Leading Schools Impacted by Poverty: Case Studies from Three Winnipeg Schools

by

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A Thesis submitted to the faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Administration, Foundation & Psychology

University of Manitoba

Abstract

This study examined the perceptions of three inner city principals on how poverty impacts the school experience and success for children attending high poverty schools in the Winnipeg School Division. This study focused on how three principals defined and understood poverty; how they created a vision for their school as well as exploring the sustainability of their work.

The study examined and explored the frameworks and strategies that each principal worked from in an effort to address the impact of poverty on their schools. In doing this, the thesis attempts to tell the stories of three school principals who spent their entire careers working in the inner city district of the Winnipeg School Division. The schools examined in this study exist within a current reality in stark contrast to the one sought in the Mission and Vision for all students by Manitoba Education.

The study found that there is a need for greater professional development for principals on the issue of complex poverty and how it impacts schooling. Although participants outlined a great deal of programming that is already in place to support children attending high poverty schools, all felt that much more can, and should, be done to improve conditions for children impacted by poverty. Findings suggest that policy and practice at the school, district, and provincial levels need to be examined and, where necessary, changed to address the needs of students and families impacted by poverty.

Keywords: community schools, high poverty schools, inner city education, leadership, poverty

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere appreciation and thanks to my three research particpants: Dr. Myra Laramee, Suni Matthews and Angeline Ramkissoon. By having three former principals' willing to share their time and insights on leading high poverty schools, this study was made possible. I hope that by giving voice to your leadership experiences within Winnipeg's inner city will provide improved learning for other leaders.

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Jon Young, for encouraging me to embark on the thesis route and for continually asking the tough questions, guiding my reflections and thinking all the while making me feel that the work I was doing was important. Your patience and guidance throughout the entire process was critical to completing this work. I have learned so much from you and want you to know how much I have appreciated working with you.

I would like to thank my advisory committee; Dr. John Wiens and Dr. Karen Boyd. You have both pushed my thinking, engaged me as a learner and presented new lenses from which to explore the topic of poverty and its impact on schooling.

And finally, this thesis is dedicated to my family. Sarah, Quinn and Nate who have supported my work and given up important family time in order for it to be completed. Thank you for your love and support.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The challenge of growing up poor is highlighted each and every day in Winnipeg's high poverty schools. A considerable body of evidence demonstrates that students living in poverty are overall much less successful, across a wide range of indicators, in school than others not living in poverty. The single most powerful predictors of school success as well as many other life outcomes are based on socio-economic status (Brownell, Roos, Fransoo, Guevremont, MacWilliam, Derksen, Dik, Boganovic, Sirski, 2006; Gaskell, 2012; Glaze, 2012; Levin, 2011).

In the Annual Report of Manitoba Education for 2011, Education Minister, the Honourable Nancy Allan, shares the Mission and Vision as well as four Overarching Goals for all students attending public schools in the province of Manitoba:

> **Mission:** To ensure that all Manitoba's children and youth have access to an array of educational opportunities such that every learner experiences success through relevant, engaging and high quality education that prepares them for lifelong learning and citizenship in a democratic, socially just and sustainable society.
>
> **Vision:** That every learner will complete a high school education with a profound sense of accomplishment, hope and optimism.
>
> Overarching Goals:
> 1. To ensure education in Manitoba supports students experiencing and learning about what it means to live in a sustainable manner.
> 2. To ensure that education practice and policy in Manitoba is guided by the principle of inclusion.
> 3. To significantly increase achievement levels of those students who have been historically less successful.
> 4. To continue to increase the overall provincial graduation rate.
>
> (Allan & Farthing, 2011).

This thesis explores the work of school principals in three high poverty Winnipeg schools and the frameworks and strategies that each principal worked from in an effort to address the impact of poverty on their schools. In doing this the thesis attempts to tell the stories of three

school principals in the province of Manitoba who worked in schools with a current reality in

stark contrast to the one sought in the Mission and Vision for all students by Manitoba

Education. It examines aspects of a "socially just society" and the concept of "inclusion" of all

students regardless of their socio-economic status. More importantly, it will tighten a focus on a

particular group of students "who have been historically less successful."

Educational Achievement Across Various Socio-Economic Conditions

In the latest report from the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy: *How Are Manitoba's*

Children Doing the authors share that:

in almost every case, we see those living in the poorest areas are shouldering the burden

[of poor educational and life outcomes] disproportionately … perhaps by focusing on

those populations who shoulder the most disproportionate burden of poor outcomes, we

can start to see even more improvement. (Brownell, Chartier, Santos, Okechekwu, Au,

Sarkar, MacWilliam, Burland, Koseva, Guenette, 2012, p. 4).

This report highlights the strong relationship between health status and socioeconomic status

while at the same time examining safety and security and social engagement and responsibility.

One aspect that repeats itself throughout the report is the notion that "things can be changed; that

the lives of individuals are not tied to some pre-determined fate" (p.4). Things can change for

children living in poverty and attending high poverty schools. Not only can they change, they

need to change in an effort to create greater educational equity in the province of Manitoba. The

various sets of data included in this report as well as in a variety of other reports created by the

Manitoba Centre for Health Policy help to highlight the urgency for greater scholarship to be

dedicated to the role of the school principal in high poverty schools in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Part of what makes the work of the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy so valuable to education in the province is its use of the Population Health Research Data Repository that has been built over the past 25 years. By working together with the Ministries of Health, Education, Citizenship and Youth, and Family Services and Housing, this repository includes information on all children born in the province. This information has been used to track educational outcomes over a length of time that is long enough to follow children from kindergarten to graduation. One of the key areas these studies focus on are the grade twelve Provincial Standards Exams in both English Language Arts and Mathematics. Upon first glance, the differences in outcomes between low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic status students appear not to be that substantial. It is only when one examines the difference between reviewing all students who *should* be writing grade twelve provincial standards exams with those who are *actually* writing the exams during the scheduled year of graduation that the true disparity stands out. There are, the report suggests, far greater socioeconomic disparities in educational outcomes than have been previously realized and reported. The work in this thesis attempts to examine a study of principals perspectives on the relationship between poverty and school success, school practices that can promote student success, and their role in creating increased student success.

Highlighting the fact that students that come from more affluent communities perform better in academic areas than their less affluent peers on its own is not surprising. By zeroing in on specific data collected over a long period of time that uses Provincial Standards exam results and cuts across all socioeconomic areas – the results show that students living in poverty have a different K-12 educational experience in the province of Manitoba.

In *The Complete Story: A Population-Based Perspective on School Performance and Educational Testing*, all children born in Manitoba in 1984 were tracked for 18 years to assess

their grade 12 performance on a provincial examination according to a student's socioeconomic status (Levin, 2007; Brownell et al, 2006). What is interesting and most striking about this data is how the numbers differ depending on whether or not one counts only those in the cohort who took the test on time in 2002 or all youths born in 1984 who should have taken the test in 2002. When the results are examined by socioeconomic indicators (family receipt of social assistance, affluence of neighborhood of residence, and age of mother at her child's birth) the results are shocking. Approximately 9 per cent of the 2002-resident cohort (538/5894) were members of families receiving social assistance, but only 2.2 per cent of the test writers were in such families. The proportion of youths in families receiving social assistance judged to have passed their language arts exam drops from 80 per cent to 12 per cent, depending on whether we counted only those taking the test on time or all children born in 1984 who should have taken the test. The mathematics test shows essentially the same pattern, with the pass rate dropping from 76 per cent to 10 per cent (Brownell et al, 2006).

This specific set of Manitoba data helps to emphasize the remarkably different levels of educational achievement across socioeconomic groups. It also highlights the importance of addressing the third overarching goal of Manitoba Education "to significantly increase achievement levels of those students who have been historically less successful." Whether and how a child progresses through the public school system is strongly related to socioeconomic status.

Silver (2000) in his book, *Solutions that work: Fighting poverty in Winnipeg,* highlights the situation, specific to the inner city of Winnipeg, and how it impacts educational attainment:

The growth in the proportion of children [living in poverty within the inner city of Winnipeg] and especially very young children, is especially significant because of the

very high and rapidly growing rate of poverty in the inner city, and because of the

relationship between poverty and educational attainment. As will be discussed later,

where rates of poverty are high, educational attainment is likely to be reduced. Where

educational attainment is low, poverty tends to be reproduced. Thus the rapidly growing

proportion of very young children in Winnipeg's inner city suggest that, if left

unattended, poverty in the inner city will continue to grow, and the rate of growth may

even accelerate (p.29).

It is with this knowledge that educational attainment is impacted by poverty that

education systems must move forward as they plan for this reality and its impact within the inner

city of Winnipeg. Poverty exists across the province in varying degrees, but in no other area will

one find the concentrated "complex poverty" that impacts schools within the inner city district. A

direct and calculated response to complex poverty in the inner city is needed. The highest levels

of poverty can be found within the inner city of Winnipeg, something which places additional

pressure and creates extremely challenging working conditions for the schools located in this

low-socioeconomic area.

Responding To Poverty

Each school division in Manitoba faces, to some degree, the impact of poverty in their

schools. However, the response to educating students from low socioeconomic areas is likely to

differ significantly depending on which division families reside in. One promising factor is the

increase in awareness and programs that are in place designed to begin the task of levelling the

educational playing field. By highlighting the following programs: *C.S.I. (Community School

Investigators), B.E.E.P. (Balanced Experiential Education Group), Wayfinders (A Bright*

Futures Program) as well as *CSPI (Community Schools Partnership Initiative)*, I hope to bring attention to the fact that some significant programs are in place and are making a difference in the lives of children living in poverty.

Manitoba Education and Poverty

One of the most significant responses to educating children who live in poverty is the creation of the Community Schools Partnership Initiative (CSPI). It was launched in 2005 under the jurisdiction of Manitoba, Education, Citizenship and Youth's Aboriginal Education Directorate. The objective was to increase and support the number of "community schools" in Manitoba. To date, the program helps supports twenty-six schools in fourteen school divisions across Manitoba. "The Community Schools Partnership Initiative (CSPI) is designed to support schools in low socioeconomic communities by enhancing education outcomes by developing and strengthening partnerships. The CSPI is meant to be a long-term effort to work together to improve students' success and strengthen communities" (CSPI, p.7). Each and every CSPI school in Manitoba faces its own unique challenges and no two schools can be considered the same. What has been seen to be consistent throughout the twenty-six schools is the need to improve student learning, strengthen families, and build healthier communities for children to grow up in. The Community Schools Partnership Initiative is one example of Manitoba Education acknowledging that schooling needs to look different across communities and that a support structure and special funding are needed in low socioeconomic communities.

School Divisions in Winnipeg and Poverty

Each school division in the city of Winnipeg is impacted by poverty. The degree to which school divisions are impacted by poverty varies greatly. The Winnipeg School Division, with the

inclusion of the Inner City District, has a disproportionate amount of schools that are located in

some of the poorest areas of our city. It is important to keep this in mind as community data is

used to paint a clear picture of the socioeconomic realities for the school communities in which

Niji Mahkwa School, Dufferin Elementary School and David Livingstone School are located.

Community data for three inner city school communities.

The three communities in which the schools are located in for this study are: William

Whyte Neighborhood (Niji Mahkwa School); Centennial Neighborhood (Dufferin Elementary

School) and Lord Selkirk Park (David Livingstone School). All three schools are located in the

inner city district and serve their own unique school communities. The following table will

outline the unemployment rate; percentage of people over 20 with less than a grade nine

education as well as the ethnic origins of these specific school communities. Information was

taken from the 2001 Statistics Canada Census, 2004 Statistics Canada Income Tax Data as well

as the 2006 Statistics Canada Census and it was reproduced in the Winnipeg School Division

School Demographics Report for 2006/2007.

Table 1. Select Demographic Characteristics of Niji Mahkwa, Dufferin & David Livingstone
School

School Name:	Niji Mahkwa	Dufferin	David Livingstone
Unemployment Rate	N/A	12%	20%
< Gr. 9 Education	19.5%	20.8%	27.5%
Ethnic Origin	Aboriginal, First Nations, Metis	Aboriginal, Filipino, Canadian	Aboriginal, Metis, French

It is important to note that these statistics are based on the community in which the schools are

located and may not reflect the exact numbers of the students and families that make up the

specific school populations. The unemployment rate for Niji Mahkwa School cannot be included

due to the fact that the school is not always included in the regular school program data that is

available. It is not always included due to its identification as an Aboriginal School that offers

regular academic programming "in a setting which emphasizes Aboriginal languages and

culture" (Winnipeg School Division, (2014). What these numbers do reflect is that all three

schools are located in low socio-economic areas in which the poverty is racialized and

unemployment rates are significantly higher than normal and the education levels of people over

20 is significantly lower than normal. The numbers above that outline the unemployment rate;

percentage of people over 20 with less than a grade nine education as well as the ethnic origins

of these specific school communities tell a specific story when compared to the overall average

in the Winnipeg School Division as well as the City of Winnipeg.

*Table 2. **Comparison Table between Winnipeg School Division & City of Winnipeg***

	Winnipeg School Division	**City of Winnipeg**
Unemployment Rate	7%	4%
< Gr. 9 Education	10.2%	7.7%
Ethnic Origin	English, Canadian, Scottish	English, Canadian, Scottish

The Winnipeg School Division has higher unemployment, more people with less than grade 9

education and a higher percentage of visible minorities, Aboriginal people, and immigrants than

does the City of Winnipeg (Winnipeg School Division School Demographics Report for

2006/2007, 2014).

It should not come as a surprise, based on the data shared above, that a different response

is needed to address the needs of children living within the inner city district of the Winnipeg

School Division. With schools operating for less than two hundred days within a calendar year,

additional programs are crucial for children to maintain their academic growth and to build on

their experiences which they bring with them to school.

Community School Investigators

In both Winnipeg School Division and Pembina Trails School Division, learning does not

end when the final school bell rings on June 30th for over 1, 000 children. What started out with a

vision by two local educators/activists, Strini Reddy and Karen Botting, *Community School*

Investigators, has grown into a flagship summer program that has been proven to curtail student

summer learning loss. Working through the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, Reddy

launched the program in the summer of 2005 at two schools within the inner city district of the

Winnipeg School Division and the initial program reached 60 students. Eight years later, in

2013, the program has expanded to include twelve schools in the Winnipeg School Division as

well as two schools in the Pembina Trails School Division and reaches over 1,000 students.

(Smith, 2013) It is important to note that *Community School Investigators* was created by Strini

Reddy and came about as a response to the impact of poverty on student learning. Over time, the

Winnipeg School Division and Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning have helped to

support its expansion and growth. The *Community School Investigators (CSI) Summer Learning*

Enrichment Program is an academic program designed to combat summer learning loss and to

narrow the opportunity gap for children over the summer months. This full day, five week

quality summer program strives to decrease summer learning loss by engaging students in

academic and experiential activities. The majority of participants are Aboriginal and the second

largest grouping of students are immigrant and newcomer children. The program is run in twelve

inner city schools within Winnipeg School Division as well as two schools in Pembina Trails

School Division. The goals for the CSI program are as follows:

- Engage children considered at risk of summer learning loss in enriching learning opportunities during the summer;
- Improve educational outcomes for children living in poverty;
- Enhance the skills and employment experiences of local youth; and
- Provide opportunities for university education students to work in the inner city

(Community School Investigators, 2014)

Elwick Community School Summer Program and Bright Futures

Another distinctive program aimed at combating summer learning loss takes place at

Elwick Community School in the Seven Oaks School Division in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The

Balanced Experiential Education Group (B.E.E.P.) has students focus on literacy and numeracy

in the morning while a focus on broadening students understanding of the city through art and

active learning experiences fills up the afternoon. The main focus of B.E.E.P. is to infuse

perspectives of Aboriginal life and culture into the daily experiences of students from Elwick

Community School over the summer months (Balanced Experiential Education Group, 2012).

After moving on from Elwick Community School in eighth grade, students in high school

living in both the Elwick Community and Watson Street Neighborhood can also benefit from

additional programming through a Bright Futures program called *Wayfinders*. The *Wayfinders*

program is a community based mentorship and outreach program that is run outside of regular

school hours. This program aims to help high school aged students with academic tutoring,

career exploration, community mentorship as well as performing community service. The *Wayfinders* program is designed to help low-income students reach their full potential. This program is made possible through a strong partnership between the Province of Manitoba, the Winnipeg Foundation and the Seven Oaks School Division (Wayfinders, 2014).

The purpose of briefly highlighting successful programs already in place is twofold. First and foremost, it demonstrates that thoughtful, engaging and important work is already being done to combat the impact that poverty can have on children living and learning in Manitoba schools. Secondly, it highlights the currently fragmented approach to combating a problem that presents itself across all school divisions in Manitoba.

Statement of the Problem

In the face of an ongoing commitment to (or rhetoric of) an ideal of equity in education, there is widespread evidence that socioeconomic status remains a strong predictor of school success. Children living in poverty, specifically for this study, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, do not perform as well in school and are not served by schools in the same way that other groups experience. Although there are isolated examples of sustained efforts to address this issue across the province, there remains no systematic approach to addressing the needs of children living in poverty and attending public schools within the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to address the following research questions in an attempt to better understand the importance of leadership in high poverty schools:

1. How did three selected, former inner city, elementary school principals understand poverty and its relationship to students' school experiences and school success?

2. How did each former principal construct a vision for their school and attempt to create and design a school program to maximize student success?

3. How did each former principal attempt to implement the vision in their school during the period of time that they were there?

4. How did each former principal view the success of their efforts and the sustainability of their work?

Methodology

The qualitative approach I used was a multiple instrumental case study (Creswell, 2005) that focused on three principals perspectives of schools impacted by poverty. This type of case study allowed the researcher to focus on a specific issue, poverty, and explore it through three cases that were used to illustrate the issue of poverty and its impact on education for children attending high poverty schools. For this research study, the case, was principalship perceptions of inner city schooling in high poverty schools. There was very little comparison done between the three cases: Myra Laramee / Niji Mahkwa School; Suni Matthews / Dufferin Elementary School and Angeline Ramkissoon / David Livingstone School. As Gall & Borg (2010) describe a case study: "A case study is conducted to shed light on a particular phenomenon – that is, a set of processes, events, individual, programs, or any other events or circumstances of interest to researchers" (p.339). This research study used a multiple instrumental case study to shed light on the phenomenon of complex poverty and its impact on inner city schools.

I collected my data by interviewing three former school principals who worked in urban elementary schools located in the inner city district of the Winnipeg School Division. I conducted two separate interviews ranging from 60-90 minutes in length with each of the three former school principals. Each interview was based around one or more common themes. The first interview was designed to examine the principal's understanding of poverty and schooling (Research Question #1); the second interview examined how they attempted to create and develop effective programs and I also had them reflect on the impact of their efforts (Research Questions #2 - #4).

I chose a purposeful sample by focusing on three former school principals that have worked in urban elementary schools located in the inner city district of the Winnipeg School Division for my research. To assist my participant selection process, I put together an expert panel consisting of three individuals who have worked directly with school principals that have worked in the inner city district of the Winnipeg School Division. The three members of this panel included Ms. Helen Robinson-Settee who is currently working as the Director of Aboriginal Education for Manitoba Education. Ms. Robinson-Settee is very familiar with the *Community Schools Partnership Initiative* and the work of principals in the inner city district of the Winnipeg School Division. The second member of this expert panel was Mr. Tony Tavares who also works for Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning as a Multicultural Education Consultant and has worked extensively with inner city schools within the Winnipeg School Division. The third member of this expert panel is Jim Silver who is chair of the Department of Urban and Inner-City Studies at the University of Winnipeg. This panel was asked to provide five names of school principals that met the following criteria:

- They had worked as a school principal for three years and been a vice-principal for a minimum of two years or any combination resulting in at least five years of administration experience between 1990 – 2012.

- They were considered to be "leaders in inner city education" and had worked in the elementary and/or middle school system within the inner city district of the Winnipeg School Division.

- They were currently not working in the Winnipeg School Division.

- They were known as principals who had a vision for their schools and demonstrated an ability to promote school success for students living in poverty.

- They might be willing to take part in this study by participating in two separate interviews ranging in length no longer than 90 minutes during the months of October and December, 2013.

In addition to conducting multiple interviews, I reviewed literature written about each particular school. Although there was a common theme of poverty, the three principals that were chosen had completed extensive but varied work in community development, anti-racist/ multicultural education and/or early childhood development on an individual basis. I was looking for multiple perspectives on the issue of poverty and how it impacts schooling. By reviewing the literature on poverty and school leadership and by analyzing my interviews, this thesis presents a cross case analysis on the issue of poverty and how school principals can work to reduce its impact on schooling.

Definitions

Poverty: There has been a great deal written about poverty and its impact on schooling

and each of the participants brought their own understandings to the term. However, for the

purpose of this thesis, I will use a working definition of the term poverty based on Townsend's

(1993) definition of poverty in which he defines it as "individuals and communities that lack

access to the resources and amenities that are typically available to members of a society" (p.

11).

High Poverty Schools: With respect to the term 'high poverty schools', I write about and

refer to high poverty schools as schools that are most in need. These are schools that are

generally located in low socioeconomic areas and meet the Inner City criteria outlined by the

Winnipeg School Division. The factors they take into account include:

Table 3. ***Winnipeg School Division: Inner City School Criteria***

Variables	Sources of Data
% Students Not in Two Parent Families	Mayet System 2006/2007
Mobility	Mayet System 2006/2007
Stability	Mayet System 2006/2007
Meridian Income of Families That Have	2004 Statistics Canada
Children Younger Than 18 Years of Age	Income Tax Data
% Families With Income Less Than the Low	2004 Statistics Canada
Income Cut-Off (LICO) and That Have	Income Tax Data
Children Younger Than 18 Years of Age	

% Persons 20 Years and Over With Less Than Grade 9 Education	Statistics Canada 2001 Census
% Students From Families Where Only English is Spoken	Mayet System 2006/2007
% Students in Grades K or Greater who are English as an Additional Language (EAL)	Mayet System 2006/2007
% Students who are Landed Immigrants or Refugees	Mayet System 2006/2007

Based on these variables the three schools in this study are identified as schools with the highest socio-economic needs within the inner city district of the Winnipeg School Division ranked in the following order: #1 Niji Mahkwa School, #5 David Livingstone School and #8 Dufferin Elementary School. (Winnipeg School Division School Demographics 2006/2007)

   Family: Another term that will be referred to throughout is family. When using the word family, it is my intention to include the following: biological parents and siblings, step-parents and siblings, foster parents and siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and any other type of parent or guardian who may be in the role of the significant adult in the lives of children. In speaking with the connection between home and school, it is my intention to stress the importance of linking the adults involved in a child's life not only both to the child, but also to each other. I will draw on Joyce Epstein's work in referring to these connections as "overlapping spheres of influence" (Epstein, 2004).

Community: The final term I further define is community. In writing about home and school connections, as well as about partnerships between schools and outside agencies, the term community will be used to represent both the geographical area in which a high poverty school is located as well as including the school community (families, schools, businesses, community centres and programs) that play an integral part in the overall education of students living in poverty.

Significance of the Study

A review of the recent literature reveals that there remains a need for greater research on leadership within high poverty schools. The gap between the wealthy and the poor is not closing in Winnipeg, Manitoba and some may suggest it will only continue to widen as years go by. This study attempts to highlight the importance of zeroing in on schools that serve low socioeconomic areas within Winnipeg with a special focus on school leadership, understanding how poverty impacts school success and providing concrete examples of programming that have made a difference in the lives of children who live in poverty. Looking beyond the immediate realm of public education, other organizations within the local community may benefit from this study including: Education faculties at post–secondary institutions throughout Manitoba, the Manitoba Teacher's Society, Manitoba Education as well as an array of outside organizations including: Boys & Girls Club, United Way and the Winnipeg Foundation.

It is my hope that the findings of this study may, in fact, have a direct impact on those facing the challenge of working and leading in Winnipeg's high poverty schools. By making an impact it is my hope that the children of greatest need are given similar educational opportunities and experiences as their more affluent peers within the public education system.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The literature review begins by outlining the literature related to poverty and its impact on schooling in Canada. It will then expand on school leadership and the important connection between families and high poverty schools.

The Impact of Poverty on Student Learning, Success and Experience of School

Poverty is an issue that cannot be solved by schools. It is not an issue that is created solely by schools nor can it be ignored by schools. As the morning school bell rings across various divisions in Manitoba, children living in poverty arrive each day in classrooms needing something different. They arrive at school from a different set of circumstances. They face challenges both in and out of school. At times, they demonstrate high levels of resiliency and offer a great deal to both our public school system as well as the greater society. They have untapped strengths, courage, determination and unique skill sets. Unfortunately, the one area in which they have little or no control over also serves as the greatest indicator of school success – they live in poverty.

