

Potential Solutions to Manitoba's High School Dropout Crisis:
Insights of a High School Classroom Teacher Think Tank

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ABSTRACT

It is a widespread belief in western society today that every adolescent is capable of attaining a high school diploma (Pharris-Ciureja, Hirschman, & Willhoft, 2012). In reality, a Statistics Canada (2012) "Labour Force Survey" concluded that only 73.9% of all 18 and 19 year olds have received high school diplomas. Richards (2009) stated that Manitoba's high school dropout rate is the highest in Canada, and is twice as high as that of British Columbia.

Unfortunately, many adolescents have started on the path to dropping out long before they enter high school (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007) due to a combination of sociological, socioeconomic, cultural, developmental, behavioural, and academic factors (Englund, Edgeland, & Collins, 2008; Pharris-Ciureja, Hirschman, & Willhoft, 2012; Richards 2009). To better understand this phenomenon, I used the critical analytical tool of the immanent critique (Skrtic, 1995); and several different critical thinking tools (Levy, 2010). I also reviewed literature concerning sociology and education, Manitoba's interpretation of inclusion, and the unique nature of high schools and their teachers.

The purpose of this study was to invite Manitoba high school classroom teachers into a think tank and ask them what they believe they do to help adolescents stay in school and graduate. I found that the high school classroom teachers who participated in the study creatively strived to connect with students, worked individually and collaboratively with colleagues, and acknowledged the need for legislation, policies, and administration. They also took the time to examine current educational practices and continuously searched for innovative ways to improve their classrooms, schools, and the system-at-large. I concluded that school systems would greatly benefit from seeking out the voices of high school teachers and asking them what they think.

Keywords: high school, teachers, graduation, dropout, inclusion, special education, think tank

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to seek out Manitoba high school classroom teachers, invite them to participate in a think tank, and capture their voices in order to better understand what they do that helps adolescents stay in school and graduate. This introductory chapter utilizes the critical analytical tool of the immanent critique (Skrtic, 1995) to first provide a rationale for the study by illustrating that Manitoba's high school dropout rate is currently the highest in Canada (Richards, 2009). A critical analysis of some of the reasons youths drop out, and two of Manitoba's recent attempts to respond to this issue, are presented in Chapter 1. To better understand the phenomenon of dropping out of high school, the literature concerning education and sociology, Manitoba's interpretation of inclusion, and the unique nature of high schools, students, and teachers is reviewed in Chapter 2. In Chapters 1 and 2, I use several different critical thinking tools (Levy, 2010) to critically analyze prevalent ideas and research about why students drop out of school. The research design for my thesis is presented in Chapter 3. Finally, the findings are presented and discussed in Chapter 4. My hope is that this study can ultimately help to reduce dropout rates and increase graduation rates.

Our Claims

High school graduation is considered to be one of the major life achievements for all youth, and the perception that virtually every adolescent is capable of attaining a high school diploma is a widespread belief in western society today. For example, Pharris-Ciureja, Hirschman, and Willhoft (2012) stated, "The near universality of high school graduation is considered one of the major achievements of the American education system. Social indicators, based on survey and census data, show that high school completion has risen from about 50% of

young adults in mid-20th century America to almost 90% among recent cohorts” (p.709).

In Canada, the dropout rate appears to have been reduced to half its level of 20 years ago. The national dropout rate in 1991 was 16.6% (Statistics Canada, 2011). Statistics Canada (2011) recently reported that 191,000 individuals, or 8.5% of all Canadians aged 20 to 24, were considered high school dropouts.

As a society, we can be proud of such success, because dropping out of high school costs a great deal to both the individual and the community at large. Englund, Edgeland, and Collins (2008) noted the following startling facts concerning the disparity between the earnings of high school graduates and students who drop out of high school:

1. Individuals who graduate from high school earn, on average, 1.5 times more than high school dropouts, and individuals with a college degree earn 2.7 times more than dropouts.
2. Nearly one out of every four individuals in full-time working families where the head of household had less than a high school education were living in poverty.
3. The unemployment rate was 33% for those individuals who dropped out of high school in 2004–2005.
4. Recent estimates indicate that the total lifetime costs to society for each individual who drops out of high school ranges from \$243,000 to \$388,000 (p.64).

Our Conditions

While these statistics may be shocking, they are more troubling when we consider that recent studies have reported that the actual graduation rate is far from universal. Pharris-Ciureja, Hirschman, and Willhoft (2012) studied the records of nearly 9000 high school students in a large American metropolitan school district from 1994 to 2005. They tracked each student from the time they entered the school system until they left the system or graduated. Based on their

findings, they determined that only 65% to 70% of the high school students actually earned a high school diploma. This disparity between reported graduation rates and actual rates is significant, and also puzzling.

It is apparent that our claims of a near universal high school graduation rate and our actual conditions, that an alarmingly high number of youth drop out, are not aligned. Therefore, two important components of an immanent critique are used (Skrtic, 1995) to guide an exploration “exposing the contradictions between our claims and our conditions, between our values and our practices” (Skrtic, 1995, p.47). By using this form of critical social analysis, I hope to account for the disparity between our claims that all but a few students graduate high school, and our actual conditions that many prematurely leave high school. Second, an immanent critique serves to emancipate us from our current thinking, so that we can seek ways to “transform the real into the ideal” (Skrtic, 1995, p.47). My hope is that this study has produced ideas that can help move us closer to the ideal of universal high school graduation.

The first step is to account for this incongruence in our claims and our conditions regarding high school graduation rates. One reason for the different findings may be due to the manner in which results were obtained. Pharris-Ciureja, Hirschman, and Willhoft (2012) noted that most national results concerning graduation rates come from household surveys and censuses, and many individuals appear to exaggerate their own educational credentials. Warren and Halpern-Manners (2009) discovered that 25% of the dropouts' parents also lie about school attendance when asked, stating that their child was still enrolled in school, when they clearly were no longer attending.

Additionally, Pharris-Ciureja, Hirschman, and Willhoft (2012) added the following explanations for the variation in results:

There are several reasons for the discrepancy between administrative and survey estimates of high school graduation, but the most important is the conflation of the receipt of a high school diploma and a high school equivalency certification (e.g. GED). Although about one-half of high school dropouts eventually receive some sort of alternative certificate of high school completion, a real high school diploma is worth considerable more in the labor market (p.710).

A closer inspection of Statistics Canada's (2011a) graduate numbers reveals some similar discrepancies. For example, the Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey Questionnaire (2012) obtained its results from a telephone survey, where the questions asked included, "What is the highest grade of elementary or high school [name] ever completed?" (para. 46), "Did [name] graduate from high school (secondary school)?" (para. 47), "Has [name] received any other education that could be counted towards a degree, certificate or diploma from an educational institution?" (para. 48), and, "What is the highest degree, certificate or diploma [name] has obtained?" (para.49). Based on research highlighted earlier, regarding the rates of dishonest and exaggerated responses, it is reasonable to assume that national graduation statistics are most likely inflated, in part due to respondent dishonesty.

Warren and Halpern-Manners (2009) claimed that the estimates of high school graduation rates were greatly dependent on how those rates were measured. This assertion seems to hold true in the Canadian context, as Statistics Canada (2011) reported that determining the age at which to measure national graduation rates can prove to be a challenging task, stating: When measuring graduation rates, it is important to select age groups that are representative of the situation in each province. High school dropout rates provide an indicator of student retention to high school graduation, but, when measured at ages 20 to 24, also capture

Figure 1.0. Graduation Rates in Manitoba – Our Claims vs. Our Conditions

Our Claims	Our Conditions
<p>North America</p> <p>“The near universality of high school graduation is considered one of the major achievements of the American education system. Social indicators, based on survey and census data, show that high school completion has risen from about 50% of young adults in mid-20th century America to almost 90% among recent cohorts” (Pharris-Ciureja, Hirschman, and Willhoft, 2012, p.709).</p> <p>Canada</p> <p>In Canada, the dropout rate appears to have been reduced to half its level of 20 years ago. The national dropout rate in 1991 was 16.6% (Statistics Canada, 2011). Statistics Canada (2011) now reports that 191,000 individuals, or 8.5% of all Canadians aged 20 to 24, are considered high school dropouts</p> <p>Manitoba</p> <p>In Manitoba, the Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey (2012) reported that 11.4% of adults aged 20 to 24 are high school dropouts.</p>	<p>North America</p> <p>Pharris-Ciureja, Hirschman, and Willhoft (2012) studied the records of nearly 9000 high school students in a large American metropolitan school district from 1994 to 2005. They tracked each student from the time they entered the school system until they left the system or graduated. Based on their findings, they determined that only 65% to 70% of the high school students actually earned a high school diploma.</p> <p>Canada</p> <p>Statistics Canada (2011) reported that 89.5% of all Canadians aged 20 to 24 have (or perhaps more accurately, claim to have) a high school diploma (or equivalent), 2% are still enrolled in high school (or equivalent), leaving only 8.5% to be considered high school dropouts. If however, one looks at the age groups of 18 to 19 year olds, Statistics Canada (2011) also noted that only 76.9% had graduated high school on time.</p> <p>Manitoba</p> <p>In Manitoba, the Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey (2012) reported that only 73.9% of all 18 and 19 year olds have a high school diploma. Richards (2009) stated that Manitoba actually has the highest dropout rate in Canada, and that, “The ratio between the province with the highest dropout rate, Manitoba, and the lowest, British Columbia, is two to one” (p.2).</p>