Poverty is a key issue that has been consistently identified as an important influence on educational attainment in Canada and in many other jurisdictions (Brownell, et al. 2006, Gaskell, 2012, Glaze, 2012, Levin, 2011). What educators do in response to teaching children who live in poverty to become successful in their respective schools is a far more complex issue to unravel. It is one thing to acknowledge the impact of poverty on children in school and it's an entirely different thing to make genuine efforts to address it as the major factor it is for all involved.

Defining Poverty

Defining poverty is not a simple task. Yet the way in which people define and make sense of poverty can determine how they view it, react to it, and plan for its existence in their school. Poverty is most often equated with people who lack the basic necessities in life: food, clothing and shelter. Thus Sarlo (1996) states:

Someone is in a state of poverty if he [sic] lacks any item required to maintain long term physical well-being … Poverty means a genuine deprivation of life's basic necessities. It means that people cannot obtain a nutritious diet, warm, dry and safe housing, and clean clothing appropriate to climate, sufficient personal hygiene items and health care. The absence of one or more of these 'necessities' compromise long term physical well-being (p.19).

Townsend (1993), however, presents a different, relative, definition of poverty in which individuals and communities lack access to the resources and amenities that are typically available to members of a society. Working from this definition, poverty can exist when citizens do not have, nor do they have access to, the assets and personal capabilities that in fact allow them to access and use the freedoms that wealthy nations like Canada are able to provide (Sen, 1999).

Another method to determine whether or not children entering Manitoba schools live in poverty can be examined through Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cut Off (LICO). The LICO is used as a rudimentary measurement tool and it can determine which Canadians spend 20% more of their gross income on food, shelter, and clothing than the average Canadian. The LICO

includes 35 income measures based on size of household and specific community (since living in

an urban area is generally more expensive than living in a rural community) (Brothers, 2012).

Drawing on the work of Jim Silver, in particular, his book *About Canada: Poverty*

(2014), it is important to distinguish the type of poverty that exists in the inner city of Winnipeg.

First and foremost, Silver argues that poverty is about much more than a shortage of money.

Silver writes "Poverty can be complex, and multi-faceted, and can change the human spirit in

ways that are profound" (p. 2). It is *complex poverty* that impacts the people living in the inner

city of Winnipeg and Silver defines it by saying:

> Complex poverty exists when people experience not only a shortage of income, but also a
>
> host of other causally connected problems that can trap them in a cycle of poverty. These
>
> may include inadequate housing, poor nutrition and poor health, elevated exposure to
>
> crime and violence, low levels of educational attainment, intergenerational exclusion
>
> from the labour market and reliance on forms of social assistance, negative interactions
>
> with various agencies of the state—police, the justice system, child welfare agencies,
>
> schools … Complex poverty in Canada is typically spatially concentrated and racialized.
>
> It is associated with a wide range of social problems that go well beyond a shortage of
>
> income. It is more likely to be long-lasting and even inter-generational, and it often
>
> causes deep psychological damage to those who experience it, and in fact it is often the
>
> damage to the human spirit—the erosion of peoples' sense of self-worth; a hopelessness
>
> about the future—that makes it so difficult to get out of this form of complex poverty …
>
> Complex poverty tends to be deep and long-lasting and is often psychologically
>
> debilitating. Those who experience complex poverty suffer not just a shortage of income,

as debilitating as that alone can be in a monetized society, but a host of other causally

inter-related factors—inadequate housing, low levels of educational attainment, poor

health, racism of various kinds in many cases, a relatively high incidence of violence via

street gang activity and the illegal drug trade, and perhaps most importantly, high levels

of unemployment and low levels of labour force participation. These factors feed on each

other, and create a deep and often intractable form of poverty. The roots of this complex

poverty—which in many cases is spatially concentrated and racialized—are to be found

in the dramatic socio-economic changes of the past 30-40 years. (p. 61)

It is by considering all of the connected problems of complex poverty that school systems can

begin to address the issue and how it can impact student's success and experience in school. As

noted earlier in this chapter, poverty impacts children in a specific way and they lack any type of

control in improving the situation. Silver explains the impact of child poverty on Canadian

society when he says:

But the notion of child poverty as such is nevertheless useful because we know that

poverty, and especially complex poverty, can damage and disadvantage children in a

wide variety of ways, resulting in the children of poor families being much more likely

than average to end up being poor themselves. And perhaps worse, growing up in what is

described in this book as complex poverty can significantly increase the likelihood of a

range of adverse consequences. For example, there is a wealth of evidence that children

in poor families are less likely to succeed in school, are more likely to experience poor

health, are more likely to be apprehended by child welfare authorities, are less likely to

secure good jobs when they reach a working age, and are more likely to be in trouble

with the law and to end up being incarcerated. These and other similar adverse

consequences of complex poverty serve then to contribute to the reproduction of poverty. It therefore follows that if large numbers of children in Canada are poor—because they are living in families that are experiencing poverty and especially complex poverty—then as Canadians we are creating a host of problems that will manifest themselves in the near future, and that will be costly, financially and otherwise, to everyone. (p.5)

It is clear from Silver's work that poverty is structural and systemic in nature and in order to address it within the public education system, school principals must develop an understanding of its complexities in order to guide their work in schools to minimize its negative impact on students.

How Poverty Affects School Success

Developing an understanding of poverty is crucial if educators and school systems are expected to effectively contribute to meeting the educational needs of children living in poverty. Levin (1994) states that, "poverty is the enemy of education." (p.27) It educators are going to tackle the issue of poverty, they need to understand the factors that make the enemy such a powerful force to overcome. In getting to know the enemy, Levin shares that "to address multi-layered factors contributing to poverty, educators must find ways to attend to the localized context of a particular community, school system, or school and as a result, there can be no general strategy that will work in multiple situations" (p. 36). In attempting to understand the issue of poverty and how it impacts schooling, one must be able to link the educational issues to larger issues in society. Anyon (2005) challenges educators to link educational issues to community issues regarding jobs, housing, transportation and investment. In doing so, one can become overwhelmed by the complexity and layers of the problem. What educators

acknowledge is that they have a role to play in addressing it at the classroom level, the school

level as well as in the broader school community.

Schools impacted by poverty must develop a response to the reality they face. Numerous

studies have examined the factors that make school more challenging for students living in

poverty. The Canadian Teacher's Federation outlined in their report *Children, Schools and*

Poverty the consequences of living in poverty that impact children: hunger, inadequate child

care, behavior problems at school, low self-esteem, lower motivation, delayed development,

lower achievement, less extra-curricular participation, worse student-teacher interactions,

streaming into less challenging programs, lower educational aspirations, interrupted attendance,

lower university attendance, illiteracy, and increased risk of dropping-out (CTF, 1989). Children

impacted by poverty may arrive at school with fewer of the skills needed, greater health

concerns, less access to materials, are more prone to be transient participants in school, have

parents that may be less able to advocate for them due to lack of skill, time or involvement with

the school and have a harder time overall fitting into an existing system that was never designed

with them in mind. Brothers (2012) identifies the root of the problem when he writes: "we must

soberly acknowledge that our school systems are not neutral, objective institutions and that we

must question the ways in which practices, for which we are responsible, disadvantage some and

privilege others" (p. 35).

Responding to Poverty: Strategies that Promote School Success

If current school practices unfairly disadvantage some while giving privilege to others,

our job as educators and school leaders working in high poverty schools is to make distinctions

between both and focus on what practices will make a difference in helping our children who are

impacted by poverty.

Indirect / health related responses

First and foremost, poverty can be viewed as a health issue for all those impacted by it.

Rothstein (2004) argues that the most significant improvements to student learning in high

poverty schools would come from investing in things beyond instruction such as nutrition and

adequate housing (p. 27). The issue of nutrition in schools has been addressed in a variety of

forms. Free breakfast programs exist in some schools while others choose to provide a snack to

all students mid-morning. In literature reviewed about high poverty schools in the United States

(Barton & Cooley (2010), David (2010) one common factor is the importance of adequate

nutrition and learning. Barton writes: "science supports the common sense view that hunger

impedes student learning. Adequate nutrition is necessary for the development of both mind and

body. The differences show up early. Students living in poverty are more likely to live in food

insecure households" (p.20). The rationale for additional school food programs is to improve

nutrition and offer all students a better opportunity to succeed. Making sure children have

adequate food in their system to help them learn is a critical factor schools must examine in their

response to educating children who live in poverty.

Other health issues that emerge from living in poverty that impact a child's education

include: ensuring an appropriate amount of sleep, access to health care including vision, hearing

and dental work, access to extra-curricular athletic programs to maintain fitness levels and

appropriate clothing to combat the harsh winter weather in Winnipeg. When health concerns are

not addressed for children living in poverty, attendance at school may be affected as well as the

ability for students to perform while at school. It needs to be re-stated that schools cannot be

expected to address these issues alone. They can be expected to work collaboratively and

proactively with outside agencies to best meet the needs of all students.

Direct / educational responses

How schools respond to poverty varies greatly. Levin (1994) states "although the impact

of poverty is widely recognized by educators, schools have not invested significant resources in

dealing with poverty effectively" (p.3). In making this claim, Levin also puts forward three key

areas in which schools can make a greater effort to address the impact poverty has on schooling.

One thing, he argues, must always come first; educators cannot blame children and parents for

living in poverty. When teachers and school leaders begin referring to the conditions in which

their students live before examining the practices implemented to help children impacted by

poverty, Levin (1994) argues that they run the risk of lowering expectations and streaming

children into a determined path. Particularly in Winnipeg, Levin states that "estimates are that

poverty rates among Aboriginal people, including children, are three times the national rate" (p.

6). These are not numbers that can be ignored in high poverty schools in Winnipeg. The three

areas Levin highlights in responding to poverty are 1) Improved instruction 2) More pre-school

education 3) Stronger links with families and community.

Improved instruction

After sifting through the long list of instructional practices that are not effective in working with children impacted by poverty, Levin (2008) shares the following as a starting point for educators: establish a focus on a small number of key student outcomes, improve instructional and relational practices within the teaching ranks, build organizational motivation through positive reinforcement and develop public and political support for effective and sustained impacts. Children living in poverty do not need a watered down curriculum. They need strong relationships with their teachers, an engaging and challenging curriculum and huge doses of positive reinforcement to build self-esteem and self-worth as they move through school. Teachers can address the needs of students living in poverty by holding high expectations for all students, place a strong focus on literacy across all subject areas, develop oral language, implement differentiated instruction across all subject areas, teach high order and critical thinking skills, use formative assessment and place an importance on integrating the arts (Levin, 2011).

More pre-school education

When it comes to school readiness and preparing children for the school experience from kindergarten through graduation, for some children it can come down to the family they were born into. Levin (1994) writes, "There is overwhelming evidence that socioeconomic status (SES) has been and continues to be the best single predictor of how much schooling students will obtain, how well they will do at their studies, and what their life prospects beyond school are." Children cannot control the socioeconomic status of the family they are born into. Nor can they contribute financially to help their family.

The area of pre-school education is one in which schools can contribute to helping children impacted by poverty. By acknowledging that all children enter school with a different set of skills, life experience and support system at home, teachers can better address the issue of some children needing more exposure to school readiness activities and skills through pre-school education. Levin (1994) states: "the rationale for preschool programs is to provide students with the background they will need to meet the demands of schooling" (p. 15). The challenge for teachers in high poverty schools is to be able to decipher the difference between children who have had greater experiences in school readiness skills (drawing, painting, literacy, etc.) and those who simply have lacked exposure and practice at these skills due to the environment in which they live and the opportunities they may or may not have been given before entering school. In writing about the importance of pre-school education Levin states, "Generally, the practices of middle-class parents tend to complement the work expectations of teachers, while the demands for child care, employment and the meeting of basic needs of poorer families and mothers often conflict with the demands of teachers" (p. 17).

Stronger family-school connections

The last area in which Levin insists schools can make a difference for children living in poverty involves building links with parents and community. In examining school leadership, a special emphasis will be placed on Leithwood's Family Path which will examine specifically Family, Community & School Connections in High Poverty Schools. Poverty is not an issue that is created by schools. Schools cannot solve the issue of poverty. What schools can do is widen their circle of influence to include greater participation of families and community members that live in a given school community. The importance of this is reflected in Levin's conclusion to "Education Looks at Poverty" (1994) when he states, "seeing education as something that is

done by teachers in school buildings according to a standardized scheme is simply inconsistent with what we know about helping poor children" (p. 21). The only way educators are going to be able to access and tap into the prior knowledge and experiences of their students is to form stronger relationships with both the student and their family. Educators need to continue seeking input from parents and families regarding the adaptations needed for the school to be successful with their children. High poverty schools must acknowledge that the model of schooling may need to look and feel different to include all members of the school community. In helping marginalized members of the school community, educators must be aware that the additional programming that may be offered must be included in the core programming of the school. Prenatal programs, parent education, peer tutoring, adult education, work experience, family centres and the integration of social service delivery to name a few must become a genuine feature of the day to day running of high poverty schools if connections between school, family and community are to succeed.

Leadership in High Poverty Schools

I intend to examine a leadership framework created by Kenneth Leithwood as well as three of his seven strong claims about leadership that exists in his various work. In particular, I want to determine through an examination of the literature whether or not Leithwood's perspectives on leadership will hold up in high poverty schools. Acknowledging that leading schools that are located in low socioeconomic areas can be different from leading schools in more affluent communities, it is my intention to link Leithwood's work to the reality of what school leadership consists of in high poverty schools.

Leithwood believes that leadership encompasses a set of functions that may be performed by many different persons in different roles throughout the school. He defines school leadership by stating: "school leadership is the work of mobilizing and influencing others to articulate and achieve the school's shared intentions and goals" (Leithwood & Riehl 2005, p. 14). In reviewing a significant portion of his work on leadership, in no way does Leithwood suggest that the principal is the sole leader within the school. Leithwood does narrow his focus on leadership practices that lead to increased academic success for students through both direct and indirect action. I will begin by reviewing the seven strong claims about successful leadership:

1. School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.
2. **Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices.**
3. The ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices - not the practices themselves - demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work.
4. **School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions.**
5. School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed.
6. Some patterns of distribution are more effective than others.
7. **A small handful of personal traits explain a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness.** (Leithwood, K. & Harris, A. & Hopkins, D. (2008) pp. 27-28)

Of the seven strong claims about leadership, I will focus on the following three and how they are or are not existent in high poverty schools:

- Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices.
- School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions.
- A small handful of personal traits explain a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness.

First and foremost, Leithwood shares that "leadership serves as a catalyst for unleashing the potential capacities that already exist in the organisation" (p. 29). By unleashing the talents of

teachers in high poverty schools, leaders can place the focus on student learning and work together to keep out distractions from learning that present themselves from within the school as well as from outside of the school.

Leithwood's 2nd Claim:

In Leithwood's second claim, he shares that all successful leaders essentially draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices. Leithwood breaks this down even further and highlights the three categories that successful leaders work within: building vision and setting direction; understanding and developing people; and redesigning the organization. (pp. 3-4)

Leithwood places emphasis on the importance of building a shared vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals and demonstrating high-performance expectations. These three areas appear in the literature on high poverty schools and set the stage for successful leadership.

By focusing on understanding and developing people, Leithwood highlights the most important resource that exists in any school – its staff. Leithwood explains that "the primary aim is building not only the knowledge and skills that teachers and other staff need to accomplish organizational goals but also the dispositions (commitment, capacity and resilience) to persist in applying the knowledge and skills. (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008, p. 30). High poverty schools present a challenge to teachers, and it's not a challenge to be taken lightly. If educators are expecting their students to commit themselves to learning, develop their own capacity to learn and demonstrate resiliency through tough times, the expectation of leaders in these schools can be the same for the teaching staff. Other areas in which leaders can further develop people include their ability to connect emotionally with others. (Leithwood, & Riehl, 2005, p. 21). By demonstrating emotional intelligence to staff, leaders assure them that any problems encountered

while changing their teaching practice will be taken seriously and that help will be offered.

Leithwood also places emphasis on the importance of leaders offering "intellectual stimulation

by providing opportunities for in-depth conversations about teaching and schooling, making

informational resources available, supporting well-organized programs for professional

development, and introducing new ideas for the school to consider (p. 21).

Leithwood's 4th Claim:

In redesigning the organization, Leithwood places emphasis on "direct structural

changes to the establishment of positive conditions for teaching and learning" (p. 21). The idea

of allowing teachers to make the most of their motivations, commitment and capacities will lead

to better teaching and student learning. These changes may include building collaborative

cultures and in the process of strengthening school cultures, successful leaders provide

opportunities for staff to participate in decision making about issues that affect them. A final area

of redesigning the organization that I will expand on later involves the "building of productive

relations with parents and the community, and connecting the school to its wider environment"

(p. 30).

Leithwood's 7th Claim:

In Leithwood's seventh and final claim he states, "a small handful of personal traits

explain a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness", he focuses on a leaders

sense of collective efficacy and the role it plays within the organization. In relation to low-

performing schools, Leithwood shares: "at least under challenging circumstances, the most

successful school leaders are open-minded and ready to learn from others. They are also flexible

rather than dogmatic in their thinking within a system of core values, persistent (e.g. in pursuit of

high expectations of staff motivation, commitment, learning and achievement for all), resilient

and optimistic. Such traits help explain why successful leaders facing daunting conditions are

often able to push forward when there is little reason to expect progress" (p. 36.). It is this final

claim that will resonate with leaders of high poverty schools as they try to navigate the

conditions they are in control of at the school level while at the same time being keenly aware of

the societal realities of the poverty in which their school community exists.

In examining school leadership in high poverty schools, Lawson (2008) states "the

professional practices, decisions, and policies of a school principal play a significant part in that

leader's ability to create a school that serves the best interests of children and families in high

poverty communities" (p. 21). Throughout her work, Lawson (2005) identifies the massive

responsibility that is placed on principals working in high poverty schools in the inner city

district of the Winnipeg School Division. These principals are expected to "provide students

from high poverty schools with the skills they will need to find their way out of a life of poverty"

(Lawson, p. 1). At the same time, they are expected to ensure that students are nurtured and

provided with opportunities to meet their academic and social potential in school. Drawing on

Lawson's work (Lawson, 2005: Lawson, 2008) I would like to highlight the everyday realities of

principals working in high poverty schools in the inner city district of the Winnipeg School

Division.

Principals that work in the twenty-one schools that make up this district deal with a

unique set of challenges. First and foremost, there is continual management of crises that exist

for both students and families that make up the school community that include: illness, death,

violence, abuse, addictions, lack of housing, food shortages, and the like. The issue of transiency

of the student population can be compounded by lack of attendance, and truancy, leaving the

principal with the dilemma of grade retention. Principals in high poverty schools may experience

variable teaching quality and expertise in subject areas while at times facing unrealistic

expectations around student performance. Facing the diversity of student needs, both academic

and personal, principals are often expected to do more with less as they strive to foster

relationships with various members of the community. There is a greater need to form positive,

working relationships with multiple agencies including (Child and Family Services, Manitoba

Housing, etc.) in order to support all students within the school community. In working closely

with inner city district Principals, Lawson (2005) discovered that their main concerns for

leadership within their schools could be summarized by focusing on the following: student

safety, home and school connections, student achievement and the issue of staffing (p. 10). It is

my intention to link Lawson's work with inner city principals to Leithwood's construct of the

Four Paths of school leadership.

A principal's influence on student learning is largely indirect. By examining this

influence through four specific paths, Leithwood aims to uncover how leadership becomes an

exercise of influence. In each path, Leithwood highlights variables that make the most impact on

student learning. The Four Paths include: the Rational Path, the Emotional Path, the

Organizational Path and the Family Path (Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall & Strauss, 2010 p. 2).

The Rational Path is rooted in the knowledge and skills of the school staff about

curriculum, teaching and learning. The variables can be found at the classroom level as well as

the school level. The most important variables within the Rational Path include but are not

limited to the following: having teachers provide students with immediate and informative

feedback; teacher's use of reciprocal teaching strategies; the importance of the teacher and

student relationship; classroom management and the general quality of teaching in the school.

Principals are left with figuring out how to best improve the status of these variables in school. Leithwood also shared a collection of leadership practices that have been found to increase the academic success of students in school. They also include but are not limited to the following: school-wide professional development; monitoring and providing feedback on teaching and learning processes; developing and communicating shared goals; establishing high expectations; not burdening teachers with bureaucratic tasks and busy work; grouping students using methods that convey academic expectation and protecting instructional time (Leithwood et al, p. 4).

The Emotional Path is rooted in the idea of teacher efficacy and trust. The idea of collective teacher efficacy is explained by Leithwood as the "level of confidence a group of teachers feels about their ability to organize and implement whatever educational initiatives are required for students to reach high standards of achievement" (Leithwood et al, p. 5). This efficacy presents itself in teachers taking responsibility for their students learning. Teachers that work in highly efficacious schools take ownership over the teaching and learning of their students and "learning difficulties are not assumed to be an inevitable by-product of low socio-economic status, lack of ability, or family background" (Leithwood et al, p. 5). In order to increase the level of collective teacher efficacy in schools, Leithwood shares the following leadership practices: promoting cooperation and collaboration among staff towards common goals; having staff network with others facing similar challenges in order to learn from their experiences; structure the school to allow for collaborative work; recognize and acknowledge the vulnerabilities of their staff; create a space for parents in the school; buffer teachers from unreasonable demands from the policy environment or from the parents and the wider community as a whole and set high standards for students and then follow through with support for teachers (Leithwood et al, p. 6).

The Organizational Path can be best understood as the working conditions for both teachers and students. The Organizational Path is rooted in structures: school culture, policies and standard operating procedures. In relation to high poverty schools, the organizational path takes into consideration variables such as: class size, ability groupings, timetables and multi-age classes. By paying close attention to the school's infrastructure, Leithwood argues that leaders need to zero in on one major variable – instructional time. The Organizational Path offers a specific break down of this variable by looking at three factors: the total amount of time potentially available for instruction; the total amount of time actually devoted to instruction; and the opportunity to learn and academically engaged time that students take part in (Leithwood et al, p.7). The variables highlighted in the Organizational Path present concrete things within the school that a principal can influence in many directions.

The fourth and final Path that Leithwood explores is the Family Path. The Family Path presents itself to school leaders as a "high leverage" option to examine further. The variables that Leithwood explores include: influence from the school on the home environment and parent involvement at school and visits to the home by school personnel (Leithwood et al, p.8). The striking factor that improves academic outcomes for students can be found by examining the Family Path and the role of the parental support for children. The variables include: paying attention to a family's work habits, academic guidance and support provided to children, stimulation to think about issues in the larger environment, provision of adequate health and nutritional conditions and the physical settings in the home that are conducive to academic work (Leithwood et al, p. 9). Leithwood shares a variety of strategies to improve working with families that have proven to increase academic success in students who live in poverty, face

linguistic challenges and display significant cultural differences. The following represents a

sampling of Leithwood's suggestions:

- Issuing personal and specific invitations for parental participation at the school
- Providing specific information and feedback to parents about their child
- Creating opportunity for parents to interact with one another about school matters
- Appointing a community liaison person as a link between the school and home
- Adult literacy initiatives to promote and increase overall literacy in the school

The Family Path offers a variety of variables for school leaders to focus on to improve the

connection between home and school with the intention of improving academic and social

outcomes for students.

Family, Community & School Connections in High Poverty Schools

The connection between the family home, the school and community is powerful and

important. This section of my literature review will explore parent involvement and engagement

with school, the importance of understanding the school community and models of collaboration

between families, school and the community.

In *Poverty is NOT a Learning Disability*, Howard writes "for children from low-income

homes, parent involvement can be the single most important factor in fostering cognitive and

emotional resilience in the face of multiple stressors" (p. 56). Drawing on the work of

Weissbound (2009), he outlines this most important factor by stating:

Although many factors affect students' moral development – peers, genetic influences,

television, and other media – there's no question that parents play the primary role in

either nurturing – or undermining – children's capacities for kindness, honesty, courage

and moral reasoning as well as their notions of justice and their sense of responsibilities

for others. Effective efforts to instill ethical abilities and social responsibilities in students

must be deeply interwoven with the work of engaging parents meaningfully (p. 28).