those students who return to school to complete the requirements for graduation (para. 23 & 24).

When examining high school graduation levels, Statistics Canada (2011) reported that 89.5% of all Canadians aged 20 to 24 have (or perhaps more accurately, *claim* to have) a high school diploma (or equivalent), 2% are still enrolled in high school (or equivalent), leaving only 8.5% to be considered high school dropouts. If however, one looks at the age groups of 18 to 19 year olds, Statistics Canada (2011) also noted that only 76.9% had graduated high school *on time*. Although Statistics Canada (2011) claimed that 14.7% of 18 and 19 year olds were still attending high school (leaving only 8.4% to be considered high school dropouts), it is not difficult to find reason to dispute such findings.

One of the great difficulties in determining dropout rates is that it is never clear as to who has dropped out and who has not. As Pharris-Ciureja, Hirschman, and Willhoft (2012) stated, “The underlying problem is that high school attrition is not a clearly defined event. For a long period, neither the school nor the student may know if a spell of missed schooling is a temporary or permanent interruption in schooling” (p.712). The result of such ambiguity is that society may never grasp the true magnitude of this crisis, particularly in provinces with high dropout rates.

In the province of Manitoba, the Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey (2012) reported that 11.4% of adults aged 20 to 24 are high school dropouts. This does not seem extraordinarily high, but we then must consider that the same study concluded that only 73.9% of all 18 and 19 year olds have a high school diploma. Richards (2009) stated that Manitoba actually has the highest dropout rate in Canada, and that, “The ratio between the province with the highest dropout rate, Manitoba, and the lowest, British Columbia, is two to one” (p.2). He reported that

the number of 20 to 24 year old Manitobans without any type of high school certification was actually 24% for males and 19% for females.

Reasons for High School Dropout

At this point, it is easy to immediately ask the question, "What causes high school aged youth to drop out of high school?" It might be just as simple to conclude that the causes must be due to some type of fundamental flaw in the structure of high schools resulting in an abrupt student "grade 9 shock" (Pharris-Ciureja, Hirschman, & Willhoft, 2012) that forces students to prematurely exit. Levy (2010), however, argued that the idea of asking for one specific cause is, "misleading because of its implication that there is a single cause" (p.78). Levy (2010) referred to the underestimating the impact of other external factors as the "fundamental attribution error" (p, 95). As Levy (2010) further explained in "Multiple Causation Theory" (p.77), many phenomena, such as dropping out, are complex and multifaceted. Levy (2010) stated, "virtually every significant behaviour has many determinants, and any single explanation is almost inevitably an oversimplification" (p.78). Instead, most phenomena are due to multiple causes. Social scientists support this analysis, referring to the hidden trap of "reductive bias", in which a "person treats complex phenomenon as if it were a simple one" (Miller, 2010, p.71).

Reasons for dropping out actually appear to more closely resemble a "perfect storm" of sociological, socioeconomic, cultural, behavioural, and academic factors (Englund, Edgeland, & Collins, 2008; (Pharris-Ciureja, Hirschman, & Willhoft, 2012; Richards 2009). Pharris-Ciureja, Hirschman, and Willhoft (2012) stated the following reasons:

Why do so many high school students dropout from high school? Our results confirm many of the familiar findings from the literature on the salience of risk factors - earlier disadvantages beget later disadvantages. Minority status, economic marginality,

distressed families, and human and social capital deficits are strongly associated with poor school performance and high school attrition (p. 724).

Socioeconomic status seems to be the largest predictor for dropping out, as adolescents from low-income households continue to drop out of high school at higher rates than those from other socioeconomic backgrounds (Reimer, 2011). Although many youth from poor households do graduate from high school, Englund, Edgeland, and Collins (2008) noted that the dropout rate for students from the low-income bracket was, “twice the percentage of adolescents in the middle-income, and nearly 6 times the percentage of those individuals in the high-income bracket” (p.77). Pharris-Ciureja, Hirschman, and Willhoft (2012) noted that students from “low-income families are 25% less likely to graduate than are students from non-poor homes...Students from the best neighborhoods are twice as likely to graduate on time as students from the lowest ranked neighborhoods” (p.724)”.

Unfortunately, these sociological problems seem to pass on from generation to generation. Richards (2009) stated, “In empirical analyses of parental influence, the two most important variables are usually parental education levels and family income. Parental education measures the stock of human capital that parents can contribute to their children’s education; family income measures the current resources, including parental time, that families contribute” (p.17). Often, these reasons are cultural. Richards (2009) noted that an obvious example “of cultural alienation from formal education exists among Canada’s Aboriginals. The importance of this alienation has been noted in virtually all studies of Aboriginal education” (p.13). Given the variety and enormity of the causes of this dropout crisis, it is easy to see how many might conclude that it is a complex problem that affects all adolescents, but particularly the most

marginalized and vulnerable. A closer examination of education from a sociological perspective might be useful in better determining ways to combat the dropout crisis.

Still, new and innovative research needs to be directed at this crisis from multiple perspectives (not just sociological) due to its confounding multidimensional causes, so that more effective responses can be created. Englund, Edgeland, and Collins (2008) noted:

Many high-risk, low socioeconomic (SES) youth do complete high school, however, and some individuals drop out of high school despite doing well academically. Although much research has been done investigating predictors of dropping out of high school, few studies have attempted to explore factors that influence students who are at risk of dropping out to stay in school or influence students who are not at risk to drop out of high school” (p.80).

As Manitoba currently has the highest dropout rate in Canada, it would greatly benefit from an exploration of these influential factors.

Manitoba's Response to the High School Dropout Crisis

In the past ten years, Manitoba's government has announced significant legislation and produced policies directed towards attempting to make it possible for youth to experience more successes in schools (Reimer, 2012a). Arguably, the two most significant policies related to high school success may be around (a) the raising of the compulsory school age from 16 to 18 years, and (b) the formalized promotion of inclusive education.

Manitoba raises the compulsory school age from 16 to 18 years. In 2011, Manitoba's government raised the compulsory school age from 16 years of age to either graduation or 18 years of age through the amendment of *Bill 13: The Preparing Students for Success Act*.

Education Minister Nancy Allen announced that the purpose of the legislation was “to actively

engage students in learning and help them stay in school until the age of 18” (Manitoba News Release, 2011). Bill 13 was amended to state that, a student 16 years of age or older who refused to attend was liable and subject to a fine of up to \$200. She added the following rationale for the amendment:

Success in the modern economy will be dependent on students having every opportunity to pursue post-secondary education, training and apprenticeships. Those opportunities are lost when a young person does not have a high-school diploma or equivalent. Raising the compulsory education age to 18 will help ensure kids stay in school and are well prepared for life beyond the classroom (Manitoba News Release, 2011).

Manitoba is not the only province to introduce such legislation. Oreopoulos (2005) noted that the motivation for introducing and updating these laws relates to assumptions that children are better served if they are legally mandated to stay in school. Oreopoulos (2005) examined a combined dataset containing over 9 million Canadian-born citizens between the ages of 20 to 64, who were 14 years old between 1920 and 1970. Oreopoulos (2005) examined differences in educational attainment in provinces once mandatory school ages were raised, and concluded that compulsory education considerably increased adult earnings and substantially decreased the probability of future poverty and unemployment. In short, Oreopoulos’ (2005) findings supported the notion that “compulsory schooling legislation was effective in generating large lifetime gains to would-be-dropouts” (p.4). For example, Oreopoulos (2005) noted, “Children compelled to take another grade of school end up with about 12.3 percent higher annual income, on average, than children not restricted to stay in school longer” (p.18).