There are different ways of examining the role parents play in the education of their

children. One can look at "involvement" or "engagement" and discover that children benefit

from both but in different ways. Joyce Epstein has spent a great deal of her career exploring the

relationship between Family, school and home and states that "the degree to which parents are

involved in their children's education is one of the most important factors affecting children's

success in school" (Epstein, 1995, p.48). For students attending high poverty schools, different

demands have been placed on their parents. Research indicates that the two most important

factors that limit parental involvement at school are lack of time / conflicts in schedules and

parental experience with school. One cannot ignore the significance of a parent's own experience

in school, be it positive or negative, in trying to understand the role they may or may not play in

their child's education. Schools are not designed as welcoming institutions for people who may

possess low-levels of school related skills; have had bad experiences in school, lack easy access

to transportation or are simply overwhelmed by other family realities.

The role of parental involvement at school is important. This does not mean that parents

who are unable or choose not to be involved directly at the school level cannot play an important

role in the educational success of their child. For all that has been written around the topic of

parental involvement, a new literature is arising around parental engagement.

Epstein outlines six types of parental involvement that schools can focus on to improve

student success. This model is cited in many pieces of the literature (Block, 2010, Epstein, 2004,

Ferlazzo, 2011). The six types of involvement include: parenting; communicating; volunteering;

learning at home; decision-making; and, collaborating with the community (Epstein & Sheldon,

p. 48). Epstein identifies both the school and the family as important partners in the education of children by stating:

> The ways schools care about children is reflective in the way schools care about the children's families. If educators view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. That is, the family is expected to do its job and leave the education of children to the schools. If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development. Partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students (p. 81).

Of the six types of involvement that Epstein puts forth, communicating between home and school and learning at home are the two that make the most impact on improving student success in schools. This is not to say the remaining four factors should be left out by parents or teachers but if one is trying to implement new ways to increase parent involvement in high poverty schools, it makes sense to focus on the ones that make the most impact.

In her work on parent involvement, Epstein (1995) coined the phrase "overlapping spheres of influence" to explain the relationship between home, school and the community. Epstein states: "with frequent interactions between school, families, and communities, more students are more likely to receive common messages from various people about the importance of school, of working hard, of thinking creatively, of helping one another, and of staying in school" (p. 82). For students that attend high poverty schools, the increased communication between school and home can only help to strengthen the common message needed about the importance of education. The idea that parents can be involved through engaging with their

children as they "learn at home" is a shift in the mindset of what parental involvement should

entail.

Another prominent theme in the literature on home and school connections revolves

around the school community. In high poverty schools, it is often the case to have the majority of

the school staff not living in the community and therefore lacking a direct connection with the

community outside of the school hours and calendar of the school year. Block & Edmunds

(2010) highlight this point by stating: "by understanding potential barriers, administrators and

teachers can establish varied practices and policies that encourage new and meaningful

partnerships with parents" (p. 52). To truly engage with a community in which the only role you

play is through the work of the school, one must purposefully put it into the school plan to link

academic and non-academic goals. Epstein (2007) shares that "if you want to improve the

partnership between school, families and the community – you must plan for it as you would for

an excellent academic program" (p. 18). In the planning process of creating and strengthening

the partnership between school and home, one must include administrators, teachers, support

staff, parents and extended family members, community partners and most importantly –

students. Schools must take into account the diversity within their school community. As greater

numbers of newcomer Canadians arrive in Winnipeg, schools are faced with the challenge of

educating children in which English is not there first language. In addition to differentiating the

instruction to best include newcomer Canadians, schools must also think creatively to ensure

they will connect with and welcome in the families that will be unfamiliar with the public

education systems in Canada. Ryan (1999) states: "we are connecting with a different group of

families … newcomers to Canada emigrate mostly from countries in Asia, the West Indies,

South America, Eastern Europe, and Africa" (p. 16). In creating partnerships between school and

home with newcomer Canadian families, schools must first look at the barriers they control within their own school. Ryan highlights the fact that in Canada "schools are organized and operated in ways that do not always include or legitimate the values, knowledge, languages, experiences, concerns, and practices of their communities and origins" (p. 16). If schools are going to include all students and families in their effort to strengthen partnerships, special consideration needs to be placed on connecting with newcomer Canadian families. From simple gestures of including welcome signs in multiple languages to providing translation services for important intake meetings, schools must be aware of the differences that may exist between cultures and remain as accessible for all families. This may involve meeting families at their place of business to discuss important information about their children; conducting home visits or simply providing child care at the school during scheduled parent teacher conferences.

The final section of the literature on home and school connections will focus on models of collaboration between home, school and the community. Learning is not limited to the time children spend at school. By acknowledging that multiple groups have a role to play in educating children, it makes sense for families, schools and community groups to work together in a cohesive manner. We can't expect outdated parent engagement strategies to work in the same way they may have in years past. Canadian schools are changing and the ways that educators connect with children are also changing, there is a shift from parent involvement at the school level to a greater focus on parent engagement on the home front. Howard (2009) outlines what this engagement may look like at home: "Parents who are involved on the home front are those who read to their children, help with homework, talk with them about academic issues such as the choices for science projects and performances on tests, and create a great place for children to study" (p. 57). It's this type of engagement that is having a greater impact on academic

success than the old model of school involvement in which parents may volunteer time in the classroom, attend the Parent Council meetings and participate in annual school events.

Ferlazzo (2011) explains the difference between school involvement and school engagement by asking of schools whether they are "doing to" or "doing with" when it comes to working with families. Does school staff spend more time listening or talking? Is the communication from the school to the home one way communication or two way communication? There is no question that school involvement of families is as an easier option for schools to focus their time. What the literature highlights is that for high poverty schools, "by engaging parents, school-family connections strengthen and begin to take on and address the important non-school factors such as health, safety and affordable housing" (p. 13). By purposefully strengthening school-family connections in high poverty schools, educators put themselves in a position to help children and families in a manner that extends beyond academic achievement.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research plan used in this study on leading schools that are impacted by poverty. The research plan includes: a recap of the research questions; a discussion of the methods, selection of participants, interview guides, validity and reliability, and data analysis.

The research plan was based on the four research questions:

1. How did three selected, former inner city, elementary school principals understand poverty and its relationship to students' school experiences and school success?

2. How did each former principal construct a vision for their school and attempt to create and design a school program to maximize student success?

3. How did each former principal attempt to implement the vision in their school during the period of time that they were there?

4. How did each former principal view the success of their efforts and the sustainability of their work?

This study examines the perspectives of three different inner city school principals.

Methodology

I have chosen a qualitative methodology to use in this study because it has allowed me to explore the perceptions of former principals, who have led schools impacted by poverty, about poverty, school leadership, and strategies that make a difference in improving conditions for academic success. In the educational context, Creswell (2005) defines qualitative research as research "in which the researcher relies on the views of participants, asks broad, general questions, collects data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants, describes and analyzes these words for themes, and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, unbiased manner" (p. 111). Bogden & Biklen (2007) define qualitative research as "an approach to social science research that emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural settings, uses inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding the subjects' point of view" (p.26).

Based on the exploratory nature of the research, I have employed a method of inquiry using one-on-one open-ended interviews to generate data by asking questions, recording and transcribing answers, analysing transcripts and synthesizing results.

By using a comparative case study, I studied the issues of (poverty, leadership, and schooling) through three cases within a bounded system (Winnipeg School Division's inner city district). Borg et al. (2010) explains that "the purpose of most qualitative research case studies is description, evaluation, or explanation of a particular phenomenon … a case study is conducted to shed light on a particular phenomenon – that is, a set of processes, events, individuals, programs, or any other events or circumstances of interest to researchers " (p. 336-338). Creswell (2005) describes comparative case studies in sharing that: "In a collective case study (or multiple case studies), the one issue or concern is again selected, but the inquirer selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue. Often the inquirer purposefully selects multiple cases to show different perspectives on the issue" (p. 110).

The three case studies I focused on were three separate elementary schools in the inner city district of the Winnipeg School Division. The three schools were examined through the eyes of their former principal and their perspectives on poverty, school leadership and improving academic success for students. Each case study examined a particular point in time at the school between the late 1980s to as recent as the 2011- 2012 school year.

Selection of Participants

Participant selection did include key informants. Bogdan (2007) describes key informants as "some subjects are more willing to talk, have a greater experience in the setting, or are especially insightful about what goes on" (p. 68). In my attempt to discover / tell the story of three school principals who have worked in high poverty schools in the inner city district of the Winnipeg School Division, I chose a comparative case study approach for my research study. As Bogdan (2007) highlights "if you want to understand the way people think about their world and

those definitions are formed, you need to get close to them, to hear them talk and observe them

in their day-to-day lives" (p.35). I collected my data by interviewing three former school

principals that have worked in the inner city district of the Winnipeg School Division. I put

together an expert panel on inner city education that included: Mr. Jim Silver, Ms. Helen

Robinson-Settee and Mr. Tony Tavares that put forth the names of school principals they knew

to have had a vision for inner city education and have demonstrated an ability to help students

from poverty meet with success in school.

Each participant had been a school principal for a minimum of five years, worked within

the inner city district at the elementary/middle school level, was currently not employed by the

Winnipeg School Division and was willing to be a participant in the study.

I chose a purposeful sample by focusing on three former school principals for my

research. In addition to conducting multiple interviews, I reviewed literature written about each

particular school. Although there is a common theme of poverty, these three participants have

been chosen due to their extensive work in the following three areas: Aboriginal education and

community development; anti-racist education; and, literacy development respectively. I looked

for multiple perspectives on the issue of poverty and how it impacted schooling. By reviewing

the literature and analyzing my interviews, I have presented a cross case analysis on the issue of

poverty and how school principals can work to reduce its impact on schooling.

Interview Guides

The data collection strategy used in this research study was open-ended semi-structured

interviews. By conducting two separate interviews, of approximately 60-90 minutes each, I

explored two separate subjects (poverty/school leadership & specific actions that improved

academic success) in a manner that allowed each participant to focus on their lived experience as

a school principal leading a high poverty school. The tentative Interview Guide focused on:

poverty; school leadership; your school through your lens: (students, staff, community,

challenges, etc.) The second interview examined the specific action/programs that improved

academic success for students including: home and school relationship; outside agencies and

wrap around services such as (Child & Family Services, MB Housing, CEDA, etc.); funding

(grant writing, Community Schools Partnership Initiative (CSPI), divisional initiatives, etc.;

additional programming (Community Schools Investigators (CSI), Boys and Girls Club, Graffiti

Gallery, Etc.); sustainability and how the school did or did not move forward after the principal

left.

In my Findings Chapters (chapters 4, 5, & 6), the following method was used to cite

which interview participant data was being drawn from. I identify the participant by using a

capital letter of the first letter of their first name. This is followed by a number indicated which

interview the data was taken from. The next number indicates which page number and the

remaining numbers will indicate the line numbers that one could find the data in the transcripts.

The citation will appear as: (A.1.16.531-543). This tells the reader that the data comes from

Angeline, first interview, page 16, and lines 531-543.

Validity

The technique used to establish credibility of the data collected through the interview

process was member checks. Each participant was given the opportunity to review the interview

transcripts thus ensuring the plausibility and integrity of the research study. Creswell (2005)

defines member checking as: "a qualitative process during which the researcher asks one or more

participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account" (p. 594). By including member

checking as part of the research study, it allowed me to confirm that I am interpreting the data

collected in an accurate manner. Creswell (2005) further explains that member checking:

"involves taking the findings back to participants and asking them (in writing or in an interview)

about the accuracy of the report. You ask participants about many aspects of the study, such as

whether the description is complete and realistic, if the themes are accurate to include, and if the

interpretations are fair and representative (p. 252).

Data Analysis

Creswell (2005) indicates that analysis consists of taking the data apart "to determine

individual responses and then putting it together to summarize it" (p. 10). By analyzing and

interpreting the data, I was able to organize the data so that I could draw conclusions, discover

themes and explain the conclusions drawn to address each of the research questions.

Bogdan (2007) describes data analysis by stating: "by data analysis, we mean the process

of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other

materials that you accumulate to enable you to come up with findings (p. 159). In this research

study, I have completed an analysis of the data collected by following Creswell's (2005)

"bottom-up" approach which is inductive in form, going from the particular – the detailed data –

to the general – codes and themes" (p. 231).

In interpreting the data, the researcher will "refer to developing ideas about your findings

and relating them to the literature and to broader concerns and concepts (Bogdan, 2007, p. 159).

I have worked with the data, organized the data and broke it down into manageable parts. By

completing a hand analysis, I have been able to code the data, synthesize it and search for patterns that connect to the literature presented within the literature review.

During the coding process, I have used a systematic method to label and code my data based on my research questions. At first, I read through my data and searched for "certain words, phrases, patterns of behavior, and subject's ways of thinking, and events that repeat and stand out" (Bogden, 2007, p. 173). By following Creswell's guide to the coding process, I was able to "read the data, divide the text into segments, label the segments of information with codes, reduce overlap and redundancy of codes and collapse the codes into themes" (Creswell, 2005, p.238).

The major code categories that I use come from Bogdan & Biklen's work *Qualitative Research for Education* (2007) and they include but are not limited to the following:

- *Setting / Context Codes*: general information of the setting, topics, subjects i.e. Descriptions of elementary schools (population, school community, etc.)

- *Perspectives Held by Subjects*: Codes oriented towards ways of thinking.

- *Perspectives of the Situation Code*: How subjects define the setting or particular topics.

- *Subjects' Ways of Thinking about People and Objects*: This family of codes gets at the subjects understanding of each other, of outsiders, and of the objects that make up their world (students, staff, parents, etc.)

- *Process Codes*: Process codes are words and phrases that facilitate categorizing sequences of events, changes over time, or passages from one type or kind of status to another.

By working with the transcripts by hand, I used concept labels to break down my data by referring back to the research questions. Over time, my concept labels took the shape of five to ten major themes that existed across the three stories of leading schools impacted by poverty within the inner city district of the Winnipeg School Division. Data from the transcribed interviews was analyzed for commonalities and outliers according to the themes that emerged in the data.

Conclusion

This research study was developed by incorporating qualitative data collection methods and by analyzing the data, common themes and findings were reported. Implications and recommendations will be proposed which may be of special interest to school divisions as well as Manitoba Education in their continued efforts to address the issue of poverty and its impact on education.

Chapter Four: Findings - Principals and Their Understanding of Poverty

Introduction: Inner City Principals & Their Schools

The purpose of this research study was to explore principal leadership in high poverty schools and to discover what three experienced administrators thought schools can and should do to minimize the impact of complex poverty and improve student success and experiences within school. To guide my analysis of the interviews, I used four research questions to explore the work of principals in high poverty schools.

1. How did three selected, former inner city, elementary school principals understand poverty and its relationship to students' school experiences and school success?

2. How did each former principal construct a vision for their school and attempt to create and design a school program to maximize student success?

3. How did each former principal attempt to implement the vision in their school during the period of time that they were there?

4. How did each former principal view the success of their efforts and the sustainability of their work?

In this chapter, attention is first given to presenting an introduction to each of the principals and their schools. This is followed by an analysis of the principals' interview data addressing the first research question – the various effects of poverty on school success and school experiences. Chapter five will look at the second and third research questions – the design and implementation of school programs to support students in high poverty ('inner city') schools, and Chapter six looks at the principals' comments about success and sustainability.

The inner city district of the Winnipeg School Division is comprised of 21 schools. As noted on the divisional website, its geographical area is large and is comprised of several distinct areas that include the following:

> The inner city district serves a geographic area that spans from the Red/Assiniboine rivers near the Forks (Fort Rouge) to the south, up the Red River to Mountain (Machray) in the north, to Arlington in the west (King Edward, Wellington, General Wolfe) and south down Arlington to the Assiniboine River. Our schools serve the downtown-area and part of the west end, the Point Douglas neighborhood, and the Selkirk Avenue/Salter Street /Arlington neighbourhood. (Winnipeg School Division, August 14th, 2014).

All three principals have spent the vast majority of their careers working in this district. Gaskell and Levin (2013) outline the geographical importance of the inner city in their work by stating:

> Poverty in Winnipeg has historically been concentrated in what is known as 'the inner city,' an area that extends north from the city's central business district across the main CPR tracks into the North End. Although the specific boundaries of the inner city differ somewhat in different data collection exercises, the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg has created a demographic portrait of the area over time. These data show that the inner city has shrunk as a proportion of the whole city and grown relatively poorer. Urban poverty has been increasingly concentrated and increasingly severe. (pp. 37-38)

The perceptions of three former principals on the impact that poverty has on students attending schools within the inner city will be shaped by many factors. One particular factor will be their collective experience of working in such a uniquely situated and distinct district within the Winnipeg School Division.

Three Inner City Schools

The three schools that I write about in this thesis are: Niji Mahkwa School, Dufferin Elementary School and David Livingstone School. All located in the inner city district, these schools are located in the William Whyte Neighborhood (Niji Mahkwa); Centennial Neighborhood (Dufferin Elementary School) and Lord Selkirk Park Neighborhood (David Livingstone School). They each serve their own unique school communities. It is important to understand some basic facts about the school communities in which the schools are located. Drawing on information shared in Chapter One, I highlight the following important factors about the students and families that are connected to these schools:

- The mobility and stability rates of the student population
- The percentage of students living with single parents
- The percentage of students that live in home in which English is not the only language spoken.
- The Economic Families: Incidence of Low Income

With reference to this information from the Winnipeg School Division School Demographics Report for 2006/2007, it should be noted that:

> The Division has more lone parents and lower income families, higher unemployment, and more people with less than grade 9 education than the City as a whole. The Winnipeg School Division has a higher percentage of visible minorities, Aboriginal people, and immigrants than does the City of Winnipeg. (Winnipeg School Division School Demographics Report 2006/2007)

Table #4 below outlines the mobility and stability rates of the student population; the percentage

of students living with single parents; the percentage of families in which English and other

languages are spoken and the Incidence of Low Income.

Table 4. **Select Demographic Characteristics of Niji Mahkwa, Dufferin, & David Livingstone Schools**

School Name:	Niji Mahkwa	Dufferin	David Livingstone
Mobility & Stability	M= 74% S= 76.7%	M= 44.2% S= 86.4%	M=63.1% S=83.1%
Single Parent Homes	85%	64%	67%
English + Other Languages Spoken	18.2%	20.7%	10.8%
Incidence of Low Income (LICO)	65.4%	67.7%	71.5%

As outlined in Chapter Two, and drawing on Silver's work on "complex poverty", this

table highlights the reality that the complex poverty that exists within Winnipeg's inner city

district is "spatially concentrated and racialized." The faces of complex poverty will be explored

in this chapter and each one leads to the reality of low educational outcomes. In the Manitoba

Centre for Health Policy (MCHP)'s study "*How are Manitoba's Children Doing*?" a direct link

can be made between the data collected in the Early Developmental Instrument (EDI) of children

living in complex poverty within the inner city of Winnipeg and the school outcomes that are

expected to be met by grade three. The study paints a clear picture of the link by stating:

> What we see is quite remarkable. With each vulnerability identified in Kindergarten, we
>
> see that the likelihood of not meeting expectations, for both reading and numeracy in
>
> grade 3, increases in step like fashion. So among children with no vulnerabilities

identified in Kindergarten, only 10 percent did not meet numeracy expectations in grade

3. Compare this to children with three vulnerabilities: more than half did not meet

expectations in reading, and over 55 percent did not meet expectations in numeracy in

Grade 3. Worse still, among children with five vulnerabilities, about 70 percent did not

meet either reading or numeracy expectations in grade 3. (Brownell, et al. (2012) p. 14.)

As the pattern continues it should not come as a surprise that the MCHP finds that lower rates of

high school completion are associated with lower income levels. From EDI data, Grade 3

Reading and Numeracy, Grade 7 Mathematics and Engagement, Grade 8 Reading and Writing

Assessments all the way through to Grade 12 Provincial Language Arts & Math Standards Tests

- students growing up in the inner city perform significantly lower than their peers in the highest

income level as proven through the following excerpt regarding graduation rates:

In 2009/2010 the graduation rate in urban centres was 55.4 percent in the lowest income

quintile, compared to 98.5 percent in the highest. The MCHP found that increases in high

school graduation rates were positively correlated with income level: higher income

quintiles have higher graduation rates. (State of the Inner City: A Youth Lens on Poverty

in Winnipeg, pp. 7-8).

 The next section of this chapter introduces each of the three former principals and their

schools, and the remaining parts of chapter four will draw on the perceptions and experiences of

these three principals related to the nature of complex, racialized poverty and its impacts on

school experiences and success.

Dr. Myra Laramee & Niji Mahkwa School

Dr. Myra Laramee[1] is a member of the Fisher River Cree Nation and holds a place in the

Muskwa (Bear) kinship. A respected elder in the Winnipeg Aboriginal community, Myra is also

a grandmother, mother, sister, and daughter and has spent 30 years teaching and learning in the

inner city of Winnipeg, Manitoba. Myra has been a teacher, counsellor and administrator within

the Winnipeg School Division. Upon graduating in 1976 from the Winnipeg Centre Project,

Myra began her teaching career at Wellington School. Over the course of thirty years, from 1976

– 2007, Myra worked in the inner city district of the Winnipeg School Division in the following

roles:

• Classroom teacher at Wellington School from 1976 - 1984

• Classroom teacher at Argyle Alternative High School from 1984 - 1990

• Guidance & Resource teacher at RB Russell High School from 1990-1992

• Vice Principal at Hugh John McDonald School from 1992 – 1994

• Principal at Niji Mahkwa School from 1994-2007

Myra has written curriculum for Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre as well as

the provincial Department of Education and Advanced Learning. For 13 years between 1994 and

2007, Myra has taught a Summer Institute on Aboriginal Education in the Faculty of Education

at the University of Manitoba. She has served as an instructor at the University of Winnipeg in

the Urban Studies program teaching a course on Indigenous Ways of Knowing. Myra completed

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[1] Dr. Myra Laramee earned her PhD from the University of Manitoba in 2013. For the remaining chapters of this thesis, Dr. Myra Laramee will be referred to by her first name.

her PhD in Education from the University of Manitoba in 2013 and her PhD Thesis is titled:

Teaching and Learning as an Act of Love: An Examination of the impact of Seven Traditional

Indigenous Teaching Practices in Teacher Education and on Teacher's Classroom Practices.

Myra's sees her background, work experience and academic training as providing her

with a post-colonial Aboriginal perspective on poverty and how it can dramatically impact

student's success and school experiences. Identifying with Silver's (2014) notion of "complex

poverty" she comments: "There are many ways you can be impoverished. Emotionally you can

be impoverished. Spiritually you can be impoverished. Physically you can be impoverished. The

impoverishment takes on different shapes and forms."

Niji Mahkwa School

Myra spent the last 13 years of her career with Winnipeg School Division as the

Principal of Niji Mahkwa School in the North End of Winnipeg. The school is located on Flora

Avenue, bordered by Salter Street to the south, Stella Avenue to the west and Powers Street to

the north. This area that is bounded by Arlington, Jarvis, Salter and Selkirk is almost void of

green space and recreational facilities except for the school and the Boys & Girls Club. Niji

Mahkwa is a nursery – grade eight school that offers the regular academic program in a setting

which emphasizes Aboriginal languages and culture. Formerly known as Aberdeen School, Niji

Mahkwa School opened in 1993, two years after Winnipeg School Division responded to a

divisional Task Force on Race Relations which, among other things, highlighted the relatively

poor performance of Aboriginal students (Winnipeg School Division Task Force on Race

Relations, 1989). Before Niji Mahkwa School was opened in 1993, there had been a long, highly

public debate around Aboriginal Education within the division that previously led to the creation

of Children of the Earth High School in 1991 (Gaskell & Levin, 2013). The Mission of Niji

Mahkwa School is:

> Niji Mahkwa School and Community upholds the belief that all children
>
> have an inherent right to the highest quality of holistic education. The integration
>
> of traditional, cultural teachings in a supportive learning environment will provide
>
> students with strengths and skills to meet the challenges of life.
>
> (Winnipeg School Division Inner City District, 2014).

With a specific focus on Ojibway & Cree language instruction, as well as Aboriginal cultural

practices, Niji Mahkwa School combines culture with curriculum by viewing the work of the

school through four directions: technology, linguistics, academics and culture.

The student population at Niji Mahkwa School is 100% Aboriginal, and the school serves

the local community and the school division by offering the regular academic program in a

setting which emphasizes Aboriginal languages and culture. Niji Mahkwa offers nursery through

grade eight and has a student population that has ranged from 250-350 students. It has one of the

highest mobility rates within the inner city district and is located in the William Whyte

neighborhood, one of Winnipeg's most economically disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Ms. Suni Matthews & Dufferin Elementary School

Ms. Suni Matthews describes herself as a "South Asian Woman" who was born and

raised in India. Suni grew up attending private school under the British colonial system in India.