Manitoba promotes inclusive education. Within the past ten years, Manitoba has produced unprecedented legislation and policies that have done more to ensure the inclusion of

children in regular, neighbourhood schools than at any other period in history (Reimer, 2012a). All rights and responsibilities related to inclusive special education belong to Manitoba's Ministry of Education. These are defined in Manitoba's Public Schools Act and in the Education Administration Act. The most significant piece of legislation guiding inclusive special education in Manitoba is the Public Schools Amendment Act (Appropriate Educational Programming), which was proclaimed on October 28, 2005. This act reflects, "Manitoba's commitment to providing all students with appropriate programming that supports student participation in both the academic and social life of schools" (Standards for Student Services, 2006a, p. 1).

Manitoba Education, Citizenship, and Youth (Manitoba Education) has recently published numerous useful manuals concerning inclusive special education policies, regulations, and guidelines, including *Appropriate Education Programming in Manitoba: Standards for Student Services* (2006a), *Handbook for Developing and Implementing Individual Education Plans* (2010), and *A Formal Dispute Resolution Process* (2006b). All of these documents were designed with the hopes of engaging every student, which ultimately could lead to an increase in the number of high school graduates (Reimer, 2012a). Additionally, Manitoba policy (2006a) stated that inclusion is a means of enhancing the well-being of every member of the community.

Stainback and Stainback (1996) believed that inclusive school communities provided benefits to all students, avoided the ill effects of segregation, and promoted equality. Stainback et al. (1996) have noted that students labelled with both mild and severe disabilities obtained significant academic and social gains in inclusive settings. Downing and Peckham-Hardins (2007) determined that all students benefited from inclusive educational settings.

Schools are powerful instruments of socialization (Reimer, 2011), and inclusive initiatives are considered crucial in addressing educational equity (Roland, 2008). Clarke (2006)

noted that equal educational opportunities for everyone may be the only hope in attaining socially-just communities and nations for all of its citizens, including newcomers. Many contend that the best opportunity to create an inclusive school climate is to create an educational community that promotes inclusive teaching and learning practices (Kliewer & Biklen, 1996; Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Stainback & Stainback, 1996).

Reinke and Herman (2002) concluded that interventions aimed at improving students' academic performance decreased antisocial behavior and delinquency. Reinke and Herman (2002) noted that, "preexisting risk factors (i.e., family stressors, poverty, neglect, and abuse) for academic failure and antisocial behavior are compounded by poor classroom management, lack of teacher involvement, and ineffective teaching, putting these students at even greater risk" (p.552). Additionally, Reinke and Herman (2002) believed that the "downward trajectory of academic failure, antisocial behavior, school rebellion, and school dropout" are all invariably related to one another (p.552). Stainback and Stainback (1996) stated that, "when provided with appropriate educational supports in inclusive settings, students previously labelled as at-risk report significant academic and social gains" (p.31). Perhaps inclusive school settings motivate students to perform better in high schools because they envision a brighter future ahead.

High Schools and Inclusive Education

It seems logical to assume that Manitoba's government hopes that the provincial adoption of more inclusive educational practices and the raising of compulsory schooling will one day curb the number of youths dropping out of high school. Still, the fact remains that a large number of early school leavers exit from high schools, while the inclusive education movement seemed to most quickly take root in elementary schools. Priestley (2004) noted, "Increasingly, especially at elementary (Kindergarten to Grade Six) schools, students with special needs have access to

and participate in the same physical spaces, social milieu, and academic work as other students” (p.9), and acknowledged that, “In practice, there is more evidence of inclusion at the elementary than the secondary level” (p.11). Inclusion is proclaimed to have social and legal benefits for all students, but academic inclusion becomes increasingly difficult to accomplish as students progress through the public school system, especially when they reach high school (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007). The question that must be asked then is why inclusive education does not appear to be catching on as well in high schools, and is this contributing significantly to the high school dropout rate?

The problem with this question is that many adolescents begin the path to dropping out long before they enter high school (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007) due to a great combination of factors (Englund, Edgeland, & Collins, 2008; Pharris-Ciureja, Hirschman, & Willhoft, 2012; Richards 2009). Additionally, there may be valid reasons why high school teachers find it difficult to employ inclusive practices as they are currently constructed.

There are some fundamental (and beneficial) differences between high schools and elementary schools, and the current understanding of what constitutes inclusive education does not fit so neatly within the high school model as it does within the elementary one. Berry (2011) posited that "a shared definition and standardized models of inclusion do not exist, and so practical and conceptual confusions continue" (p.628). If this supposition has merit, then many high school teachers may have actually successfully incorporated inclusive practices by creatively connecting with youth who had been disengaged before they entered high school. This theory would support the assumptions that many high school teachers hold the unique position of being more intimately familiar with the nuances and intricacies of the high school system, and that they are the only educators that have daily interactions with the youth that tend to vanish

from Manitoba's high schools. Perhaps high school teachers hold vital information about what causes at-risk youths to stay, or even reappear.

For this study, I sought out high school teachers and attempted to identify exactly what they do that keeps adolescents in school. For this study, I captured the voices of these teachers by assembling a think tank. In determining the theoretical framework for this study, I was influenced by several logical positivist and post positivist research paradigms. For example, logical positivists emphasize logical analysis (Yu, 2003). I hoped to use this type of analysis in this study, recognizing that social inequality and inclusion are emotionally and politically very sensitive topics. Still, I respect Levy's (2010) position that critical thinking is necessary in order to create a better world. Second, logical positivists are most interested in the knowledge that can come from experience "[i.e. synthetic a posteriori]" (Willis, 2007, p.40). I hoped to learn from the experiences of knowledgeable high school classroom teachers. Additionally, I believe in the post positivist position that inquiry should come from "multiple perspectives from participants rather than a single reality" (Creswell, 2007, p.20). Third, I align myself with the post positivist position that no study can ever definitively "prove" anything to be true, but can only assist in supporting or dismissing theories (Willis, 2007).

To gain insight into these areas, literature specific to the sociology of education, Manitoba's interpretation of inclusion, and the unique nature of high schools and their teachers are reviewed in Chapter 2. A study designed to gain insights from high school teachers' perceptions on keeping youth in school is reported and discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As socioeconomic variables appear to be associated with the primary reasons why students become socially, physically, and academically alienated from high school, a review of some of the literature concerning education from a sociological perspective seems to be a reasonable place to start. *Social exclusion* is a concept used to characterize different and prevalent forms of social disadvantage in society today (Reimer, 2011). Wotherspoon (2002) once noted that, “for society as a whole, the social exclusion of individuals and groups can become a major threat to social cohesion and economic prosperity” (p.viii). He argued that social exclusion was increasingly becoming one of the largest issues facing Canada today as the economic gap among families widened. He certainly makes a compelling case, citing the following examples.

- 1) There is an over-representation of racial minority families and children among those living in poverty in large cities, and the denial of access to many services to immigrant and refugee families.
- 2) There has been a 43% increase in the number of children in poverty in Canada since 1989.
- 3) There has been a 130% increase in the number of children in homeless shelters in Toronto.
- 4) Canada has one of the highest youth incarceration rates among Commonwealth countries (Wotherspoon 2002, p. vii.).

Educators need to ask themselves whether or not today's school system assists in transforming society to help deal with such social exclusion issues, or if it actually exacerbates

them in terms of academic exclusion and increased dropout rates. Loreman, Deppeler, and Harvey (2005) contended that inclusive community building has to begin in schools if we hope to rid society of “segregation, oppression, and elitism” (p.v).

Poverty, low achievement, and behaviour problems are all highly associated with failure to succeed in high school (Englund, Edgeland, & Collins, 2008, Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007).

Unfortunately, it appears that poverty is often the major predictor of high school failure.

Englund, Edgeland, and Collins (2008) reported that students from poor backgrounds were six times more likely to drop out of high school than those in the highest income brackets. Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007) arrived at similar findings, stating:

The best documented correlate and risk factor in disengagement and early school leaving is socioeconomic status (SES) and parental social class. Students from lower SES backgrounds are much more likely to leave high school without obtaining a diploma, than are those from higher SES backgrounds (p.17).

Still, these researchers were careful to point out that many youth from low socioeconomic backgrounds do complete high school, and that some individuals drop out of high school despite doing well academically (Englund, Edgeland, & Collins, 2008). As it appears obvious that high school graduation greatly improves the quality of life for so many, further analysis into the issue of high school dropouts is required.