Upon arriving in Manitoba, Suni recalls facing some barriers from the very beginning when the

provincial universities did not fully recognize her schooling in India. Suni attended Brandon

University from 1969-1970 to receive her Manitoba teaching certification and taught in Militia,

Manitoba from September 1970 through December 1970 before moving to Winnipeg. Since then

Suni has spent her entire career working in the inner city district of the Winnipeg School

Division in a variety of roles. Over the course of thirty-nine years, from 1971 – 2010, Suni

worked in the following roles:

- Classroom teacher at Glen Elm School from 1971-1972

- Suni spent one year (1972-1973) substitute teaching in Calgary, Alberta

- Classroom teacher at John M. King School from 1973 – 1975

- Classroom and Special Education teacher at Lord Roberts School from 1975-1985

- Migrancy teacher at William Whyte School from 1985-1986 through Manitoba's
  Department of Education

- Program development and staff consultant with the provincial Inner City Initiative
  Branch from 1986-1991

- Classroom teacher at King Edward School from 1992-1994

- Vice Principal at King Edward School from 1994-1995

- Vice Principal at R.B. Russell High School from 1996 - 1999

- Principal at Dufferin Elementary School from 1999-2010

Drawing on the various experiences within the Winnipeg School Division, as well as her

time seconded to the Province working for the Inner City Initiative Branch, Suni articulated a

strong understanding of the importance of the structural and systemic foundations of poverty.

Through her leadership and participation in the Centennial Neighborhood Project (2003-2008), Suni has developed an understanding that there are structures and systems in place that allow for society to be divided. These divisions separate rich from poor and allow for a cycle of poverty to be sustained.

After retiring from the Winnipeg School Division, Suni has continued her work in the field of education as a member of Premier Selinger's Advisory Committee on Education, Poverty and Citizenship.

Dufferin Elementary School

Dufferin Elementary School is located in the Centennial Neighborhood, considered to be one of Winnipeg's most economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. The neighborhood measures one half kilometre, bordered by Princess Street to the east, William Avenue to the south, Sherbrook Street to the west and Logan Avenue to the north. The neighborhood is home to many important community service organizations including Winnipeg Boys & Girls Clubs' Freight House, Rossbrook House and Anishinabe Place of Hope. Dufferin Elementary School offers Nursery through grade six and has a student population that ranges from 200-300 students.

During Suni's time as Principal of Dufferin Elementary School (1999-2010), she was directly involved with the Centennial Neighborhood Project (2003-2008). This 5 year commitment launched by The Winnipeg Foundation had the goal "to help rebuild, revitalize and restore hope to families who call Centennial home." (WPG Foundation Special Report). Based on the premise that "education is the ticket out of poverty" the Centennial Neighborhood Project focused on building a support system for children and families at Dufferin Elementary School.

Ms. Angeline Ramkissoon & David Livingstone School

Ms. Angeline Ramkissoon has spent thirty-three years as an educator with twenty-four of those years as a school administrator in the inner city district of the Winnipeg School Division. Angeline is originally from Trinidad. Having attended private school in Trinidad under the British colonial system, Angeline learned at a young age about privilege in society. Upon arriving in Winnipeg she attended the University of Winnipeg Collegiate. Although she was already teaching in Trinidad, Angeline felt it was important to become familiar with the Canadian school system and she chose to retake grades eleven and twelve at the Collegiate. Angeline attended the University of Manitoba for her Bachelor of Arts degree in English, her Bachelor of Education degree as well as her Master's in Education.

After graduating, Angeline spent from 1975-1979 working as a substitute teacher in the Fort Garry School Division (now a part of the Pembina Trails School Division) as well as the Winnipeg School Division while she raised her family. In 1979, Angeline was hired as an English as a Second Language teacher for the intermediate level at Victoria Albert School. Over the course of thirty-three years from 1979 – 2012, Angeline worked in the inner city district of the Winnipeg School Division in the following roles:

- ESL, Special Education & Resource teacher at Victoria Albert School from 1979-1988

- Teaching Vice Principal at Garden Grove School from 1988-1989

- Vice Principal at Stanley Knowles School from 1989-1993

- Acting Principal at Norquay School from February 1993 to June 1993

- Principal at David Livingstone School from 1993-2002

•   Principal at Wellington School from 2002-2012

Angeline's background as well as her experience of working in the inner city district provides her with a unique perspective on the causes of poverty and the agency of students and teachers in struggling to overcome its many complex elements.

After retiring from the Winnipeg School Division, Angeline has continued her work in the field of education by continuing to present at various conferences on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder and its impact on student learning. Angeline was also appointed as a member of the municipal police board for the City of Winnipeg in July 2013.

David Livingstone School

David Livingstone School is located at 270 Flora Avenue in the Lord Selkirk Park neighborhood. It is located steps away from the bustling low cost hotels, various medical clinics and pawnshops of Main Street in the North End of Winnipeg. The school is located on Flora Avenue, bordered by King Street to the south, Stella Walk to the west and Charles Walk to the north. David Livingstone School offers nursery through grade eight and has a student population that ranged from 300-400 students. The Lord Selkirk Housing Development is across the playground and is home to the majority of David Livingstone School families. The Turtle Island Recreation Center and the Mount Carmel Clinic are important community service organizations within the school community.

It is the connection between the school and the Mount Carmel Clinic that David Livingstone School is most well-known for within the Winnipeg School Division. The Bridges program was established in 2003 while Angeline was the school Principal. "The purpose of the program is to identify and utilize best practices in the education of students with FASD in order

to maximize the success of the student while minimizing barriers to learning in a classroom

setting". (Healthy Child MB, FASD Strategy) This partnership between Healthy Child Manitoba,

Manitoba Education and the Winnipeg School Division was designed to support students with

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder in grades three through six.

With essential but limited background information provided on both the schools, the

school communities and the principal's that led them, the rest of this chapter will draw on the

perceptions and experiences of these three principals related to their understandings of poverty

and its impact on students' school experiences and school success.

Understanding Poverty and Its Impact on Student School Experience and Success

This section of the chapter has as its focus the study's first research question: *"How did*

three selected former inner city elementary school principals understand poverty and its

relationship to students' school experiences and school success." In the series of interviews

conducted as part of this research each participant articulated aspects of their own unique

responses to this research question. In presenting an analysis of these three perspectives my

decision has been not to focus on presenting in detail each participant's responses and then

analyzing of their similarities and differences. Rather I have chosen to identify a number of

themes drawn from the interviews collectively and to use comments from the three participants

to illustrate each theme.

Although each principal worked in the inner city district, each school community

presents different challenges and therefore the faces of complex poverty varied between the three

schools. As the realities of complex poverty varied from school community to school

community, so did the principal's understanding and perspective on poverty and how it impacted

students' experiences and success in school.

In interviewing Angeline, she identified poverty, in its simplest form, as a lack of

monetary resources, as a defining characteristic of the inner city that can become a commonality

amongst all people as it impacts on children's education. Angeline says:

> I think that's what really defines the inner-city – is the poverty. It doesn't matter whether
>
> parents are on government subsidies like welfare or whether both parents as immigrants
>
> are working or not. It is still poverty that affects the academic performance. The income
>
> level is low. Parents are holding on to three, four jobs sometimes to be the working poor
>
> – even then. They are not able to make things work, so poverty I see as being the most
>
> awful deterrence in the student progress and academic progress. (A.1.8.233-38)

This perspective on poverty serves as an important starting point for exploring the concept of

poverty through each of the three principal's perspective on poverty. In the above quote

Angeline emphasizes the concrete and material financial aspects of poverty as cutting across all

backgrounds, cultures, immigrants, Aboriginals or multi-generational poor families. In

discussing her philosophy of inner city education she emphasizes the need "to meet children

where they are at, focus on their strengths and try to design the school program in a way that will

move children forward regardless of their individual situation and how poverty may impact their

school experience". (A.2.12.345-348)

Having grown up in the North End and spending her entire working career in the inner

city district, Myra was able and willing to share a wealth of information about poverty and what

impact it has on student's school experience and school success during the interviews. Myra describes her understanding of poverty as the following:

> Poverty became for me something to do with the fact that there are many ways you can be impoverished. Emotionally you can be impoverished. Spiritually you can be impoverished. Physically you can be impoverished. The impoverishment takes on different shapes and forms. But when you know there are children that are sitting in front of you whose minds, bodies, spirits, emotions have been impacted by lack of something – there is lots of work to do – lots of different kinds of things that need to be done on multiple levels. (M.1.5.184-90)

Myra's understanding of poverty takes into consideration the impact of complex poverty and how over time, people can have their human spirit damaged as well as their self-worth eroded to the point where hopelessness for the future can set in. Myra's philosophy of inner city education is to examine the whole child and focus their education in a way that will draw out their talents, acknowledge areas that need strengthening and fill them with opportunity to develop as a person that will live and work in the community as a good person and contributing member to society.

Suni shared through her experience of being born and raised in India and that her understanding of poverty began at an early age and that it has helped her to understand the structural aspects that are in play and allow for poverty to exist. Suni describes the systemic pieces of poverty:

> I had a real awareness of those who have and those who haven't and how that impacted on my own life, and also how you are shaped by the political thinking of the time and the thinking of my own parents, who were my first teachers. From them I learned two

important lessons. One was the role of systemic pieces that impact on the lives of those

who have and those who don't. It's not by accident that people are poor. That was a

teaching that I learned that was shaped by my father, and I also learned about the

importance of community and the need for reaching out to community and working with

community from my mother. (S.1.2.54-62)

Throughout Suni's interviews, a real focus on the systemic and structural causes of poverty was

explored. Her philosophy of inner city education was to acknowledge the realities of complex

poverty and the challenges they present but to work from an assets-base with children and to zero

in on strengths of children, families and communities and to focus on building on them while at

the same time acknowledging the barriers that are placed upon schools by poverty.

As I proceed to share the story of each principal, their understanding of complex poverty

will appear as they discuss the barriers that existed in their school community and the work that

was needed to be done to overcome such barriers through education. Drawing from the work of

Silver (2014) as well as the emerging themes from my research data, I will focus specifically on

(i) social exclusion; (ii) unemployment; (iii) inadequate housing; (iv) poor health; (v) low

parental education levels; and (v) Aboriginal street gangs and associated violence.

Hopes & Dreams: Breaking through Social Exclusion

A common theme that all three participants spoke about was students' hopes and dreams

and how living in poverty can result in social exclusion. There are many factors that can lead to

social exclusion. Racism within society has historically been connected to social exclusion. One

only need to look back to the way in which black South Africans were treated and controlled

during Apartheid or the experience of African Americans in the 1960's as U.S. inner cities were

being "hollowed out" through suburbanization. (Silver, p. 73). In his defining of social exclusion,

Silver (2014) describes it by stating:

> Poverty increases the likelihood of social exclusion – people who are poor are less likely
>
> to be able to participate fully in what mainstream society has to offer. They may become
>
> marginalized from important aspects of the dominant culture. (Silver, 2014, p. 90).
>
> One area in which children living in complex poverty are not able to participate in fully is

the labour market. It can be difficult for young people to "learn the cultural norms associated

with work to find work by means of connecting with family members or neighbors who have

jobs, which is the traditional way for young people to get their first job." (Tal, 2013, p.15)

The social exclusion that exists for children living in the inner city impacts the life

experiences that they bring to school. By living in a concentrated area of the city, children are

only exposed to the opportunities within their immediate reach. As experiences with their

immediate surroundings are determined by what they can or cannot access, the impact of social

exclusion can begin to shape who children believe they are destined to grow up to be.

In particular, all three participants spoke about the impacts of inter-generational poverty,

racialized poverty and complex poverty on families living in their specific school communities.

Myra spoke about the hopes and dreams of Aboriginal, First Nations and Metis students she had

worked with over the years from her time at Argyle Alternative High School, R.B. Russell

Technical High School and as the Principal of Niji Mahkwa School. Myra also shared her

frustration with a commonly held belief that is not true in her experience as she illustrates below:

But one of the things that people kept saying to me over the years in my career is why don't Aboriginal children have aspirations? Why don't they have dreams? That was a question that used to bug me so bad and I would fume and I would bite my tongue because I said to myself the first time I got that angry there has to be a response to this. So I took it to Sundance, and I took it to my elders and teachers, and my mentors and I took it to prayer. And one of the things I was clearly told is that every human being has dreams. They're God given. In fact, in our tradition, it's the only time that we can shut up long enough to let God speak. So we be quiet and Creator speaks through dreams. And unfortunately, traumatized kids, poor kids have dreams that are severely interrupted and interfered with. They dream of things that are couched in the lifestyle that they live with their parents or without their parents with their grandparents. (M.2.32.1135-46)

Myra's quote includes two important aspects: all children and families have hopes and dreams – but they are cast within the particular realities of their life - and that people working with these children and families (including teachers) may not believe they do because they may have a individualistic/pathological or racist view of people who live in poverty. This identifies a starting point for an emerging theme in which teachers and support staff working in high poverty schools can, at times, become a barrier by holding lower expectations and untrue beliefs about the lived experiences of people impacted by complex poverty.

Angeline's thoughts on the hopes and dreams of her students at David Livingstone School highlight the observation that their hopes and dreams are often couched within the lifestyle that they live and by what they see as realistic possibilities. In this situation Angeline observed that while in her experience the work of the teaching staff, school administration and outside agency programming had an impact on student experiences they were not always enough

to break through the intergenerational lived experiences of the students. She shared a story from her final year as principal of David Livingstone School:

> I remember having this conversation with a few young ladies in grade seven and eight, asking them about their dreams and "What would you like to be when you grow up? What would you like? Wouldn't you like to have your own apartment? Wouldn't you like to have a job? Wouldn't you like to have your own car and stuff like that? After all the intervention with these kids, one young woman turned and said: "My mother collected welfare. My grandmother is collecting welfare. It's the way I see my life going. No matter what you do, that's going to happen". They were very bright, intelligent, outgoing kids; but yet they were so drawn to that culture that I couldn't pull them out of it. That's when I knew I was losing ground. It's very disheartening when you see that – that no matter what you do, you know that when you leave at 5 o'clock or 6 o'clock in the evening you have no power over what is happening (A.1.9.294-305)

It is within the second half of this quote that one can feel a sense of hopelessness related to students from poverty being able to improve their life circumstances. The notion of being "drawn to that culture" may suggest that individuals have a choice to live in poverty whereas Silver would argue that many key aspects of their life that are beyond their immediate control and substantially determine their existence of living in poverty.

Suni spoke at length about attitude and outlook held by some school staff and community members as well as about a paradigm shift she felt was needed when she arrived at Dufferin Elementary School as the new principal:

>   You always had to look at that because it isn't just about the money. It's about a belief system, about children and how they learn, about parents … I'm going to say this in quotations – "these kids" if you view them as "these kids" there was always differential treatment because I don't believe that these children and these parents – often times you hear that, of children who come from poverty, are referred to. I think that says that there is a fundamental belief in your framework that says "I truly believe that the children who come from situations of poverty can't really change because I don't believe that parents support them in the same way as my folks do" in terms of if you come with your middle-class framework. It's different. There had to be a paradigm shift in the way you view children, the way you view what they can and cannot do, and what they are able to do; and it's about what you believe is the role of parents and the larger community in order to ensure that the children are successful at school. (S.1.12.404-24)

It is obvious by Suni's quote that she firmly believes that the systemic structures that are in place that allow poverty to exist must be challenged if we are to see all children experience the hopes and dreams of reaching their potential. It is also within this quote that the notion of schools, as they currently exist, can themselves be an additional barrier for children and families impacted by poverty. Any time that people find themselves working in a school in which they do not believe in the abilities of children or the desire of parents for their children to be successful – then standards may be lowered and expectations may be set that will not focus on what children and teachers can do in an effort to move them forward.

Suni continues to share her insights on the hopes and dreams parents had for their children at Dufferin Elementary School by sharing the following:

One of the critical pieces from all of this is that poverty of the person is not poverty of

aspirations. Every one of those – in Dufferin, we did a survey…. Every parent that I

talked to that I spoke to that filled out the survey wanted their children to do better, to

become better and to go on to some kind of post-secondary education. Those were their

aspirations. They wanted so much better for their children than they had for themselves.

(S.1.15.543-48)

Social exclusion limits student's experiences in life which ultimately can impact on their

ability to dream about their future. By participating less in what mainstream society has to offer,

students are given fewer opportunities and are connected to a limited range of role models to

learn from.

Employment/Unemployment: Maximizing Student Employment Skills

Linked closely to hopes and dreams, the notion of transitioning from school to the world

of work is also a theme that each participant shared their views on and how poverty impacted

this transition for the students attending their schools. It was made clear from each participant

that many of the students attending their schools are not exposed to a wide range of employed

people in their immediate lives. In the first interview with Myra she took the time to read a direct

passage from the Niji Mahkwa School handbook that outlined the importance of transition from

school to work for their school community:

The significant rates of inter-generational unemployment and long-term poverty have left

many Aboriginal children with a void in experience and knowledge related to the world

of work. The children of our communities may lack experience with the role of modeling

work, and therefore they have developed a limited vision of what their opportunities

might be. Dreams and aspirations will also be limited, and career aspirations in some cases may even be a foreign concept. (M.2.31.1047-156)

Myra shared the explicit school plan to address this issue and also shared the following:

I realized that the acquisition of knowledge related to the work ethic, employability skills, setting goals, opportunities, requirements of securing and holding employment, skill development in relation to informed decision making will leave a void in some of our kids because one, they had grandparents … remember I told you 51% of parents at Niji Mahkwa were grandparents raising their grandchildren. So those people probably weren't working right or limited work? And then the parents, the young parents they were also not working so that modeling of work experience – the whole bit of getting up at 7:00 a.m. in the morning to get to a job for 9:00 a.m., work the full day, come home and you know at the end of the week or two weeks get a pay cheque, go out shopping and do all the business that's required to look after a child those were missing. (M.2.31.1063-74)

Further down Flora Avenue at David Livingstone School, Angeline was experiencing a similar situation in her school community:

It wasn't prevalent to see parents or grandparents out going to their job, for example. They depended mostly on social services and that is the result of intergenerational issues and societal issues because they did not belong to the workforce because of lack of opportunities. And that's where I found that parents and a lot of them were grandmas who were looking after their kids did not have the background in terms of encouraging the kids to get up and be on time and get to school and those issues because they were not brought up that way. All that power and all those choices were taken away from them. So

they never experienced it in order to shape that for their grandchildren or their children

… and that's an impact of poverty, one of the major impacts, the lack of self-esteem and

the lack of skills that would have provided them with the opportunities to access any

form of education or any form of job facilities. It was just a vicious circle and they kept

going through that circle and the kids and the grandkids followed suit because there was

no positive role model for them in that particular area in the job situations. (A.1.24.782-

1005)

Hopes, dreams and aspirations of young people is something all three participants felt

strongly about. Unemployment plays a role in how hopes, dreams and aspirations are developed

as it limits one's experiences in life. Whether someone is employed or unemployed determines

many key features in life including basic needs: housing, food, clothing, etc. The level of one's

employment or lack thereof also determines other life experiences including: travel, recreational

activities, access to technology, etc. People who are employed have greater access to both

material things as well as experiences. Myra shared her concern and insight into how schools

could play a role in combatting the harsh reality of their students lacking the knowledge and

experience of employment:

Aspirations are a capacity for the potential to be realized. And so aspirations are

something that schools can have an effect on. We believed that school to work

transitioning starts at nursery so I started pushing. And my friend, Angeline Ramkissoon

who is my counterpart down the road at David Livingstone School, her and I became like

a dog with a bone. Like a couple of pups with a bone, and we just went at it. And we

presented this to council that school to work transitioning programs start at nursery and

everybody was looking at us like we were crazy. So I started working with my staff and

Angeline had another area that she was working in. So we both were like pit-bulls

working at this whole business. Lack of knowledge, lack of experience, and what that

was doing to our students – so we started collecting data in our schools and we started

talking to our parents and our grandparents. And you know how they were – what they

wanted for their kids, so our parents and our grandparents wanted the same thing that

everybody else in the world wanted, and that was for their kids to be viable, to get

through school. They wanted that. (M.2.33.1153-1166.)

It needs to be made explicitly clear that Myra and Angeline's vision for their students was not

that of preparing them to leave school and work in the lower echelons of the labour market. They

focused their work on transition from school to work around employability skills that would

serve children well if they were to join the labour market or continue on with further education

after high school. With this being said, based on the information that both Myra and Angeline

shared in their interviews, it is safe to say that their school to work transition program was well

grounded in the harsh reality of what options were going to be both viable and available to the

students in their school communities. They worked hard to provide opportunities for their

students to be exposed to positive role modelling, introduced employability skills and provided

students with exposure to a wide variety of career and employment opportunities.

Inadequate Housing

Housing is one the most critical issues facing people that live in poverty. Although all

three participants worked within the inner city district, the neighborhoods that make up the North

End vary in many ways and although they are close to each other in a geographical sense, the

differences in housing impact the student's school experience and school success. Affordable

housing for low-income families is scarce within the inner city of Winnipeg. Due to the lack of

affordable housing for people living in poverty families become transient in the inner city school

communities as they are: continuously forced out of housing due to deplorable conditions; leave

housing in search of more affordable options; live in overcrowded and unhealthy housing

arrangements; endure changes to the family structure (marriages dissolve, people are

incarcerated). As outlined in the literature review (see Silver 2014, Mackinnon 2013) inadequate

housing has detrimental effects on people living in poverty and children who live in poor

families are directly impacted as they are forced to change schools, sometimes multiple times

within the same school year.

 Both Suni and Angeline described in detail the impact that inadequate housing had on

their school communities while also explaining the tough position that families faced when

attempts were made to improve housing. Suni describes housing as one of the first visible

differences in the school community of Dufferin Elementary School:

> I guess the first thing that hits you in terms of something that's really visible would be in
>
> terms of the housing. The housing was very inadequate – conditions were horrible for
>
> some of the students, not all, but for some of the students. Housing is certainly a huge
>
> issue at Dufferin School. When I first started at Dufferin School in 2003, there were 90
>
> boarded up houses – and this was just Manitoba Housing. Then there were absentee
>
> landlords right on Alexander Avenue. There were several absentee landlords. Where do
>
> you find these folks? They hand over their business to agencies. Some of the rents that
>
> are charged for these deplorable places – there's a "Catch 22" when you take an
>
> inventory of what's out there in the community and you see the substandard housing, and
>
> there's no heat or there are rodents and/or other creatures, which makes it unfit. You call

the health department and it's a "Catch 22" because what happens when the health

department comes and they deem the house not fit for living, which then places a

hardship on the families who have to move, which impacts the school, which then

impacts on the migrancy, which then impacts on the interrupted learning. (S.2.35.1253-55

and 1308-19)

It is the interruption of learning that all three participants highlight as the biggest impact that

inadequate housing, experienced by those living in poverty, has on student's school experiences

and school success. Suni described her role as a Migrancy Teacher at William Whyte School in

the early 1980's when she was seconded by the Inner City Initiative Branch to help address the

transient nature of inner city school communities:

When I went to William Whyte School, I went in the role of what they used to call a

migrancy teacher. That was an intervention to help kids because due to housing, children

moved several places. Again, it was an intervention to help the children integrate into

their classroom setting. Just imagine you have moved so many times and you have no

connection with anybody, and you take a kid and bump them into a grade 4 classroom or

grade 5 or grade 6, without telling anybody. Migrancy teachers helped the students. They

came in, and we did an intake with them. We found out what their strengths were in the

areas for development. They spent anywhere from one week to three weeks with the

migrancy teacher because there was constant intake because kids were always coming in

and out. That's what happens in the inner-city. A lot of that in and out – most of them,

because of poor housing, children had to move. (S.1.7.234-48)

The days of the Inner City Initiative Branch have long passed but the problem of affordable housing still exists. Suni best describes the impact that inadequate housing had on her students at Dufferin Elementary School when she shared the following breakdown of a complex situation for people living in poverty:

> Every move is like six months off the kid's schooling. By the time they go into another area, they have to learn the culture of the school and try to fit in. Then there's another – for every move, if you calculate six months, they moved three or four times a year – migrancy would be another factor. Then the other one was the lack of family – the support within the family and how that plays out in terms of how it impacts on the learning of kids. Many of them were on social assistance, so that's another piece. You have single-parent families on social assistance living in substandard housing, and then have to leave because of the housing. There are all those factors that impact the learning and success for the children. That's how it played out in the school. When I came to the school, we had to look at all of these factors and how we mitigate or reduce the impact of those negative factors so that the children are more successful. (S.2.35. 1320-30)

Angeline described the unique housing situation at David Livingstone School in which Manitoba Housing's Lord Selkirk Park was home for the majority of her students. Angeline explained that:

> David Livingstone had a bad reputation in the location. They were right in the middle of the Lord Selkirk Housing Development, which was famous for everything negative. You name it, the kids knew everything. David Livingstone was located off Main Street. I don't know if you know where the Mount Carmel Clinic is? It's just opposite the Mount Carmel Clinic. Most of the kids came from the Lord Selkirk Housing Development,

which is a series of apartments – low rental housing – that was built at the back there,

under very poor conditions. I remember they had walls that were built up separating

these, and one of the first things I did with the police department was to ask them to

advocate breaking down those walls because people can hide behind those walls. That's

where a lot of the negative activities were going on. Before I left there, those walls were

broken down. It looked more open. People could walk safely, and no one is hiding and

lurking behind or anything like that. (A.1.16.531-543)

Each principal spoke about the role that inadequate housing had on student's school success and

school experiences. They also spoke to the importance of their staff developing a better

understanding of the conditions in which some of their students came from. This is an area that

was improved by the principal's insistence on developing and maintaining a strong connection

between home and school.

Poor Health

Throughout the interviews with Myra, Suni and Angeline, the overall health of children

and their families emerged as a theme that was directly related to poor attendance, lower

educational attainment and was a factor that impacted the overall school experience. With an

emphasis on lack of food, proper nutrition and healthy eating habits, all three principals made

sure to have special programming in place to address this barrier. Myra shared a story of the

importance of the connection between home and school that resulted in making sure food was

available in times of need. What started off as a keen observation during an evening event at the

school led Myra to discover something about this particular family that could not be ignored:

This family kept coming back. There was this big barrel of soft drinks and juice and they kept stuffing their pockets. They'd disappear because they lived across the street, they'd come back empty pocketed; and the kids were coming to get sauces, to get hotdogs two and three times from the same family. So I said these kids are hungry and this family hasn't got any food. So I took the parents and had my staff to watch the kids. And I took them down to our community cupboard and I said to them, "Now, you are not making it from the end of the month, the last week in the month is hard for you isn't it?" And they said, "Yeah, it is. It's really hard." They were on welfare. I went to their house and they had no furniture. They sold all their furniture to feed their kids. So I told them that when they ran out of food that they were to come and see Fred, and they would collect enough food from the community pantry to last them for the last week. And I looked at them and I said, "Pardon my language, but if you bullshit me that's done. But if you come honestly to me then it will continue as long as you need it." And one of the things that Fred was able to do was to show them that it wasn't a bad thing to go to Winnipeg Harvest on their own. So he'd take them and they'd go to Harvest for some food to supplement what we gave them. So there was different things that happened along the way that said to me this is so entrenched, and those people had nothing but pride. And it made me really sad. (M.1.35.1232-1250)

Further down Flora Avenue at David Livingstone School, Angeline was dealing with a similar predicament with her families. Breakfast programs were established for students and once again that connection between home and school was used to help parent's access food through Winnipeg Harvest. Angeline says:

Yes, we had a breakfast program, and we also had a family room where parents could

come in and through the family room we provided food for parents who were in

desperate need of food. We contacted Winnipeg Harvest, where we were able to go down

or the family would go--would take parents down so that they could access what was

there. (A.1.27.886-890)

More importantly, the overall health of children as well as their families played a major

role in attendance at school. Whether children were sick themselves, staying home to look after

sick siblings or unable to attend school due to a parent or guardian being sick – each day of

school they missed kept them further behind. Interventions were put in place at all three schools

as the Principals knew that in order to educate children living in complex poverty, the most

important step was making sure they attended school.

Silver (2014) similarly identifies poor health as a major factor when he says:

Complex poverty also includes poor health … It is the socio-economic conditions in

which people live that are the most important determinants of their health … Complex

and racialized poverty makes people sick; being sick in turn increases the likelihood of

being poor (Silver, 2014, pp. 80-81).

Inadequate housing was shared as a major cause of poor health amongst the students and families

that attended Niji Mahkwa School, Dufferin Elementary School and David Livingstone School.

With a lack of affordable housing in the Point Douglas and Centennial Neighborhoods, families

often experienced overcrowding while living in accommodations that lacked proper insulation,

air conditioning and in the worst cases, were overridden by bed bugs.

Neighborhood Street Gangs & Violence

For many children living and attending schools in the inner city of Winnipeg, Aboriginal street gangs and violence are a dominant social reality. Comack et al. (2013) argue that Aboriginal street gangs "are a collective form of resistance to the destructive impacts of colonialism." In the *State of the Inner City: A Youth Lens of Poverty,* a picture is painted as to how Aboriginal youth may be lead to become involved in street gangs. The report shares that:

> Winnipeg's high proportion of Aboriginal people struggling with the legacy of colonization and living in poverty creates a situation where avenues to achieve material and social successes are far out of reach. Youth who grow up in poverty face a myriad of challenges that accompany poverty: problems at home, at school, and growing up in the foster care system all limit choices that can lead them to become involved in street gang activities. (State of the Inner City: A Youth Lens on Poverty in Winnipeg, pp. 7-8).

Angeline identified Gang Awareness as a topic of Professional Development for her staff at David Livingstone School. She indicated that Aboriginal street gangs were very active during her time as the principal and that students in grade seven and eight were expected to attend Argyle Alternative School for Practical Arts classes. This learning opportunity placed students in a difficult situation at times because they needed to cross through gang territory to attend their classes off campus. Angeline shared the following:

> So they lived in that and that's all they knew. Even the kids did not get out of that particular area very much. And there were the issues about kids being afraid to crossover on the other side, you know, cross over the bridge to get on the other side because I recall when we had some of our kids going to the Argyle Alternative High School building for

shops, they were afraid to go so I had to get teachers to walk them over and pick them.

They wouldn't. It's not their territory so they wouldn't cross over. (A.1.24.796-801)

Myra also dealt with the spillover of gang activity within the school community as she shared the story of Johnny Chubb, a Niji Mahkwa School student, who was beaten to death behind the West End Cultural Centre in 2003. He was fifteen years old. Myra explains the reality of street gangs and violence as it impacted her students directly:

> Because when you talk to North End kids that bridge, McPhillips and Mountain for this
>
> set of kids that's it. They don't go beyond there. Because when they do like Johnny
>
> Chubb, took a liking to a young lady who lived on the West End Cultural Centre side,
>
> here's Sherbrook, and the street this way east. She lived on that street. So he was
>
> walking back to his bus, went to visit her, walking back to his bus and he got eight-balled
>
> behind the West End Cultural Center. Died that night. He was my only fluent speaker in
>
> Cree at Niji Mahkwa School. In my career I stopped counting at 101. We've lost 101 kids
>
> and more … because my mother gave me heck. She said, "You stop counting death right
>
> now." And that was through HIV and AIDS. That was through murder. That was
>
> through being at the wrong place at the wrong time. That was through suicide. That was
>
> through somebody else's drunken whatever. 101 kids when I was at…when I began my
>
> stint at Niji Mahkwa School. I think it was the fourth year when we lost Johnny. (M.
>
> 1.34.1181-93)

Myra also shared the experience of her grandson, Jesse, and his cohort of friends who attended Niji Mahkwa School from nursery through grade eight. Myra described the conversation as follows:

Grandson, tell me what's going on with you." He looked me square in the eye. He said

Kokum, how come I am alive?" I said, "Whatever do you mean?" Out of his cohort, his

group of kids that went through from nursery all the way to grade 8 – which was about 25

by the end of the same consistent kids whose parents stayed with the school and we went

through thick and thin together. Out of those 25 kids, 11 of them are dead. He said, "How

come I'm alive?" I said, "Well, grandson – the only thing I can tell you is what I have

always told you. Who are you? Who are you, my grandson?" He said, "I am a ceremony

man." "That's why you are alive." (M.1.22.775-783)

Students attending Practical Arts at Niji Mahkwa School from Hugh John McDonald

School also brought with them gang allegiances. Myra explains the process of working with

students and families to ensure that gang violence would not play out in her school:

It came out of a situation where we had Hugh John McDonald kids coming to our school

for shops and the grades 7s and 8s were right across the hall from shops. That's not a

good thing. And our kids made it really clear to a couple of the young women that this

was our turf. Unfortunately, their identification was IP turf. My parents who found out

were fit to be tied … My parents were so upset with their children this is why I thought I

have to do some interventions. The Hugh John McDonald students were not IP. They

were part of Deuce – as Indian as IP…. What happened with this situation was those

parents were the parents that got together with me to design this wheel. And I said,

"Your kids are not doing this because they're bad kids. Your kids are not doing this

because you don't care. Your kids are doing this because they're becoming

knowledgeable about their presence and needing to stake their territory. They don't want

Niji Mahkwa to have people to come here and do other things at night." And it was

shortly after Johnny's killing. It all had an energy flow right. It was pretty scary for a

couple of months. My kids were angry and I think I told you that my grandson lost out of

that core group of his, lost 11 already. And two of them were his cousins. So when you

face those kinds of things and you know it's because of poverty and marginalization your

ground zero stuff that you do is pretty hard-core in the sense that you gotta cut through a

lot of fluff. (M.1.39.1353-1383)

The existence of Aboriginal street gangs and the violence that ensues due to their

existence jeopardizes safety for people living in the inner city and is something that inner city

school principals are forced to deal with as part of their job. The Winnipeg Gang Action

Interagency Network (GAIN) is a committee of over 25 organizations. In their work, they have

consulted with 42 youth that are involved in inner city programs about gang issues in Winnipeg.

The youth identified four reasons that young people join gangs: "to make money, to escape home

and family problems; to be protected against bullying or the threat of violence; and for a sense of

belonging". (State of the Inner City: A Youth Lens on Poverty in Winnipeg, pp. 16.) Schools

may play an important role in addressing these four factors but similar to addressing other

aspects of complex poverty – they cannot be expected to do it alone.

Low Parental Education Levels

The cycle of poverty is not easy to break. Education is often viewed as a means to break

the cycle of poverty, but it is easy to overlook the low level of education held by parents living in

poverty. Earlier in the chapter, I shared that the Winnipeg School Division has more single

parents and more people with less than grade 9 education than the City as a whole. Myra, Suni

and Angeline experienced first-hand what impact low levels of parental education can have on a

school community. At Niji Mahkwa School, 19.5% of parents had less than a grade nine

education. At Dufferin Elementary School the rate was 20.8% and at David Livingstone it

reached 27.5%. With this being the case, it's not surprising that Gaskell & Levin (2010) share

the following:

> Socio-economic status (SES) is the single most powerful factor associated with
>
> educational and other life outcomes, as has been found in virtually every important study
>
> of these issues, over time, in every country where such studies have been conducted
>
> (Gaskell & Levin, 2010, p.12).

Silver (2014) picks up on this and connects it to complex poverty when he says:

> Poor educational outcomes lead to more poverty. The universal pattern is: the higher the
>
> level of poverty, the lower the level of educational attainment; low levels of educational
>
> attainment, in turn, increase the likelihood of poverty (Silver, 2014, p. 2).

What was remarkable about Myra, Suni and Angeline, in their response to this reality for their

school communities, was that even though a significant percentage of the parents lacked high

levels of education, they acknowledged what parents could offer the partnership between home

and school. They collectively referred to parents as the "first teacher" to their children and did

not focus on the fact that their lack of education might keep them from playing an active role in

their child's education. Suni spoke about this important partnership when she shared the

following:

> We met with the parents. The parents were also involved. At the intake meetings, because
>
> we had to learn – the parents have so much to share because they know their children
>
> best. Again working with parents and again looking at parents as equals – they have equal
>
> knowledge and important knowledge to share. We don't just make assumptions about

children and what they know and don't know. Again, that partnership – that was another

piece that was critical in terms of when you look at how you make interventions that

make kids successful. (S.1.7.264-269)

The notion of school staff and parents being on an equal grounding when it comes to

home and school partnerships was an important component. At the same time Angeline, shared

how poverty can impact on parental educational levels when she shared the following:

Parents were afraid because they didn't trust and also they were going through so much

themselves socially and emotionally that it was difficult for them to even survive in terms

of helping themselves. If they couldn't help themselves then how will they help their

kids? And that's an impact of poverty, one of the major impacts, the lack of self-esteem

and the lack of skills that would have provided them with the opportunities to access any

form of education or any form of job facilities. It was just a vicious circle and they kept

going through that circle and the kids and the grandkids followed suit because there was

no positive role model for them in that particular area in the job situations. So that's one

of the reasons or one of the areas where I think programming did come and did help for a

lot. (A.1.24.806-815)

The impact of Residential Schooling is a contributing factor to the low level of parental

education. Myra described how working with parents and a high percentage of grandparents at

Niji Mahkwa School led to discovering valuable information about her students. In an effort to

access more resources for her students, Myra met with parents and grandparents to discuss treaty

status and whether or not students were Metis, First Nations or Inuit. Myra shared the following:

I had lots of moms – at one point in the peak of the school transitioning in terms of it

moving to what it is now, I had 51 percent of my children being raised by their

grandparents. So my parent population was grandparents. It was two years in a row. I did

little pockets of research here and there along the journey. Because on the back of our

registration, we had their treaty status, whether they were Metis, First Nations or Inuit.

The reason that my parents understood that was if there were things like tutoring or

transportation support or different things that I could advocate with a reserve, then they

would give me that information. I was able to assess and find out how many of our kids

were First Nations, Metis and Inuit. (M.1.15.530-538)

The high percentage of grandparents raising children in the Niji Mahkwa School community is

reflective of the disproportionate numbers of Aboriginal, First Nations, Inuit and Metis children

that have been placed in the care of Child & Family Services. There is a connection to be made

between parents forced into Residential Schools and being stripped from their traditional

upbringing in their families to the current situation within Manitoba in which higher percentages

of children are being placed into the care of Child and Family Services due to family breakdown.

In closing, Suni stressed the importance of the school's being a centre in which families

are supported that reinforced the notion of education being an important means to overcome

poverty for both students and their parents. Suni shared that:

The school became the hub. That was part of the comprehensive development initiative –

community development initiative. The school is the hub, and education is the ticket out

of poverty. Many of the programs look at how we developed skills in parents so they can

become independent, confident and move on to bigger and better things. There are so

many parents that got employed and went on to post-secondary education, went back to

school. Strengthening the relationship with community agencies – such as Urban Circle –

they worked very closely with the school. Looking at all of those pieces that parents –

when they saw themselves reflected in the school – and the children. (S.2.43.1634-1642)

The focus on skill development of parents is essential if schools are going to work at

responding to the needs of the whole family. It is also vital to recognize strengths of parents and

grandparents. With improved skills and greater self-esteem, parents are able to support their

children in school and also have a greater chance of combatting unemployment by joining the

labour market. Although parents may possess low levels of formal education, it is not something

that should limit their involvement in their support for their child's educational experience.

As principals in high poverty schools, each participant was challenged to work with her

staff to design and develop a school program that would promote student success. How each

principal sought to do this is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Findings - Creating & Implementing Vision in High Poverty Schools

To discover how each principal formulated their vision and, more importantly, how they

went about implementing the vision the following research questions were pursued in the

interviews with each of the participants:

Research Question #2: How did each former principal construct a vision for their school and

attempt to create and design a school program to maximize student success?

Research Question #3: How did each former principal attempt to implement the vision in their

school during the period of time that they were there?

At each school, the principal brought with them and/or co-created with their staff and school communities a specific Mission and Vision to guide the work of the school. Although there are similarities and common themes that crossover between Niji Mahkwa School, David Livingstone School and Dufferin Elementary School, for the purposes of continuity I will present a case study about each school that examines how each principal described the vision for the school, its construction, and how, during the principal's time at the school, the school program was designed to maximize student success.

Vision and Practice: Walking the Talk at Niji Mahkwa School
Vision as a Starting Point for a New Principal

Myra's vision for Niji Mahkwa School, articulated throughout her interviews, was to provide the school community with what they had been asking for – a culturally appropriated school. In doing so, she drew from the work of Dr. Martin Brokenleg and his *Circle of Courage* model of youth development to help families connect with each other, connect with the school and to build trust between the school and the community. (Reclaiming Youth International. (2013). Myra knew she would use traditional teachings to incorporate Aboriginal language instruction (Ojibway & Cree) as well as the Seven Sacred Teachings to incorporate various aspects of Aboriginal culture into the school.

Myra noted that on arriving at Niji Mahkwa School in 1994, it was very clear to her that she had her work cut out for her, and she knew that she would need the trust and support of the school community as well as her school staff to move the school forward. In speaking about constructing a vision for Niji Mahkwa School, Myra began by picking up on what was already in place:

It [a vision statement] was there when I got there. It was in fact written on the front wall,

and it still is. There were a number of factors in there that were reality checks that needed

to happen. One of them was when you put into your vision statement that the staff,

students, parents of Niji Mahkwa will live by the seven teachings and the work of the

school of Niji Mahkwa, you need to know what that means. When you say out loud –

even in English – to cherish knowledge is to seek wisdom, that's huge. To know love is

to find peace; to have courage is to face life with integrity; to honor all of creation is to

have respect; honesty in facing a situation is to be brave; humility is to see yourself as a

sacred part of creation; and the truth is to know all of these things. First of all,

homophobia is not part of that. Jealousy and hate for cultural traditional ways – those are

evil. When I first got there, it was like really abundantly clear to me that there were a

number of folks in the building who weren't taught how to live those things.

(M.1.20.695-706)

Curriculum Development and Capacity Building

Myra was able to provide a detailed description of the work she embarked on with her

staff to build a framework in which they could deliver the provincial curriculum in a thematic

way. Along with her vice-principal, Audrey Bosch, Myra described how she focused her work

on guiding her staff on a journey that over time led to Niji Mahkwa School's becoming a more

culturally focused/appropriated school in which Aboriginal languages and cultures were

embedded into all areas of school life. Myra shared her thoughts on this journey when she said

the following:

We went on this journey – me and her – together. We ended up … the first time we really

got the notion of getting to cultural themes, that growth period showed me that I needed

to not come from an expanse. One theme for example … let me think. One theme that

they gave was animals – animals in culture, like the clan system. There were other things

that they gave me, and I realized that the expanse of those themes were so great that we

were never going to get to anything because there was no given time that a unit of

teachers would be on the same page at the same time. They tried to build these units, and

their lack of knowledge in thematic unit development and implementation became very

apparent next with my recognition that these things that we were trying to do were too

global. So we created a cultural committee. We had a mixture of folks on it ….What

became apparent to me as I was listening was that some of those things were seasonal

that you couldn't do outside of certain things. I began at that point to know that the

knowledge base that I carried was going to carry us through this. I had enough knowledge

that the others had left me with. We ended up with seven themes in the end. Niji Mahkwa

still uses those same themes today. In fact they use pretty much everything that we did.

We start in September with a smudge. That is a month long. Then there is pipe - that is a

month long. Then there is the circle, and because of the expanse of this particular unit, it

is two months long. Then there is feasting. Then there is sweat. Then there is vision

questing. Then there is celebration. Those are the seven themes that function over the 10

months of the school year. (M.1.11.372-395)

It was within these seven themes that the teaching staff of Niji Mahkwa School was able to blend

Aboriginal language instruction and the inclusion of Aboriginal culture into the teachings of

Math, Science, Social Studies and English Language Arts. Myra described this process of

thematic unit planning and how she guided staff to meet learning outcomes:

> We organized them into the 10 months. Then we took each month and said "What is the
>
> math of this? What is the social studies? What is the science?" So we had four directions
>
> that we worked from. We worked from the culture, the academic, the language, and the
>
> technology. Those are the four directions of Niji Mahkwa. Within each one of those in
>
> the academic, there is the – for example, the smudge. If you put this much of the middle,
>
> what is the culture of the smudge? What is the academia of the smudge? What is the
>
> language of the smudge? What is the technology of the smudge? You can superimpose
>
> over the top of that – what is the math? What is the ELA, the science, the social studies,
>
> and the math? Social studies and ELA face-off, and math and science based off of one
>
> another. There are the four core subjects, and what this does is when you take the
>
> outcomes from each of these and identify – what are the outcomes that you cover while
>
> you are doing a theme on smudge in language arts, science, social studies, and math? I
>
> needed to do something that could help them understand a quick way of chunking down
>
> the curriculum. What I did was I downloaded all the outcomes from each of the subject
>
> areas up to grade 8, and I developed a rubric. I took the five GLOs of language arts, and I
>
> put them down here, and then I put the seven units across here. I said "Plan your unit.
>
> Implement your unit. Then go pick this book up, and check off what you have covered.
>
> But make sure you're doing math activities, science activities, language arts activities,
>
> and social studies activities during your theme. But find the outcomes later. If you do
>
> that, you will cover outcomes. But if you do it from an outcomes-based process, you

won't cover as much of the outcome as if you come from a thematic-based process."

(M.1.12.400-421)

Strengthening Home-School Relationships

Myra's understanding of the Niji Mahkwa School Community was enhanced by her

personal background of growing up and working in the North End of Winnipeg. She knew that

for the school to move forward a strong connection between home and school was vitally

important, and it became a part of her vision for the school. One area that she focused on with

parents was school attendance and making that transition from school to the world of work. Myra

described a "wake up" call for both parents and staff that they could work together to improve

the overall attendance for students. Myra spoke about this in the beginning years as principal of

Niji Mahkwa School:

> And it was a real wake up for everybody; and so in the movement through that,
>
> navigating that place where parents were included. They weren't feeling like we were
>
> dumping on them, that they began to understand that we were both parent and school,
>
> giving the message to the child that the child wasn't going to play around in between the
>
> middle of both of us. And that's what I wanted. My goal was to have my parents support
>
> me and my staff in making sure that they were sure they were in school. Not only that,
>
> but that we as a staff were supporting the parent and saying, "You're not going to tell
>
> your mom and dad a different story at the end of the day". (M.2.30.1038-46)

Drawing from the Niji Mahkwa School Handbook, Myra shared the following about the

Strategies for Strength program that was all part of the vision for Niji Mahkwa School.

The parents and staff believe the *strategies for strength* program at our school will foster

the development of positive self-esteem, strong sense of identity, and the courage to

embrace whatever it takes to be successful in the world of work in this age of

technological advancements". (M.2.32.1128-1131)

Myra spoke at great length about the importance of people seeing and knowing your

vision in all of the work that occurs in school. She explained that it was one thing to have a

vision, talk to staff about a vision, and create vision statements and it is a whole other thing to

walk the walk of your vision as a school principal. She explained it in the following way:

When you're an inner city administrator you have to be a negotiator, you have to be a

researcher, you have to be able to barter which is different than negotiating. You have to

know clearly, clearly, clearly who you are. Because multi-tasking is an everyday

occurrence on seven or eight levels at least, every day. There's … there's circles moving

and you're the conductor; and you've got to stop them from hitting each other and

boing…because it's a dance. It's a dance of the spiral. And I mean by that, that those

multiple levels and you know, you're working with parents, you're working with

community, you're working with organizations, you're working with the board office,

you're working with kids, you're working with your teachers, you're working with your

support staff and everybody has to know the belief system of your vision, and how you're

walking that vision. It's not a matter of talking, it's a matter of walking it. You have to

be prepared to model what it is that you see for your school community because they

watch you. The kids watch you. Your staff watch you. Your parents watch you and the

people that you negotiate with they watch you. (M.2.45.1562-76)

A Community School Philosophy

One aspect of school vision and implementation of that vision that all three participants have in common is their understanding of community schooling and what it means to have your school be the hub of the community in which there is a shared responsibility for the safety, education and overall well-being of students and families. In speaking of the importance of the school and community connection, Myra stated that:

> I had to stand the ground of the community. The one thing that was important that I did was I always, always met with community. I always met with the parent council. Whenever I needed something to move forward or stood by – by that time I had grandmothers who had their kids in my school. I had mothers and fathers who had kids in my school. Those were the people who wanted the school to be the way it was. I also met with every parent who came into the school to bring their kids that were new, and made sure that they understood that smudging was not going to be something that they opted out of. At Niji Mahkwa School, smudging was mandated by the community of parents who built that school. If you want a school where your child is not going to smudge, there are 89 other schools to go to. It was as simple as that. I don't know if I was supposed to say that, but I got away with it for 13 years. It became really clear to the community that there were things that were protocol at Niji Mahkwa. Smudging twice a day was protocol. That was not something that we walked around. It was a necessity. Having sharing circle once a day in school was a protocol. Having pipe once a week for both the early years and the middle-years was protocol. There were certain standards that existed at Niji Mahkwa that were not in other schools, but we were not another school. We were Niji Mahkwa. (M.1.13.436-452)

It was through the seven themes (smudge, pipe, circle, feasting, sweat and vision questing) over the course of the ten month school year that Myra was able to implement the vision for Niji Mahkwa School. She spoke specifically about the importance of feasting:

Once a year the children had a feast for their classroom. In the 13 years that I was there, the only thing they ever feasted was family. That came in a dream because the grandmothers of the dream said "Our families are broken. We don't need a bunch of feasts. We need you to decide on something that's very important and to be feasted continuously." So for the 13 years that I was there, every classroom had a feast. They prepared the food, got everything ready, did the invitations - the whole nine yards. They invited their moms and dads and grannies and grandpas and aunties and uncles and any other significant person to come to that feast, and they still do it today. The only thing they feast is family. (M.1.13.456-464).