I attempted to complete this task as follows. First, given that there seems to be such a strong correlation between socioeconomic issues and academic success, I have highlighted several aspects of sociology and education, paying particular attention to the different types of capital that exist. Second, given that there has been a significant emphasis on inclusive education as a means of combating inequities in education, I have included a brief summary of Manitoba's

interpretation of inclusion. Third, I have drawn attention to the unique characteristics and challenges of high schools, including a close examination of the unique characteristics of high school teachers. Finally, based on insights gained from examining the sociological perspective of education, Manitoba's interpretation of inclusion, and my own critical analysis, I have highlighted the specific focus of my research for this study.

Sociology of Education: Issues and Implications

Although the message sounds ominous, many sociologists contend that today's education system is flawed in its design because it prevents the "underclass" from succeeding (Seabury, 1972, p.41). This is particularly concerning when we consider that, nearly 80 years later, some critics still echo the sentiments of Mannheim (1936) when he said, "Modern education from its inception is a living struggle, a replica, on a small scale of the conflicting purposes and tendencies which rage in society at large" (p. 156)". Sociologists like Mannheim argued that the current education system continues to perpetuate the social inequities that exist today (Davies and Guppy, 2010). While this issue could be viewed much more intensely through the lens of social determinism, I have chosen not to do this for the purposes of this paper. Rather, this paper examines the contention by providing a general overview of traditional sociological perspectives related to our current education system, paying particular attention to inequities in capital disbursement.

Sociological Perspectives of Education

John Dewey (1947) noted that, "what nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life" (p.17). From a sociological perspective, Durkheim (1956) described education as "the influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life. Its object is to arouse and to develop in the child a certain number of physical,

intellectual, and moral states which are demanded of [him or her] by both the political society as a whole and the special milieu for which [he or she] is specifically destined” (p.370). In essence, education has and continues to be the action of passing on the knowledge, information, values, and culture from older generations to younger ones.

Historically, the French and American revolutions, combined with the simultaneous industrial revolution, provided a catalyst to the notion that all people should develop their individual talents and capacities to their fullest extent through education (Durkheim, 1956). In recent times, society has made the education of its youth a greater priority than at any other time in history. Today, society places even greater emphasis on jobs that require specialized skills and training (Reimer, 2011). From 1981 to 2001, the number of jobs requiring a high level of knowledge had tripled (Davies and Guppy, 2010). In short, society's demand for individuals with high-level skills has exploded. Society expects schools to provide individuals with these skills.

According to Wotherspoon (2009), the idea that schools are an “investment to stimulate productivity and economic growth” (p.25) is known as human capital theory. Davies and Guppy (2010) stated that, “Human capital theory sees schools as organized largely to nurture productive skills needed in the economy, and thus receive public support accordingly” (p.55). It is evident that education has symbiotically and exponentially increased in value for both the individual and the public. One of the major issues with the education system is whether or not schools promote equitable access for everyone, or if the entire system is biased towards privileged groups and continues to unevenly distribute important capital.

Economic, Cultural, and Social Capital

In the following section, I discuss the accumulation of the various forms of capital, and make connections between acquiring this capital and being successful in school. In Chapter 4,

teachers in this study discussed issues concerning the uneven distribution of capital among students, and their responses to this phenomenon.

Bourdieu (1986) distinguished between three forms of capital as *economic*, *social*, and *cultural*. Although economic capital is the most commonly referred to form of capital, cultural and social capital are also very valuable in today's world (Reimer, 2011). Whitaker (2006) defined cultural capital as the "cultural practices, including language patterns and experiences such as visits to museums, that provide knowledge of middle and upper-class culture – the culture of schools" (p.15). Some examples of cultural capital include having a large vocabulary, appreciating the arts, and frequenting museums. Schools have the ability to offer this type of capital to youth (Reimer, 2011). When compared to middle and upper-class families, parents from working class families are less likely to cultivate this type of capital in their children. Bourdieu (1998) argued that the current education system does little more than increase the gap between the middle and upper class families, and working class families, as these groups tend to have unequal amounts of it from the outset. Bourdieu (1998) described how families use cultural capital as a reproductive strategy:

Families are corporate bodies animated by a ...tendency to perpetuate their social being, with all its power and privileges, which is the basis of reproductive strategies: fertility strategies, matrimonial strategies, successional strategies, economic strategies, and last but not least, educational strategies. Families invest all the more in school education (in transmission, in help of all kinds, and in some cases...in money) as their cultural capital is more important. It allows us to understand how the highest school institutions, those which give access to the highest social positions, become increasingly monopolized by the children of privileged categories (pp.19-20).