Another theme that came up was the notion of vision questing and how in some instances, Niji Mahkwa School, operated in isolation and the awareness that students needed to be prepared for what it would be like for them in the community upon leaving the school. Myra explained vision questing when she said:

Vision questing was not about going out into the land and taking little kids to go and fast and all of that stuff. Vision questing was about being able to see yourself no longer in grade two to now being able to see yourself in grade three, no longer being able to see yourself in grade eight at Niji Mahkwa. What is it going to be like for you to be in the community? (M.1.13.464 – 468)

In speaking about vision questing, Myra made sure to highlight her awareness that school life at

Niji Mahkwa School did not represent what school would continue to be like for her students

after they left. Myra spoke about the work being done there is in a vacuum because there was not

always somewhere for her students to attend high school that would provide the infusion of

Aboriginal languages and culture throughout the curriculum.

The important partnerships with outside agencies also contributed to the vision being

implemented at Niji Mahkwa School. Over the course of her thirteen years as the school

principal, Myra sought out numerous community partnerships, and I will highlight a few major

players that worked in partnership with the students and staff at Niji Mahkwa School.

Standing Tall is a program that originated in New Zealand and was run through the

Manitoba Metis Federation. It worked by having students partnered up with young adults from

the community in a mentorship model. Students that, at times, struggled in the classroom and

may be at risk of how to learn were chosen to take part. As Myra illustrated in the following

quote:

> If they weren't doing it, the old people would say "Sit down. Let's open up this book",
>
> and then become part of the classroom functioning. There's a learning asked, so with my
>
> child who is not functioning that particular morning or afternoon, they can go to a
>
> different part of the school and calm down and have a smudge. They could spend some
>
> time there, work on the computers and themselves ready to return to class. That was a
>
> powerful program. It's still there today. (M.1.16.580-587)

The Boys & Girls Club was attached to the back of the school and played a major role in

the lives of children attending Niji Mahkwa. Serving students after the school day ended and

during time off from school, the Boys and Girls Club was described as "family" by Myra in their

working partnership within the school community. One particular program run out of the Boys

and Girls Club and Niji Mahkwa School that stands out is the *Community Schools Investigators*

(C.S.I.) program that is run in the inner city district during the summer months. This program is

designed to provide enrichment opportunities for students that will help them improve their

educational outcomes during the school year.

New Directions. Another important partnership for the Niji Mahkwa School Community

was with New Directions through the Transition, Education & Resources for Females (TERF)

program. This program is "a transition and healing program for children, youth, adults and

transgender individuals who have been exploited through the sex trade (prostitution)." (TERF

Website) The work of educating children about sexual exploitation is something that came up

throughout the interviews as Myra shared firsthand knowledge of four former Niji Mahkwa

School students who are part of the murdered and missing Aboriginal women in Canada.

The Inner City Science Centre. The final outside agency partnership that I will highlight

is between Niji Mahkwa School and the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Manitoba.

Myra shared the origins of this unlikely partnership with a visit from Dr. Francis Amara:

> Then Francis Amara of the school of medicine – biomedicine – came to see me one day
>
> in 2005, and he said, "I want to build a state-of-the-art science lab at your school." I said
>
> "Are you nuts? You know what will happen to that equipment?" "They are going to use
>
> them, and I'm going to teach teachers how to do that." We talked for a while, and the
>
> thing that he said to me was that "I have been involved in biomedicine at the university –

the dean of biomedicine at the university for 17 years, and not one of your children have I

met. That's wrong." (M.1.17.599-605)

The final partnership between two groups that may seem unlikely at first was based on Myra's

belief in connecting with all aspects of the community.

The first thing was that I met with IP [Indian Posse] and told them "If you are going to

bring kids to my school, I want them to be here for 5.5 hours a day. I don't want IP in my

building. I don't want your signatures. I want you to tell your crew to back off, and I

want your kids to come to school. I don't want any harassment. If you have issues with

parents of the school, you deal with it on the weekends and in the evening, but don't

come to my door." So the word got out. People were pretty good that way. …The City of

Winnipeg police force adopted us. We were involved in the School Resource Officers

program from the beginning – the school resource officers. They feasted – when it came

to our graduation and our feasts, the police force supported it for years. (M. 1.17.613-

621)

The range of outside agency supports, from creating an understanding with members of the

Indian Posse to supporting families impacted by the sex trade, all these connections contributed

to the overall school experience for students that attend Niji Mahkwa School.

Vision and Practice: David Livingstone -- This School is Yours
Vision as a Starting Point for a New Principal

Angeline Ramkissoon may have not arrived at David Livingstone School in 1993 with a

preconceived vision for the school but by her own account, it did not take long to formulate one

that would meet the needs of the school community. Angeline said the following:

I didn't go in with any expectations. I went in with an open mind and wanted to learn

about the school and the situation and stuff like that. I guess after the first year, I

formulated a vision for the school. I wanted kids to move ahead. I wanted parent

engagement. I wanted academic success. And I wanted to create a warm, inviting school

climate for kids and parents. Yeah, I developed a mission statement, which simply stated

that – "This school is yours. It's a safe place where we learn from each other and where

students are going to succeed." (A.1.14.438-445)

When Angeline spoke of academic excellence, she defined it in the terms that were used at

David Livingstone to gauge the academic growth of students. The following quote clearly

illustrates Angeline's beliefs about academic growth and academic excellence:

Then I have to say I preached academic excellence. The way it is defined,

academic excellence is not that you are going to jump three levels in one year. It's

just that it's the gain you make within one year. If you make half a year gained

within one year, that's enough to celebrate. I didn't really ask for miracles. I just

said "I need you to move from this level – from A to B. If you could do that

within a year, that's fine. It doesn't have to be a whole level either" because a lot

of the kids were three, four, five, six years below grade level already. We need to

make those baby steps. If we make those baby steps, then you have achieved.

(A.1.14.447-454).

Strengthening Home-School Relationships

In order to implement a vision in which the school would become a warm, safe and

engaging place for all students to learn, Angeline knew she would need to embrace the school

community and seek out opportunities to strengthen the connection between home and school.

Angeline shared her approach when she said:

> Every opportunity I had, it was to connect with parents because I felt if you connected
> with parents in a positive way, then the kids would see that the parents really are involved
> in the school. Therefore they will have more respect for it. It was a lot of things like
> welcoming events; meet the teacher night, open house, barbecues, and all that sort of
> stuff. Free – you don't ask parents to pay because they can't afford to pay. If they have to
> pay, they could not come anyway. But if you offer anything that is free, they will come,
> which means that there was a willingness for them to be involved, but there was a
> hesitance in some ways because they did not always see themselves as valued in order to
> be there. I think the key is to make them feel that they were being valued as parents, and
> that they had – I always said to them "You are the first teachers of your kids, and you've
> got to share the information that you have with us for us to be able to deliver, for us to be
> able to help your child." It's a trust factor. It really is a trust factor. Whether it's an
> immigrant family or an Aboriginal family or a Canadian family, again I go down to the
> trust factor. (A.1.15.475-488)

Creating a Safe and Academic Climate

In an effort to gain the trust of the school community, while at the same time, improve
the learning environment within the school, Angeline set out to create a school wide code of
conduct to improve student behavior. She describes the reality she walked into during the first
year as principal of the school when she said:

> Kids were out of control. Teachers were pretty much doing their own thing. Each class
>
> was an individual. There was not a team approach. Everybody was locking their doors
>
> and doing their own things. That's when I knew I had to build this school as a family and
>
> build a community into the school and a supportive community of teams. That was vivid
>
> that I had to work on discipline, work with students and teachers in terms of working
>
> with each other, and in order to do that you had to provide the supports. The supports
>
> were teacher training, parent involvement, and also student engagement. (A.1.14.464-70)

The school wide code of conduct was based on the work of Terrance Scott[2] and at David

Livingstone School they focused on respect for self, respect for others and respect for property.

Angeline shared that by implementing it with the support of school staff, parents and students,

they we able to "show them that there is a way that they can address and correct their own

behaviors". (A.2.27.881)

Aboriginal street gangs were a factor in the school community that impacted the ability

create a safe and academic climate at David Livingstone School. To provide a learning

opportunity about the gangs that existed in the North End of Winnipeg, Angeline worked directly

with the Winnipeg Police Service's Gang Unit as well as Gary Sova, Divisional Support

Teacher, from the Winnipeg School Division.

Building Professional Capacity

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[2] Terrance Scott holds a PhD in Special Education from the University of Oregon. His area of study is Emotional and Behaviour Disorders. David Livingstone School based their school code of conduct on Scott's Positive Behavioural Interventions and Support (PBIS) model. Terrance Scott is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Special Education at the University of Florida and is the Principal investigator for the federally funded National Center for Positive Behavioural Interventions and Support.

Another part of Angeline's vision for David Livingstone School centered on professional development for her teaching staff. By focusing on poverty and the proliferation of gang violence, Angeline spoke about these two areas that had a direct impact on learning as she sought to enable her staff to develop a deeper understanding of the school community in which they worked. On the topic of poverty, Angeline arranged for Dr. Ruby Payne, to come to the Winnipeg School Division and work with her staff around what impacts poverty can have on human beings and, in particular, how it can impact kids by the lack of empowerment they are afforded growing up in poverty.

Programming

Early Intervention in Reading. By initiating a program called Early Intervention in Reading, Angeline involved all school staff in addressing the literacy needs of students in grades one, two and three. Angeline describes the literacy program in the following way:

I initiated a program called Early Intervention in Reading. It was based on the Marie Clay model[3]. So what I did was I had all grades one, two, and three, all the kids were divided according to their assessment ability so they were tested by the resource teachers and the reading clinician. And I bought some extra time for them from CGC to have the reading

---

[3] Marie Clay was a distinguished researcher from New Zealand who was responsible for developing the Reading Recovery program. Marie Clay believed in early intervention for children who struggle with learning to read. Reading Recovery is used widely in Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States as an intervention to help struggling readers. At David Livingstone School, the Marie Clay model was drawn upon to structure an early intervention in reading for students in grades one, two and three.

clinician to get some additional time. And she was instrumental in that because she was

very heavy into the Marie Clay model. So she tested all the kids along with the resource

teachers and then we divided up those kids into smaller groups. And the classroom

teachers, which there were six of them I guess because we had more than one class, we

had the classroom teachers, the EAs, the resource teacher, and the librarian, and the

reading clinician. So they were able to get smaller groups for 45 minutes every day in the

morning. And I did something called block time tabling where that time was sacred,

dedicated, no Phys. Ed, no music. So we did that so it was every day at a specific time

for a specific number of minutes. It went between 45, some kids went until 90 minutes.

They were able to sustain. And basically its word study, reading comprehension, spelling,

and they did a few games. But it was a very structured program. And I believe that that

program is really very successful because we did pre testing and post testing but because

the kids were so--their deficits were so wide we were not able always to get them up to

their level but they were able to make one year within one year gain. And to me that was

significant. (A.2.32.1046-1065)

School to Work Transitions. Along with the importance of early intervention to improve

literacy skills in the early years, Angeline focused on the school to work transition that would be

so important for students as they left David Livingstone School and attended R.B. Russell High

School or Children of the Earth High School. This school to work focus began when students

entered nursery school with explicit teaching of essential job skills in the upper grades of six,

seven and eight. Angeline described the purpose of focusing on the skill set needed to transition

into the world of work when she said that:

It was teaching kids to set goals for themselves and the importance of work and volunteerism. So we encouraged them to do some volunteering. We did some visits to businesses around the school, and that was mainly--the work part of it was school wide but it all depended on the level at which the kids were so they could participate in school-based things or they could participate in things outside of the school and enjoy the benefits of work experience and stuff like that. So that's where we started the goal setting and the fact that our work is important and developing work ethics like getting up on time and getting to school on time. That is your job as a student. And when you grow older then you have a job. Really these are the scales and these are the criteria for a workplace. (A.2.28. 912-21)

Off-campus Programming. One the most interesting ways in which Angeline was able to implement her vision for students moving ahead academically was her establishing an "off campus" location for learning in the Lord Selkirk Park Development housing complex. This off campus site for learning was created in an attempt to make sure students did not slip through the cracks if for some reason they could not physically attend school at David Livingstone. Angeline explained the process of establishing and maintaining this important resource for struggling students when she said:

The other one was I started an off campus program where I was able to get a unit within the community, the Lord Selkirk Park development, from the government for one dollar a year and the division paid for the cleaning and stuff like that. So I did that off campus program and not mainly for late comers but for non-attenders who did not feel comfortable coming into a school situation. So we ran that program. We started off with boys and girls. And over a year we knew that it wasn't working for the boys no matter

what so we concentrated on the girls to keep them off the street. And when you have a

group of girls and you've been able to address issues that pertain to them. It didn't work

very well for the boys. They were still taking advantage of not coming and getting

involved in other things other than education. One of the staff members was able to -- it

wasn't specifically given to me for that but as an administrator you find ways of doing

these things so I was able to do that. It was run within school hours just at a different

location. And it was still supervised by me. I would still go in and visit the kids. And

what happened there was they were able to make their own breakfast. It was more of a

life skills kind of a program. So they were able to make their own breakfast and that's

where you applied for and got funding to run that program plus I was given the unit, by

the government. So I was able to apply to the Richardson Foundation to get some money

to run that program. Katherine Richardson gave me twenty thousand dollars in August to

start off the program. So it was difficult for my superintendent to say no to it. Yes to

space and yes to money, you know what else, and I'm providing the staff out of my

staffing compliment. (A.2.30.966-988)

The Bridges FASD Program. An important aspect of her work during her time as the

school principal was the creation of the Bridges Program, a program which supports students

with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD) and assists them to be successful in classrooms

with a strong academic focus, will be thoroughly examined later on as Angeline shared some

success stories from David Livingstone as well as commenting on the sustainability of the work

that was left behind.

A Community School Philosophy

At the heart of all programming at David Livingstone School, Angeline noted, was her strong belief in community schooling and that education could play a role in overcoming the poverty in which families endured. Angeline set out to create a safe and welcoming school in which members of the school community would feel welcomed and valued for what they could bring to the school. Angeline spoke about the importance of having a space in the school for parents to meet as well as having staff that could dedicate their time to improving the connection between home and school. Angeline shared the following:

> We had a breakfast program, and we also had a Family Room where parents could come in and through the Family Room we provided food for parents who were in desperate need of food. We contacted Winnipeg Harvest, where we were able to go down or the family would go — we would take parents down so that they could access what was there. We had a clothing depot, and we ran programs for pre-school kids like the *Rock and Read* and *Mother Goose* - literacy programs. We had a coordinator - a community liaison worker really, and even though it was run out of the Family Room she was able to access staff to assist in many ways. (A.2.27.886-893)

Part of the community schooling model involved working closely with the parents in a Parent Council. Angeline was able to host the meetings during the day and this gave parents who were not working an opportunity to come into the school and spend some time with the staff and students. Angeline spoke about the need to run the Parent Council in a less structured format to make sure it was a safe and welcoming atmosphere for any parents wishing to become involved:

> We had a few parents who were very active. We sort of went away from the structured thing about constitution and all those things. It was a bit overpowering. So we had it as a

coffee party sort of. But it was a parent council. And there were some really strong

parents on that committee and they advocated for things. Like I remember this one guy,

he advocated for a spelling bee to be reinstated a spelling bee program. So things like

that, there were some parents who had some of their experiences and wanted to see some

of those for the kids. So I think eventually they were able to run the meetings whether I

was there or not. We always had teachers attending, always had a rep from the teaching

staff who would attend so if it occurred during the day then I would make sure to free that

person up. (A.2.40.1271-1280)

Angeline also worked closely with outside agencies to build partnerships that she

believed would benefit her school community. One the most intriguing examples she shared

involved an Interagency Committee that met monthly to discuss important issues to people living

and working in the inner city. Angeline described the make-up and purpose of that group as

follows:

So we had one main agency that we dealt with. And to circumvent the double dipping or

the confusion of two, three agencies involved with one family we started something--we

called it an Interagency Committee and we had people who belonged to different

agencies like the social worker, the police officer, somebody from Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata

Centre, and somebody from Mount Carmel Clinic, someone from Netinway. That was a

home for women. People from Manitoba Housing. So all the agencies, and I can't

remember all of them that we've been involved with, but community people as well

would sit around the table once a month and just share some of their interventions and

who they were working with. And then we were able to take specific names of kids or

families to this agency and then they were divided--then they would figure out who is

going to be the case worker for that particular family. (A.2.41.1309-19).

Vision and Practice: Dufferin Elementary School –Deficits to Assets through Equity Education
Vision as a Starting point for a New Principal

When given a choice by her Superintendent between the principalship of two schools

Suni Matthews chose Dufferin Elementary School. She admits that "I went there knowing full

well – maybe not to the extent – the work that it was going to take to turn the school around"

(S.1.16.602-3). When Suni arrived in the Centennial neighborhood, in which Dufferin

Elementary School is located, she brought with her a vision for the school and the community

that would keep the needs of children in the forefront of all the work that was needed to be done.

Suni spoke about the importance of having a framework in which to view the work of schools

and explained that:

When you have your own school, you have a certain vision. For me, the critical piece that

you have to have is a framework under which you are operating. You have to believe that

it is – you are not doing to the community. You are working with the community. It was

almost like your ideology has to be through that equity lens. You have to believe that we

are not working with "these people" in poverty. I use the word these in quotation marks

because you have to have that equity lens, and you have to work from a position that you

are working with strengths that every individual has an inherent right to a quality

education – no matter what their socio-economic status is. That is the job of a public

school principal or a teacher. We don't use that as an excuse for not doing our job, which

is basically and fundamentally to teach the kids. But you teach them in the context of

where they're coming from. Therefore their cultural relevance is important. The family

relevance is important. The family connections are important. We are partners in this

process of educating your treasured gift. It's a gift that you are giving us, and what we do

with that gift is important – and how we educate your child is critically important. It's a

whole ideological framework that you have to have. (S.2.43-44.1648-64)

Building Professional Capacity

The equity lens, in which Suni operated Dufferin Elementary School from, ties in nicely

with a community schooling model as evidenced by the multitude of programs and initiatives

that were in place. Before work could begin on dismantling barriers between the school and the

community, Suni needed to help her staff develop a stronger understanding of poverty and its

impact on student learning. Suni shared the importance of community walks in the first year as

Principal when she said:

Let me come to the professional development, which is the cornerstone. Before I do, I

need to make a comment about poverty. Poverty is – at Dufferin School – was

intergenerational for some of them. Somebody had to break the cycle. Staff have to have

an understanding of how they got there. How did that happen? How did it happen that we

have – when you look at the size of the Aboriginal population and you look at the

incarceration rate, there is an imbalance there. It's out of proportion. Who are in the

prisons and why? When we look at a housing issue and the kind of housing that many of

our folks live in, why is that? We did a community walk. Many of our folks at that time

would drive. Community walk became an important part because they need to see where

our students come from and where they go to. These were all critical questions about

what was happening in our society. If there is poverty, how did that poverty play itself

out? How does that happen in our society in a country like Canada? Why is that? When

you look at life on the reserve, for many urban Aboriginal people and the housing

situations in those communities – those are systemic pieces. They didn't just happen by

chance. It happened because of systems that played out across our society. (S.1.21.807-

822)

One of the most important things that Suni shared about her time as principal of Dufferin

Elementary School was the opportunity she was given to work with her staff on equity education.

Having worked with educational consultant Enid Lee [4]in the past, Suni wasted no time in

accessing money to create a professional development plan that would have her entire school

staff examine what it would take to create an equity centered school. The following dialogue

illustrates Suni's approach:

How we did it was through a staff development with Enid Lee. It happened over five

years. She is an organizational change person. She also is an expert in looking at

organizational change and how to create equity centered schools. As part of the staff

development, we then explored some of these questions of systemic racism… We were

there as a whole community looking at these issues and talking about what things we

needed to do. Some of the sessions involved staff looking at institutional racism, looking

at patterns in society and patterns in their life, then looking at school structure. We

looked at curriculum. We looked at the content in the curriculum. We looked at climate.

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[4] Enid Lee is a teacher, educator, researcher, writer, consultant, facilitator and speaker. Her current area of research is professional development and anti-racist school leadership. Enid Lee consults internationally on anti-racist, inclusionary and equitable education. Enid Lee worked with the staff at Dufferin Elementary School in the area of anti-racist education.

We looked at community involvement. Looking and examining all these things, how do we create that equity centered school? If we're talking about equity, this is Enid Lee's definition. Equity is not treating everybody the same. Equity is using different measures to get to the same outcome – different measures, interruptions. It is interrupting the systems that are getting in the way toward that. I think there's a quote somewhere here. It talks about how we go about creating that equity in the classroom. Equity is the process, but equality is the goal. That is Enid Lee's quotation. Equity is a process. It means examining everything that we do. (S.1. 21. 824-841)

From the very beginning, Suni was mindful of the fact that grant money would not always be available in years to come, and that structures needed be put in place that would ensure the equity work continued to expand. Suni said that:

We were looking at sustainability. We know that funding is going to end and we are not going to have the opportunity to have this pot of money. How do we sustain all of the work that we've done with Enid over the past five years? We created a leadership team in the school. We started looking at how we increase – looking at our structures, like the staffing for example; looking at the content within the curriculum; and ensuring that we use the knowledge that the students and parents bring as being as important as stuff that's in the books; using the community as resources; and expanding our term of widening that net. You don't have to be an expert on Aboriginal education to teach Aboriginal kids. You can use the resources that are out there. It's not saying we are not teaching the curriculum because in language arts – it doesn't matter what content you use. Its teaching kids how to read. In mathematics – using those things, using the statistics of

unemployment, using the statistics of children in care to teach statistics, using the

disparity, and getting kids those important skills of critical thinking. (S.1. 21. 849-863)

When I dug a little deeper on the anti-racist and equity professional development, Suni shared

that it was not always smooth sailing for the school principal. She said the following:

All of that happened over the course of the year when we looked at our own professional

development. But it also examined our own biases and prejudices. Looking at white

privilege – when you talk about racism, it is an uncomfortable topic. It makes people feel

uncomfortable, and some folks did, especially when we talked about privilege and who

has privilege in our society. Those are important things because if you want to really –

it's not personal. It's systemic. Don't get your feelings hurt about these things. You have

to understand it in order to make the changes. Some folks were uncomfortable and did

not like it. They were quite overtly oppositional to the changes and personally attacked

me in that process. But despite that, I stayed the course. (S.1.23.870-879)

The Importance of Resources

During her time as the principal of Dufferin Elementary School, Suni was directly

involved with the Community Education Development Association (CEDA) and had access to

grant monies that came from four partners including: The Winnipeg Foundation, The Winnipeg

School Division, Provincial Government of Manitoba and the Federal Government of Canada.

These monies were made available under the Centennial Neighborhood Project that had an

objective to "to work with local residents and community organizations to encourage a

sufficiently large number of coordinated interventions that will significantly shift Dufferin

School in its relative rating amongst inner city schools". (Winnipeg Foundation Report)

A Community School Philosophy

Another important way that Suni sought to implement her vision of creating an equity centered school was to capitalize on the objective of the Centennial Neighborhood Project by working with local residents, community organizations and outside agencies to coordinate multiple interventions to significantly improve the Dufferin Elementary School community. One of the first areas in which she was able to mobilize efforts to improve Dufferin Elementary School was to take care of the physical building. By improving the physical structure of the school, Suni said that she wanted to send a message to students and their families that they were important. Suni as keenly aware of the transiency of the community and wanted people to know that she was there to stay and the staff were committed to working at Dufferin Elementary School were in it for the long haul. She describes the importance of these small steps by saying:

> That's the thing. You have migrant kids. You can't have migrant teachers or administrators. To me, I had a mission and a vision to do this and to bring about change. In order to bring about change, it's slow. You need to be patient with how that change takes place. I was there in 1999, and we made some changes in terms of the involvement of parents, getting very physical things, cleaning up the school, painting it. I started with some of the smaller concrete things, things that were very tangible for changing – getting the furniture, making the school look good. When you walked in that building, you would say "Wow." Teachers had to be feel comfortable. Just because you had poor children, you don't have to have a poor building. That was important because there is a message that you are giving kids. You are important. (S.1.18. 684-695)

Programming

Early Childhood Education. An area that was identified early on by Suni was the importance of early childhood education and how crucial it was for the success of students when they started school. Using federal grant money, Suni was able to start a *Head Start* program called *Little Red Spirit* which at the time, was the only program of its kind in a public school setting in Manitoba. She explained that by examining the Early Development Instrument (EDI) Data, it was evident to her that students in the inner city had huge gaps in their language development. She responded to this data by using various grant monies to increase speech and language clinician time, hiring educational assistants to work as clinician's assistants as well as providing release time for the *Little Red Spirit* staff to meet and work collaboratively with the Nursery and Kindergarten teachers within the school. In order for the *Little Red Spirit* program to be effective, Suni needed to guarantee parent buy in to the program. She explains the process when she said:

> Just to give you an example – we did meet with the parents, there was programming for parents. The speech clinician worked with the parents, and we used this Letter Land program, where they are singing and moving and all that. That was the same thing that they used at *Little Red Spirit.* But *Little Red Spirit* was culturally appropriate. The children learned their language. Ojibway was taught there. They had smudging. The elder would come in, and sweet grass would be burned. There would be Aboriginal music. In order to send your kids – there were 10 students in the morning and 10 students in the afternoon. In order for your child to be in the Head Start program, you had to be part of that. The parents came, and they volunteered a couple of times because there was a parent outreach person attached to the *Head Start* program. (S.1.19.736-746)

After improving the physical features of Dufferin School and establishing the *Little Red Spirit* program to improve early childhood education, Suni was able to focus on the valuable partnerships that were formed that improved the overall life of the school through their involvement with students in every area of learning both during the school day and long after it finished. To begin with, I will outline the numerous partnerships that existed at Dufferin School. I will then choose a select few to highlight as key players in the school community.

- Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCOM)
- Boys & Girls Club / Community School Investigators
- Community Education Development Association
- Families and Schools Together (FAST Works)
- City of Winnipeg Public Libraries
- Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra
- St. John's-Ravenscourt School
- Royal Conservatory of Music
- Urban Circle Training Centre
- The Winnipeg Foundation
- Rossbrook House
- Frontier College
- Freight House
- Career Trek

The connection with CEDA and the Urban Circle Training Centre is a partnership that Suni referred to throughout the interviews. Suni was able to work closely with Tom Simms and Diane Roussin, co-directors of CEDA at that time, to develop a comprehensive community development initiative in the Centennial Neighborhood. An important aspect of this work was the partnership formed with the Urban Circle Training Centre which ran an Educational Assistant training program. Not only did it increase the number of Aboriginal, First Nations and Metis people working in the school – it allowed people an opportunity to acquire more education and develop job skills that would lead to future employment. Suni describes its impact on Dufferin Elementary School when she said:

The focus of the Centennial Neighborhood Community Development initiative – the

premise of the program was education being a ticket out of poverty. So we had the first –

the educational assistant training program, which took folks from the neighborhood, from

the Centennial neighborhood and we partnered with Urban Circle. They were getting

their grade 12, but they worked at Dufferin School full-time. They were in the schools

and in the classrooms. They were part of the community, and it was seamless. They

became like staff. I talked about changing. They were not considered EA's. Everybody

was staff. We changed. Everybody was a staff member. The EA's knew more about the

community, so they became really expert resources to the staff, to the classroom, and to

the kids. That was very successful because we had two cohorts that we went through. Out

of the first cohort, we have one, Rick, who is working as the assistant at the Family

Resource Center today. We had Denise and – two of them that went into social work.

One went back into the reserve and did housing. The second cohort, Melanie went back

and did her teacher training. All of them went on to post-secondary of some sort in the

second cohort – very successful. But the collaboration within Urban Circle – when we

did our school opening, it was held at Urban Circle. For the staff – you know how you

bring the staff? Because the staff needed exposure to what was happening. That was part

– all that happened as part of the professional development of staff. That was another

piece. We had the educational assistant training program. (S.1.20-21.777-95)

In order to implement her vision of the school meeting the needs of the children and

becoming an equity centered school, Suni worked hard to create, build on and foster partnerships

that would benefit the students that attended Dufferin School and lived in the Centennial

Neighborhood. From a social justice lens, Suni explains why she put her energy into fostering these important partnerships when she said:

> Wherever you see inequities in the system, wherever you see the barrier is playing out in such a way that it is impacting negatively on the student, then you have to examine it. Once you examine it, you say "What is it that we can do to dismantle this, change it, throw it out, and bring about something new?" You do that in consultation and collaboration and in partnership with those who it affects. (S.2.44.1668-72)

One way of removing barriers for children living in poverty was to make opportunities available to them that would not otherwise exist.

A *City of Winnipeg Public Library Partnership.* Having access to a public library was a barrier that was removed by having the City of Winnipeg Public Library come to Dufferin Elementary School every Monday with their mobile library. Students and parents signed up for library cards and had access to books. Frontier College ran Literacy based activities after school from 3:30pm – 5:30pm and students and parents attended together. These two outside agencies helped support the goal of increasing literacy levels for students and families at Dufferin Elementary School.

Winnipeg Boys and Girls Club. The Boys & Girls Club was invited by Suni to run some of their after school programming at Dufferin School. This allowed students to take part in programs like Power Up that focused on academics without having to leave the school. Suni also used the Freight House for important Parent Council meetings as a way to involve students and recruit parents to become more involved in the life of the school. The Boys & Girls Club also hosted the six week summer program, Community School Investigators, at Dufferin School. This

program was successful in students maintaining all that they had learned in the previous school

year. Teachers found that students who attended CSI every day made academic gains over the

summer months.

Learning Through the Arts. Knowing that many of Dufferin students were kinesthetic

learners, Suni accessed the Learning through the Arts program from the Winnipeg School

Division. She was able to supplement the program with additional grant monies and made sure

that there was a full time arts program and a staff member to teach drama. There was a strong

emphasis on music, film and art at Dufferin Elementary School to build on students' strengths.

Elder-in-Residence. An Elder in Residence program was established in which a local

elder was hired to work within the school with both students and parents. The Elder worked in a

counselling role and was a crucial piece of connecting with Aboriginal, First Nations and Metis

students and families that made up the highest percentage of students attending Dufferin

Elementary School.

The Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. The orchestra worked directly with Dufferin School

through their Fiddle Jig program for students in grade three, four and five. Additional staff was

hired through the Winnipeg Conservatory of Music to help promote music education.

The Community Education Development Association. CEDA worked directly in the

school and, in particular, they worked closely with the Parent Council. CEDA and the Parent

Council at Dufferin Elementary School worked together on four committees that focused on

housing, safety, health and recreation. Housing was a major issue in the Centennial

neighborhood and the grant money allowed for two people, working in part time positions, to

focus on dealing with the ninety boarded up homes that were discussed earlier in this chapter.

Community Gardens were established at Dufferin School through a partnership between Rossbrook House and the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCOM). Each classroom was given a plot of land to plant and tend to during the school year. Student volunteers and staff from Rossbrook House and IRCOM maintained gardens during the summer months. Aboriginal, First Nations, Metis and Newcomer families were able to grown their own vegetables in the Community Gardens located at the school.

An interesting partnership for a high poverty school located in the heart of the inner city of Winnipeg was with the private school, St. John's-Ravenscourt. Grade nine students from St. John's-Ravenscourt School were paired up as student mentors for students in grade four and they worked with them over the course of the school year for three years until they finished in grade six at Dufferin Elementary School.

Parents had their own place in the school through the development of the Family Resource Centre. Suni was able to use grant money to staff the Family Resource Centre full time with a coordinator as well as a Community Liaison Worker. These positions, along with the support of the school staff, allowed for programs like Families and Schools Together (FAST) to run at Dufferin School. Parents felt connected through FAST Works and the connection between home and school was strengthened for all those who took part.

The examples of outside agency partnerships demonstrate some concrete ways in which schools, through partnerships with various community organizations, can take steps to remove barriers and create a more equitable learning environment for children that grow up in poverty. The next chapter will examine the successes and sustainability of the work at Niji Mahkwa

School, Dufferin Elementary School and David Livingstone School.

Chapter Six - Findings

Exploring Success and Sustainability in High Poverty Schools

To discover the perceptions of success, as well as the sustainability of their work, the following research question were asked in the interview:

Research Question #4: How did each principal view the success of their efforts and the sustainability of their work.

The last section of this chapter focuses on how each participant viewed the success of their efforts as well as the sustainability of their work after they retired as principals of high poverty schools located in the inner city of Winnipeg. It should be noted that each participant presented as extremely humble when they shared their accomplishments and spoke about student and school successes and sustainability.

Myra Laramee - People Just Know When You Are a Community Person

It was made clear that as Myra's time ended as principal of Niji Mahkwa School, she was just beginning to see how all of the important cultural work was beginning to accentuate academic value in the classrooms. She explains that her "little brother," Rob Riel, was able to pick up as principal and continue moving the school forward by integrating the seven cultural themes into all academic areas. Myra knows that her time at Niji Mahkwa School made a difference in the lives of children that were impacted by poverty as she said the following:

I know that we made a difference in lots of kids' lives. There were some that we didn't and they still hit the street. They still ended up on the murdered or missing person's list. They got shot, they got stabbed, they got all those things; but that's 10%. There's 90% of

the kids at Niji Mahkwa School who represent a milieu of everything that colonization

could throw at them – that oppression, and racism could slap them that not having any

money, to walk into a family home knowing they sold every friggin' piece of their

furniture except the kid's beds to feed their kids…like those are stories that never get

told. (M.2.42.1457-1464)

A big part of what Myra touched on that linked success and sustainability had to do with

the relationships she formed with people working in the inner city for thirty-one years. She spoke

about one of her first students at Argyle Alternative High School who ended up working as an

Educational Assistant at Niji Mahkwa, graduated from the Community Aboriginal Teacher

Education Program (CATEP), and is currently teaching at Sister McNamara School in the inner

city. Myra feels that the students at Niji Mahkwa School are partly responsible for teaching this

young woman valuable lessons that have allowed her to become a teacher and continue working

within the inner city district. Myra also spoke about the powerful staff she worked with at Argyle

Alternative High School when she said:

I probably met the most powerful staff that I've ever worked with. They were something

else. In the inner city – one of the things that's really key is to be able to not whine about

what you don't have. It's about the ingenuity to take what you have and make it more

than what it really is. It's like making stone soup. It's not the bigger the stone that you get

more out of something. It's what you do with the stuff that you've caught. They could.

They did. We did. It's a very unique place – very, very unique place. I probably would

have never left there had it not been for some political stuff. Politics can get in the way of

your beliefs sometimes, especially if you stand your ground on those beliefs. And I did. It

cost me my place at that school. (M.1.43.119-128)

Myra speaks of working closely with the daughter of an administrator colleague who took her summer institute course, *A Journey from Cultural Awareness to Cultural Competency*, who begged her to bring her on staff at Niji Mahkwa School. When she was told "You're not Aboriginal my girl. Why do you want to be here? She said, "Because you taught me how to love unconditionally." She's been at Niji Mahkwa now for ten years." (M.2.43. 1491-1492)

In the case of Niji Mahkwa School, Myra was able to retire and know that her vice principal, Rob Riel, was willing and able to take on the role of principal. Myra and Rob met when he attended her summer institute course as he was working at Children of the Earth School at the time. Myra became a mentor for Rob and was able to hire him as her vice-principal over time. Myra shares the sustainability of the work in the following quotation:

> Now the place where I wasn't able to get Niji Mahkwa to, was to the place where Rob is taking it now, and that is all of this in terms of – how does that accentuate academic value? He's taking it on that journey. I got into that place, and I ran out of steam. My sister works with him very closely. She is the cultural support teacher for inner-city. She works with that school very closely, and she is very pleased with the direction that Rob is taking that school. I'm still his mentor. When he runs into trouble, he still comes to see me. He's my baby brother in the spirit world. That's the way it is. (M.1.21-22.761-767)

> When asked about the successes of her work at Niji Mahkwa School, Myra is quick to clarify by stating: "It depends on what you mean by success. Are there kids still alive that shouldn't be? Yeah, lots and lots, and lots. Are they going the common Eurocentric route of grade 9, 10, 11, and 12? Not likely." (M.2.41.1494-1496)

Although they may have not been following the Eurocentric model of schooling, Myra beamed with pride as she described a former student attending a course she was currently teaching in the Urban Studies program at the University of Winnipeg:

> The programs that we involved kids in at the school were all targeted at developing strategies for their strength to become one day…you know what Nick? I have a kid from Niji Mahkwa School in my course at the Urban Studies program. I just about fell off my chair when I found out who she was. I knew this kid looked familiar to me and I couldn't place her; and she'd come up to me and say, "Auntie, don't you know who I am?" And I looked at her and it was the way she said it. I said, "Jazzie?" She said, "Yeah." That kid went from the nursery all the way through Niji Mahkwa School. (M.2.42.1471-1477)

Myra spoke about students returning to Niji Mahkwa School to register their own children and about the countless encounters with former students in the community. Although not all former students shared success stories of the paths life had taken them, a consistent theme among many was about how they felt as students in Myra's school.

In closing, Myra spoke about the importance of being a community person when working in the inner city of Winnipeg. She made it clear that you don't need to live in the community to be a community person. The following story she shared about starting her new job as the Aboriginal Awareness Consultant with the Aboriginal Education Directorate through Manitoba Education, which has its office on Selkirk Avenue, drives home the importance of being a community person within the inner city. Myra said that:

> You have to be - you have to be different to work in inner city. You have to be willing to be humbled by the people who come to your school and amazed by the gifts that they

give the children. If you have that then you'll last long in the inner city. If you don't,

you won't. I spent 31 years in the inner city schools and they were the best years of my

life. And I'm still working in the North End which is funny. When I drove up in the

summer before I started here in July - I was riding up and there was a young lady going

up into Urban Circle. I said, hey my girl, are you the secretary?" She said, "Yeah, I am."

I said, "What are the chances of my getting a parking stall in your parkade?" She ran in

there and she came out with a parking pass. She said, "I'm glad you're coming home." I

don't pay any parking. I can't talk for many other places about being a community

member and then knowing what that's meant for me as an educator in an inner city, even

in a multicultural you know it's people just know when you're a community person.

(M.2. 50.1711-1723)

Suni Mathews - I Left at a High Point

Suni wanted to make sure that when it was her time to leave Dufferin Elementary School,

a strong leadership team would be in place to carry on the important equity work the staff had

been involved in with Enid Lee. In speaking about success and sustainability, Suni focused on

the area of housing in the Centennial Neighborhood and the improvements that were made

through the partnership with the Community Education Development Association. She also

spoke about the shift in demographics of the staff make up at Dufferin Elementary School from

when she arrived to when she left. Most importantly, she spoke about the process of ensuring

that strong leaders were developed within the school as well as how the work of creating more

equity centered schools had spread throughout the Winnipeg School Division.

When asked about the most important success story from her time spent at Dufferin

School, Suni did not hesitate in sharing her thoughts. As outlined below, the continuation of

equity centered schooling was critical for her and she knew she had left a leadership team and

structures in place for the work to continue. Suni said that:

> Of course we had a solid leadership team. One of the things that we did, we looked at our
>
> professional development and how we use those monies. When we had the grants, we
>
> used to have all the staff come to the meeting. It allowed for the EA's to be compensated
>
> for their time. But after that – at least up until the time I was there, I found a way of
>
> making sure all the EA's were there. I found a way of ensuring through all kinds of other
>
> means … We had the committee structure in place. We ensured that the leadership team –
>
> you used your staff dollars to ensure that the leadership in meeting and setting the
>
> direction of the school. We now have 13 schools involved. Enid is still connected, and
>
> there is support being built in the system and within that district. People who have left
>
> and gone, they said they would never teach the same way again. When they look at who
>
> is in front of them that is how we ensure that the work will be sustained. (S.2. 27.1009-
>
> 1014 & 1051-1057)

In our initial discussions about poverty and its impact on student learning at Dufferin

Elementary School, Suni broke down the complex problems that were created for children who

come from inadequate housing. From poor attendance due to health concerns to overcrowded

living conditions, Suni found herself in a tough position when working to improve housing

conditions for her families. By addressing the concerns, it often resulted in families being forced

to move and in the worst case scenario, becoming temporarily homeless, as houses were

condemned. One of the areas that she worked on, in conjunction with the parent council at

Dufferin School and the staff from CEDA was to make improvements to housing in the

Centennial Neighborhood. She described the success of their work below:

> Because we had the comprehensive community development program housing was one
> big issue, and they started tackling it. We looked at those who would qualify for
> Manitoba housing – sorry, for Habitat for Humanity housing, but there was only two
> families that really qualified because they were working and able to qualify. Or the
> others, there was a way – we partnered with Assiniboine Credit Union. There was a way
> – that group, which didn't really involve that much of the school. I just went to the
> meeting. But the community got together. Each of those – health and housing and safety
> – they were all community members involved in improving their lives. They were
> directly involved in improving their own access to better housing. So by the time I left –
> right on Alexander, there was Ronnie, Monica, one of the Fletts. There were at least five
> people who owned their own homes by the time I left over a six or seven year period.
> There were at least six people who had their own homes. We also worked with one of the
> Trusts of the community development initiative – was to ensure that the local housing
> organizations got the work to improve that housing. So Kenu Housing, which is an
> Aboriginal housing agency, did much of the work in the area. That's the bigger picture.
> They had to hire locally. They hired Aboriginal people because we wanted to ensure that
> they were getting the work that was going to benefit their own community. (S. 2.34-
> 35.1346-1363)

A final area of success that Suni shared was her ability to increase the diversity of the
teaching staff at Dufferin School. When she arrived at Dufferin, there was not a great deal of
diversity amongst the staff and the students did not always see themselves reflected in the people
who were teaching them. During their journey towards creating an equity centered school, a

great deal of work was done around the issue of race, systemic racism and discrimination that

exists within society. Upon retiring from Dufferin School, Suni was able to leave a staff that had

grown in diversity as well as their understanding of what barriers can exist for families that are

marginalized. Suni explains this change in the following quote:

> I hired a lot of folks that came from the University that had been here – IETs,
>
> international education trained teachers. There were quite a few that came into the school.
>
> We had South Asian teachers. We had black teachers. We had a resource teacher from
>
> Sierra Leone. We had a Japanese background – very diverse. We had Métis teachers. We
>
> did have First Nations teachers, but folks moved and it was tough to keep them. Some of
>
> them moved to the reserve for a variety of reasons. That was one of the things I was
>
> disappointed that I didn`t have more First Nations teachers in the school. The school
>
> certainly looked very different from the one that I walked in. (S.1. 18. 673-680).

In closing, Suni Matthews arrived at Dufferin School with a vision for creating an equity

centered school that would be a welcoming and safe school for all people that lived in the

Centennial Neighborhood. The journey she took with her staff brought many people into the

school to work with students and staff and the needs of children were kept at the forefront at all

times. Suni shared that she knew "That part of my life was done. I left at a high point, and I

wanted to leave knowing that the school was at a good place." (S. 1.42.1584-1587)

Angeline Ramkissoon - Creating Bridges within a Community

Angeline arrived at David Livingstone School and knew that she had her work cut out for

her. The school is located just off of Main Street and the majority of its student population is

Aboriginal, First Nations and Metis students who resided in the Lord Selkirk Park housing

development and live in poverty. From the very beginning, Angeline was not going to let that be an excuse for anyone to not do their job in moving children forward academically.

The two areas of success and sustainability that Angeline focused on were the improvements to the literacy program and the creation of the Bridges program for students that had Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder. Interestingly enough, Angeline arrived with a foundation in literacy and curriculum and left being a leader in the work of inclusion of students with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder in the public school setting.

When Angeline arrived at David Livingstone School it did not take long before a strong partnership would be formed with the Mount Carmel Clinic. She was informed that she would be receiving eight students that had been identified as having Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder. After meeting with the coordinator of the Mount Carmel Clinic, Child Advocacy as well as Special Education Consultants from the Winnipeg School Division – it became Angeline's job to create a program in which students with FASD would be included in the school. The whole idea of the program was to bridge the gap between the Mount Carmel Clinic and the school.

Needless to say, the school staff was put in a position in which they were going to have to build the program from the ground up and work through the obstacles and setbacks as they occurred. Angeline shared that there was a great deal of research completed around physical literacy and brain research to best prepare for the arrival of the new students. The program was assigned a full time special education teacher, a full time educational assistant as well as additional supports from the Child Guidance Clinic within Winnipeg School Division.

As the staff completed their research and began working with the students it became very clear from the beginning that children with FASD do not understand consequences and needed a

strong and consistent routine to meet with success in the school setting. As teachers taught and

re-taught material, more discoveries were found in how sensory issues impacted learning.

Particular attention to noise, touch and colors were observed and staff began to immediately

adapt to the children by reducing visual stimuli, purposefully selecting certain colors and

reducing overall noise in the classroom and school settings as best they could. There was a great

deal of flexibility needed among all staff as Angeline and the Bridges team continued their work

through trial and error. At times, the students were sent home from school when things became

unsafe for themselves and others. This also came with an understanding that they were to be

welcomed back the next school day without any re-entry being possible, due to their not being

able to remember and/or attend to a meeting that would normally review the reasons why they

were sent home and the consequences that needed to be put in place.

Over time, it became apparent to the staff at David Livingstone School that although

there were only eight students fully diagnosed as having FASD, the strategies and systems that

were being put in place to ensure academic success for them would truly benefit more and more

students within the school population. In short order, the Bridges Program became a school wide

approach to working with children at David Livingstone School.

In speaking about leadership in the inner city as well as what she was most proud of from

her time as Principal at David Livingstone, Angeline said the following:

> If you don't have the knowledge and the knowledge of the impact, if you were not
>
> thinking outside of the box and you just had the curriculum as your guide and you were
>
> not able to look at the needs of the kids, I don't think you could make it. Like I don't
>
> think I intentionally went out to change the system but incidentally because of the needs

that I saw I think I changed the system because of that in my particular school.

(A.2.36.1143-1148)

Whether it was intended or not, Angeline's ability to respond to the needs of students with FASD took the staff of David Livingstone School on a learning journey that would ultimately benefit all students.

When speaking about the literacy initiatives that took place, Angeline speaks about the impact that Early Intervention in Reading had for children as it moved them forward at their own pace, in a supported and guided manner. It was a direct focus on an area that needed improvement in order for children to be successful as they moved through school. On the topic of success stories and sustainability, Angeline refers to the entire experience as being a turnaround moment for the school and community when she said:

It's something I started from the very beginning (Bridges Program) not knowing anything about it and being able to develop a program that met the needs of most of the kids. So it was that and the literacy program that I initiated there as well. But it's the whole thing about David Livingstone School and the turnaround that I saw, the school became a different school, the parents became different parents because they were treated with respect. They were challenged in their own ways, and I think they felt very comfortable and welcome in the building. (A.2. 48.1538-1544)

In closing, Angeline came back to a theme that ran throughout the interviews, and that is controlling what you have control over within a public school system and using the time wisely to help children succeed. It is something that she came back to with her staff often and sums it up best by saying:

And that's all we have. We have control over what happens in the building and I always

say that to staff. We've got control over what happens in the building for how many hours

a day and that's what we'll build on and hopefully we are teaching some skills to assist

our kids to really survive outside because once we let them go there's very little control.

But if you give them some of the resources like if there is a fight somewhere at home or

whatever there is a safe place for you to go. If you're lost here is a number for you to

phone, those kinds of stuff. So you give them those skills that they can help take care of

themselves. (A.2. 49. 1552-1559)

The vision each principal had for their school was unique and was created in response to the

needs of students and their families living in school communities that were impacted by poverty.

It needs to be repeated that each principal was quite modest when it came to sharing stories of

success. It also needs to be noted that each principal spoke about the importance of allowing the

incoming principal space to create their own vision and direction for the school. With this being

the case, they were not able to comment at length about the sustainability of the programs and

interventions that were in place during their time as principal. This was done out of respect for

the new principal. The final chapter of this thesis will provide a summary and conclusion to this

research project.

Chapter Seven: Summary & Conclusions

This final chapter of this paper consists of four areas of discussion. This chapter reviews both the research questions from the study as well as examining the methodology used to collect, analyze and present the data. This chapter attempts to address the research questions through a discussion of five themes that have emerged. I will share how my thinking has changed and developed around the impact of poverty and the possible responses of schools within public education. The emergent themes are presented making reference to the reviewed literature in Chapter Two as well as the personal experiences of the researcher as a school teacher and administrator over the last ten years. The themes I will examine are: (i) the limitations of strong leadership and the importance of structural support; (ii) the impact of colonialism on families in the inner city; (iii) the importance of connecting home and school; (iv) money and equitable funding; and, (v) the importance of professional development for administrators and teachers working in high poverty schools. The chapter discusses implications for further research and practice as a result of the findings of this study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the researcher's point of view on the limitations of this study.

Review of the Research Questions

In this study, I set out to address the following research questions in an attempt to better understand the importance of leadership in high poverty schools.

1.   How did three selected, former inner city, elementary school principals understand poverty and its relationship to students' school experiences and school success?

2.   How did each former principal construct a vision for their school and attempt to create

and design a school program to maximize student success?

3.   How did each former principal attempt to implement the vision in their school during the

period of time that they were there?

4.   How did each former principal view the success of their efforts and the sustainability of

their work?

Review of the Methodology

I chose a multiple instrumental case study (Creswell, 2005) to use in this study because it

allowed me to explore the perceptions of former principals, who have led schools impacted by

poverty, about their understanding of poverty, school leadership, and strategies and interventions

that make a difference in improving conditions for student success. Based on the exploratory

nature of the research, I used a method of inquiry using one-on-one open-ended interviews to

generate data by asking questions, recording and transcribing answers, analysing transcripts and

synthesizing results. By using interview guides that were open ended and semi-structured, I was

able to re-visit important themes that emerged after the first interview. The intent was not to

compare one principal's perceptions to another and therefore little comparison was done between

the three cases: Myra Laramee / Niji Mahkwa School; Suni Matthews / Dufferin Elementary

School and Angeline Ramkissoon / David Livingstone School.

In the first interview, participants were able to "walk through" their career as teachers,

consultants and school based administrators through guided questioning. By focusing on their

understanding of poverty and its impact on student's experience and success at school, the

participants were able to share their perceptions of what they experienced working within the

inner city. The second interview focused on school leadership and the specific strategies and interventions that improved students' experience and success in school. By having two separate interviews with two weeks between each session, I was able to transcribe, analyze and share the data with the participants before sitting down for the second and final interview. This process allowed me to revisit and dig deeper on important topics and aspects of their career.

The validity of the interviews was confirmed through the use of member checking in which each participant was able to review both a hard copy and electronic copy of the interview transcripts. After member checks were completed, I conducted a hand analysis of the data and developed a coding system based on themes from the four main research questions. The themes identified in the coding process were what was used to structure and share in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

The methodology chosen for this paper allowed both the researcher and participants enough freedom to explore the complexity of poverty as well as the various responses to it that exists within the three chosen inner city elementary schools. By selecting three former elementary principals who no longer worked for the Winnipeg School Division, I hoped to access a perspective about working within the inner city district of the largest school division in Manitoba. To my surprise, there were very few instances in which the principals talked about their work involving conflict with the senior administration of the school division. It came as a surprise that for three principals that had spent almost the entire length of their career working in high poverty schools within the inner city district, there was very little commentary on working within a system that may be viewed by some as another structure within society that acts as a barrier for people living in complex poverty.

Five Things I Have Learned About Poverty, Schools & School Leadership

Over the course of this graduate program, I have learned a great deal about poverty and its impact on the education system. I would like to highlight five themes that resonate with me from the literature I have read, from my personal experience as a teacher, vice principal and principal and from the process of conducting this research project in which I interviewed three former inner city principals about their understanding of poverty and the role of leadership within high poverty schools. Before I illustrate the five themes that I have learned the most about with respect to poverty and its impact on schooling, I want to share three powerful quotes from Myra, Suni and Angeline that I feel are striking about the work of leadership within high poverty schools. I will begin with Angeline's perceptions on the individuality of both the principal and the school community in which they work:

> There are a lot of philosophical things floating around in terms of parent engagement and student discipline and curriculum and all that stuff, but it doesn't always match. Even though I was the principal at Wellington School and another person is a principal at Sister Mac or Pinkham or whatever, we didn't necessarily do the same thing because our population is different. You had to do things differently. That's why it comes from the administrator. To me, it has to come from intuition. It comes from the heart. It doesn't come from the head always. It's a combination of both. (A.1.12.389-399)

I think it is important that Angeline highlights intuition, and that decisions need to be made from both the head and heart while at the same time taking into account the complexity of the population of the school community. Philosophical ideas about what may or may not work in

high poverty schools do not always match up with the realities of the living and working

conditions within the inner city.

The next striking comment on the importance of leadership comes from Myra when

sharing her perceptions on the impact the staff of Niji Mahkwa School may have made on some

of its students:

> I know that we made a difference in lots of kids' lives. There were some that we didn't
>
> and they still hit the street. They still ended up on the murdered or missing person's list.
>
> They got shot, they got stabbed, they got all those things; but that's 10%. There's 90% of
>
> the kids at Niji Mahkwa School who represent a milieu of everything that colonization
>
> could throw at them – that oppression, and racism could slap them, that not having any
>
> money, to walk into a family home knowing they sold every friggin' piece of their
>
> furniture except the kid's beds to feed their kids. Those are stories that never get told.
>
> Those are stories that people would judge those parents for doing so. To have kids know
>
> they were loved. (M.1.42. 1457-1466)

With children facing the harsh realities of complex poverty and the lasting impact of colonialism,

it's never easy to know what impact the work of schools can do. Myra's perception of the love

and dedication shown to the children attending Niji Mahkwa School is something significant

and, quite possibly, has made the difference between children growing up to become active

members of their community or becoming part of the unacceptable statistics which tell the story

for many Aboriginal, First Nations and Metis children growing up in the inner city of Winnipeg.

The final comment I will share comes from Suni, and serves as a catalyst for discussing

the five areas that have resonated with me throughout this research project. Suni shared her

perceptions of the systemic causes of poverty and their impact on schooling when she shared the

following:

> I think the whole notion of poverty schools and children coming from schools with high
>
> levels of poverty – my experience has been working with parents and kids that they want
>
> their goal and aspirations for their children that their children achieve. They are no
>
> different from yours or mine or yours and mine or my grandkids or my children that I
>
> had. We have to break the cycle of poverty. We do it. We don't accept things as the status
>
> quo. We have to question critically things that are – at least for me from a social justice
>
> perspective – that are important. We just don't accept it. We continue to do the work that
>
> is needed to change the systems. (S.1.28.1062-1069)

If we are going to do the work that is needed, we will have to keep the ideas that Suni has shared

at the forefront of our work. All children deserve the best education possible and all parents,

regardless of their background or current living situation want the same thing for their children,

to reach their goals and aspirations. Education can be a critical tool to lead people out of poverty

and we must continue to challenge and think critically about the most important aspects of

schooling and do the work that is needed to change the systems that create privilege for some

and put barriers in place for others.

Strong Leadership and Structural Support

Drawing on the work of Leithwood, leadership within high poverty schools must

encompass "the work of mobilizing and influencing others to articulate and achieve the school's

shared intentions and goals" (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005, p.14). It is important for the principal to

create a shared vision with staff, but it is far more important for them to know how they plan to

execute the vision in a manner that will support student success in school. What I have learned from completing my literature review, working as a school based administrator and interviewing Myra, Suni and Angeline is the importance of developing people on staff. Well meaning, hardworking and dedicated people (administrators, teachers, superintendents, and the like) will never be enough without the structural supports to combat the impact of complex poverty on students' experience and success in school. What can work is a staff that is focused, supported and mobilized by the principal to accomplish what has been developed, agreed upon and made the focus for learning in their particular school.

There is nothing heroic in creating the conditions for students to be successful that live in poverty. We know where our high poverty schools are located, and we also know what interventions have been successful in other high poverty schools. We know that all schools that are designated high needs deserve to have access to breakfast programs and snack programs, and would benefit from additional staffing to employ someone to work in a community liaison role within the school community. Some of these interventions can be made possible with an increase in funding. If we are concerned about equity instead of equality for children, simply put, high poverty schools need more in both human resources and funds available to them to meet the basic needs of children. By meeting the basic needs, teachers have a better chance of their students learning the basic skills required to be successful in school. Strong leadership needs to be coupled with structural supports.

What I have learned from the literature review and the first-hand accounts of Myra, Suni and Angeline is that strong leadership, be it from a teacher or principal, will never be enough. Supports need to be in place and staff need to be able to follow the vision that drives the work of the school. I feel this could be facilitated by adopting the community schooling model for high

poverty schools. By having schools become the hub within the community, families can have

access to education, health care, social services, as well as recreation and leisure opportunities

within their own school. Community liaison workers would be on staff to connect with families,

local business and outside agencies to help create the "overlapping spheres of influence" needed

to ensure students living in poverty have enriching school experiences and meet with success.

In addition to adopting a community schooling model, I strongly believe that individual

initiatives that are in place in various school divisions and in various schools could be co-

ordinated and rolled out in a systematic fashion to reach more students and positively impact a

greater number of students living in poverty within the City of Winnipeg. To have metro school

divisions sharing and learning from one another on what works to help school communities that

are impacted by complex poverty would be a positive step in the right direction. With such a

complex and difficult task at hand, it does not make any sense to reinvent the wheel on what may

or may not work to better meet the needs of students who may need schools the most in their

lives.

Colonization: Impacts of Residential Schooling in the Inner City District

All three participants, Myra, Suni and Angeline spoke about inter-generational poverty

and its impact on students' school experience. One common aspect of each of their schools was

that the student population was predominately made up of Aboriginal, First Nations and Metis

students. Another common aspect of all three schools was the higher percentage of students

being raised by their grandparents and/or in the care of Child and Family Services. Although

interview questions were not directly asked about the impact of Residential Schools on families

in their school communities, many examples were shared in which the biological parents of the

children attending their schools were unable to parent their children, and did come from homes in which their parents were survivors of the Residential School system in Manitoba. Through their descriptions of working with the school communities, the impact of colonialism can be seen as they shared their perceptions of what challenges their students faced growing up in the inner city of Winnipeg. Silver (2013) states "Colonialism and its effects have contributed to the grinding, racialized poverty of inner-city communities such as Winnipeg's North End, a quintessential "colonized space". Colonialism has also produced Aboriginal street gangs. (Silver, 2013, p.17)

The impact of Residential Schools cannot be overlooked when examining the structural causes of poverty. As Myra, Suni and Angeline shared examples of the challenging elements of being a principal in a high poverty school within the inner city, it was never a stretch to connect their experiences of Aboriginal street gangs to the impact of colonialism. Their vivid descriptions of grandparents raising children within their school community, as well as the higher than average levels of children in the care of Child and Family Services, illustrate the lingering effects of Residential Schooling and what it did to entire generations of Aboriginal, First Nations and Metis people.

If schools are going to play a role in combatting poverty, one area to start with is acknowledging the impact that colonialism has had on Aboriginal, First Nations and Metis people and, in particular, examine the role of Residential School within the education system. By doing so, educators may very well gain new insights into why schools struggle to connect with certain groups of people within their school communities. From these new insights, a different approach may very well develop to better meet the needs of our Aboriginal, First Nations and Metis students and their families. It is important to keep in mind that this history does not date

far back in time and that many students presently attending public school in Winnipeg have grown up in homes in which their parents were born into families in which their own parents were survivors of Residential Schools in Manitoba.

The Importance of a Strong Connection between Home and School

In Chapter Two, I reference the work of Joyce Epstein to highlight the importance of building a strong connection between home and school. Although Epstein does not have a specific model for engaging parents within an inner city context, she does outline a key difference between parental *involvement* and parental *engagement*. Myra, Suni and Angeline shared how they constructed and implemented their vision for their schools and, in each case, a special emphasis was placed on the connection between the home in which the child lives and the school that they attend. All three participants took different approaches to connecting with their school communities, and after listening to them explain the countless efforts to engage parents, I find myself coming back to the work of Ferlazzo (2011) in his explanation of the difference between engagement and involvement by asking schools whether they are "doing to" or "doing with" when it comes to working with families. Are schools spending more time listening or talking?

I've learned that the personal experiences of school for parents plays a major role in their level of involvement and engagement they will demonstrate for their children's education. Acknowledging the impact of Residential Schooling on a large number of Aboriginal, First Nations and Metis families living within the city of Winnipeg plays a factor in how schools engage parents. Taking the time to listen to newly immigrated parents to understand their story, and put into context what new experiences they are having in Canada, is an important step to

establishing trusting and meaningful relationships with families. What I also learned from my time spent with Myra, Suni and Angeline is to never overestimate the power of the fact that parents are the first teachers for their children. It came up time and again in the interviews and the level of respect and understanding of parents being the "expert" on their own child was evident. Suni shared that:

> I continued with the home visits. I continued with having parents coming to the classroom because that was a fundamental belief. Those relationships and allowing parents – not allowing, that's a horrible word – I believe that parents had something to offer. That was the fundamental thing. They were the first teachers just as my parents were my first teachers, and I learned some very important things about life and shaping my own thinking. So the parents came into the classroom. They were part of it. Community – inviting other people within the community to come into the classroom and building on the strengths of students, looking at their strengths; and trying to nurture those things. That kind of thinking was shaped by what I believed. I believed that I could learn for my students. I believed that I could learn from my parents because they had knowledge. (S.1.5.171-181)

Epstein writes about "overlapping spheres of influence" in her work on connecting home and school. As I worked through the countless interventions that were put in place at Niji Mahkwa School, Dufferin Elementary School and David Livingstone School, I came back to this phrase over and over again. These three inner city principals deliberately set the stage within their respective schools to provide their students with "overlapping spheres of influence" both during the school day as well as long after the school day ended. By acknowledging the reality and the impact that complex poverty had on their school communities, Myra, Suni and Angeline

were able to create opportunities for their students and their families to be surrounded by positive influences through participation in the various programs offered.

What I have learned about the importance of the home and school connection is to meet parents where they are at, and focus on engagement, spend more time listening and less time talking and create opportunities for children in which the "overlapping spheres of influence" can help create positive experiences for students at school. I have also learned that it does not take a hero to make this work happen but, in fact, it takes a mobilized team with a vision and mission to do what it takes and to use education as a possible ticket out of poverty.

Money and Appropriate Levels of Funding

When it comes to meeting the needs of students impacted by complex poverty and attending schools in the lowest socio-economic areas of the inner city of Winnipeg, it can never be just about equality and must be about reaching some sort of equity in their school experiences. Increased funding will not be the simple answer to meeting the complex needs within the inner city but it is not necessarily a bad place to start the conversation of what can be done.

What I learned from Myra, Suni and Angeline about money and funding is that there will never be enough but that one must make the most of what they have been given to best support the needs of all students within the school. In each school, the funding varied due to their distinct designations. Niji Mahkwa School had access to special funding to support its Aboriginal culture and language programs; Dufferin Elementary School had access to the Winnipeg Foundation's Centennial Neighbourhood grant money while David Livingstone School was involved in piloting the Bridges program to best meet the needs of students affected by Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. In each school, decisions needed to be made on spending money to support students. From special

language instructors to community members to run the "walking school bus," the human resources that make a difference for children come at a cost.

When it comes to creating conditions in which "overlapping spheres of influence" can be created for children, it's important to acknowledge that programs like C.S.I. (Community School Investigators), B.E.E.P. (Balanced Experiential Education Group) and most importantly, (C.S.P.I) Community Schools Partnership Initiative come with a price tag. It is programs like these that I feel could very well make up a systemic response as part of an action plan to support children living in poverty. I've learned that if I am going to advocate for more money and funding to support children living in poverty, I need to make sure I think of both the school and the supportive organizations that work directly with students and families.

The most important thing I have learned about the role of money and funding is that it makes sense to invest lots and invest it early. Students living in poverty should not be held back from having the critically important exposure that their peers in higher-socioeconomic areas of the city enjoy to affordable daycare, family centres and nursery school programs. Greater investment into early childhood education combined with supports in place to help families makes a difference. It would be my hope that at some point we connect the Early Development Instrument (EDI) data with all of the various provincial assessments (Student engagement, Reading, Writing, Mathematics) and overall graduation rates to develop a clearer picture for all to see - the importance of entering school with the readiness skills and having appropriate interventions in place to support students and families as they begin to struggle.

Professional Development Related to Poverty

As a teacher, vice-principal and now principal, my learning about the impact of poverty on students' school experiences and success has come while working on the job. Having had the opportunity to work in high poverty schools, attend graduate school and focus on poverty and school leadership as the overall topic for my Master's degree thesis, has provided me with an incredible opportunity to learn and shape my practice as a school based administrator. I feel that both teachers and administrators could, and should, receive professional development that focuses on developing a more sophisticated understanding of the structural nature of poverty as well as some of the interventions that have been proven to help children succeed in school.

Providing people with professional reading on poverty and guided discussion on how poverty impacts students in school would be a great place to start. In my learning, I have drawn on the work of Dr. Ruby Payne, Eric Jensen, Ben Levin and Jim Silver. There are countless books on the market that address issues related to the impact that poverty has on schools and student success. As a classroom teacher, I was never introduced to any professional reading around poverty and its impact on student learning. As a new vice-principal, the topic of poverty was non-existent at the divisional level. All of this changed with my first administrative transfer.

My time spent working as a vice principal at Lavallee School in the Louis Riel School Division has given me first-hand experience of working in a high poverty school. Located next to the Marlene Street Manitoba Housing complex, Lavallee School is the only school within the Louis Riel School Division that is connected with the provincial Community Schools Partnership Initiative (CSPI) program. By working closely with our Community Liaison Worker, I was able to learn from a network of twenty-nine schools across the province that also received CSPI

grants and operated under a Community Schooling model. I believe that all schools could examine the work of the twenty-nine schools designated as CSPI schools, and learn from the interventions and proactive strategies that are in place to operate their schools as community schools and better meet the needs of the school community. From learning about how a "walking school bus" program improves student attendance and builds trust within the school community to learning the importance of hiring local people to work within the school through a community development model - there are numerous successful interventions to draw on to share with teachers and administrators.

Recently, the United Way of Winnipeg has been running a Poverty Simulation called *Living on the Edge,* in which people that do not live in poverty are put through a simulation in which they must work through a month of living in poverty. This role playing simulation makes an impact by its ability for people to feel, for a short time, what it's like to be powerless within a system that is difficult to navigate and, at times, unforgiving. This simulation could be used with school staff as one way to begin the conversation of what it is really like to survive living in poverty, as well as what schools can be like for people trying to navigate the public education system.

What I feel I have learned from a professional development model from my time spent with Myra, Suni and Angeline comes from their ability to incorporate so many interventions for children within their schools as well as the creation of opportunities outside of school hours. Drawing back on Epstein, these three inner city principals were able to create "overlapping spheres of influence" for their school communities. Having the opportunity to spend time with them and hear their stories was an invaluable form of professional development for a first year principal working in what our school division refers to as a high-potential school.

Implications for Practice and Further Research

With respect to further research, I feel my work could lead to a thorough examination of the work of Healthy Child Manitoba and its connected and concentrated effort to focus on the success of children in Manitoba from birth through to high school graduation and beyond. There are several key areas of their work that I feel could be connected to the work of principals leading high poverty schools within the inner city of Winnipeg. As outlined online, the work of Healthy Child Manitoba is to:

> Healthy Child Manitoba (HCM) is the Government of Manitoba's long term, cross-departmental strategy for putting children and families first … focuses on child centered public policy through the integration of financial and community based family supports. (Healthy Child Manitoba web site).

The specific programs that fall under the umbrella of Healthy Child Manitoba that I feel directly connect to the work of principals in high poverty schools include: the work of the Early Child Education Unit; Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI); Roots of Empathy & Seeds of Empathy; Big Brothers & Big Sisters; Community School Investigators (CSI) Summer Learning Enrichment Program (SLEP); Community Schools Partnership Initiative (CSPI); Healthy Schools Manitoba; The Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Strategy and the Triple P Parenting program. (Healthy Child Manitoba web site).

From all of the programs/interventions listed above, the Community Schools Partnership Initiative (CSPI) within the Province of Manitoba is one in which further research could lead to significant implications for practice. From 2005 to the present day, significant funding has been provided to twenty-nine high poverty schools within Manitoba to strengthen community

partnerships and student success by co-ordinating services and supports for students and families. I strongly believe that a closer examination of the work that is happening in these schools from a leadership perspective would provide valuable insights into creating a more systematic approach to addressing complex poverty and its impact on student's school experience and success.

A final implication for further research that I need to explore comes from the most significant finding of the study. I would like to pose three questions that I am left with from my research study that I feel are critical for understanding the importance of leading high-poverty schools:

- How does the way in which one defines poverty impact the decision making that is critical in leading high poverty schools?
- Are decisions being made in high poverty schools based on context or on the world view which is held by the leader making the decisions?
- What difficulties, if any, exist when school principals are working in a "drive in" school community in which at the end of the school day – they are able to simply "drive out"?

I believe there is a need to further examine how one's ability to define poverty and understand its impacts on schooling can influence the decision making and approach to leading high poverty schools. After interviewing three former elementary principals with differing views on poverty and the impacts it has on schooling for children, I strongly believe this is an area of research that needs to be explored as our public school system will continue to grapple with above average levels of poverty within Manitoba.

Limitations of this Study

This qualitative study of the lived-experiences of three former inner city principals was never intended to be a study that could be generalized to all principals working in high poverty schools. This study includes a few factors that may limit the degree to which the findings should be conceived as conclusive and relational to other studies. The limitations include:

- The findings presented were based on nine hours of interviews with only three participants that took part in the study.

- My attempt to make sense of the data, analyze the emergent themes and interpret the significance of the findings can be viewed as a limitation due to my limited experience as a researcher.

- My ability to guide the interviews as they were happening and make sense of the data and feedback given through the member checking process can be viewed as a limitation.

I truly hope that the limitations of this study do not in any way detract from the work of these principals, and the contributions they have made to the children growing up in complex poverty and attending high poverty schools within the inner city district.

Conclusion

It is clear that the realities in this thesis do not align with the Mission and Vision of Manitoba Education's goal for public education. The words of the principals powerfully illustrate the complexities of understanding poverty and its impact on schooling, and construct a model of schooling that can contribute to greater education, equity and success for students living in poverty. Drawing back on the opening pages of this thesis, the Mission and Vision as

well as four Overarching Goals for all students attending public schools in the province of

Manitoba is outlined below:

Mission: To ensure that all Manitoba's children and youth have access to an array of

educational opportunities such that every learner experiences success through relevant,

engaging and high quality education that prepares them for lifelong learning and

citizenship in a democratic, socially just and sustainable society.

Vision: That every learner will complete a high school education with a profound sense

of accomplishment, hope and optimism.

Overarching Goals:

1. To ensure education in Manitoba supports students experiencing and learning about

    what it means to live in a sustainable manner.

2. To ensure that education practice and policy in Manitoba is guided by the principle of

    inclusion.

3. To significantly increase achievement levels of those students who have been

    historically less successful.

4. To continue to increase the overall provincial graduation rate.

(Allan & Farthing, 2011).

If school principal's working in public education within Manitoba believe in the Mission

and Vision outlined above, we must create spaces that will be given to people to develop a new

lens around the issue of complex poverty. A multifaceted approach to it needs to be developed

both inside our schools as well as outside in our communities. A great deal of work, over a

significant amount of time has gone into various initiatives and programs to address the impact

of poverty on students attending public schools in Manitoba. In Gaskell & Levin's book, *Making*

A Difference In Urban Schools, they interviewed several key players that have been connected to

this work in Winnipeg since the early 1970's. Greg Selinger, working in the 1970's as a Social

Worker and Community Activist, and now, currently, the Premier of Manitoba, commented on

the sustainability of earlier commitments to improve inner city education:

> Comparing the present and the past, we are not today even at the level of support for the
>
> inner city that we had thirty years ago. The thinking now is much narrower … The model
>
> at the time was a transformational model; it was a model that would change the essence
>
> of how a school ran. The school was to become an ally of inner-city communities to fight
>
> class oppression, to fight racism, and to fight socio-economic barriers. (pp. 174)

It is time to revisit what a transformational model might accomplish to provide high quality

education in which all students graduate from high school in Manitoba. To "significantly

increase achievement levels of those students who have been historically less successful" we

must take the time and invest the resources to make sure people working within public education

can learn and develop a solid understanding of what complex poverty is and how it impacts

student's school experience and success.

In closing, it has been my experience through teaching, completing graduate coursework,

and by becoming a school principal, that individuals can only create some change within the

system to improve the school experience for children impacted by complex poverty. It is my

hope that by sharing the lived experiences of Myra Laramee, Suni Matthews and Angeline

Ramkissoon that more school principal's will be given an opportunity to embrace a community

schooling model and create vision for their schools that will include the important strategies and

interventions that we know work to improve the school experience, while setting students up for

success both in the classroom and in their community.

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Appendix A – ENREB Ethics Approval