In addition to receiving cultural capital, middle and upper class parents are also more able to pass on social capital to their children. Social capital is about the power that social connections, networking, and relationships have in our lives (Reimer, 2011). Davies and Guppy (2010) stated that, "If cultural capital refers to what you know, social capital refers to who you know" (p.52). This is troubling because students from middle and upper classes seem to have the ability to convert social and cultural capital into economic capital in a way that students from poor backgrounds cannot (Whitaker, 2006).

The question one must ask is whether *academic* capital is similar to social and cultural capital, in that it can be converted into economic capital, and can be passed on from generation to generation. Richards (2009) noted the importance of parental academic success in relation to their children's chances, stating, "In empirical analyses of parental influence, the two most important variables are usually parental education levels and family income" (p.19). Further, Richards (2009) contended that, "Parental education measures the stock of human capital that parents can contribute to their children's education; family income measures the current resources, including parental time, that families contribute" (p.19).

However, parents from working class families are less likely than middle and upper class families to cultivate and accumulate the key types of capital essential for school success. Mills (2008) posited that, "An individual from a working-class background...will have acquired dispositions which are different in certain respects from those acquired by individuals who were brought up in a middle-class milieu (p.80)." Compared to middle and upper-class families, parents from working class families are less likely to cultivate social, cultural, and even academic capital in their children.

Figure 2.0. Cultural and Social Capital

Cultural	Social
<p><i>Cultural capital</i> is the “cultural practices, including language patterns and experiences such as visits to museums, that provide knowledge of middle and upper-class culture – the culture of schools” (Whitaker (2006, p.15).</p> <p>Some examples of <i>cultural capital</i> include having a large vocabulary, appreciating the arts, and frequenting museums.</p> <p>Families invest all the more in school education (in transmission, in help of all kinds, and in some cases...in money) as their <i>cultural capital</i> is more important. It allows us to understand how the highest school institutions, those which give access to the highest social positions, become increasingly monopolized by the children of privileged categories (Bourdieu, 1998, pp.19-20).</p>	<p><i>Social capital</i> is about the power of social connections, networking, and relationships we make in our life.</p> <p>“If <i>cultural capital</i> refers to what you know, <i>social capital</i> refers to who you know” (Davies and Guppy, 2010, p.52).</p> <p>This is troubling because students from middle and upper-classes have the ability to convert <i>social</i> and <i>cultural capital</i> into <i>economic capital</i> (Whitaker, 2006).</p>

For example, Schatzman and Strauss (1955) stated that there were several key differences in the communicative modes of adults coming from lower socioeconomic backgrounds versus those raised in middle class homes. They concluded that these differences in communicative modes resulted in differences in thinking and perceiving the world around them. Mueller (1973) noted that adults from lower class backgrounds had more “fixed” and “rigid” perspectives, and spoke in a more “restrictive code”, using “descriptive” and “concrete” modes of reasoning (p.73). Additionally, Mueller (1973) stated that adults from lower class backgrounds exercised an authoritarian type of parental control, resulting in their children acquiring similar restrictive patterns of communicating (p.73). In contrast, Mills (1973) noted that adults from middle class backgrounds spoke in a more “elaborative code”, using more “analytic” and “abstract” modes of reasoning (p.73). He stated that this created more “status oriented” adults from middle class backgrounds who were more open to “several standpoints and alternative interpretations” (p.53). He further stated that these codes resulted in a more “democratic (and) person oriented” type of parental control (p. 73). Subsequently, the children of these parents inherited more elaborated language codes. If Schatzman’s and Strauss’s (1955) position that differences in communicative modes resulted in differences in thinking and perceiving, then children raised in middle class homes are more likely to have more elaborative language and thinking skills. The codes used in middle class homes seem much more closely aligned with the codes necessary for school success. As a result, some students have received much more valuable school capital than others before they even enter school for the first time.

As children acquire different forms and amounts of capital from their homes before they even enter our school system, the only real potential to help level the playing field rests in the hands of a more inclusive and democratic school system. One of the most recent and promising

educational responses in recent Manitoba history is the promotion of a more inclusive educational system.

Manitoba and Inclusive Education

It is important for the purpose of this study to have some understanding of Manitoba's interpretation of inclusion as a means of creating a more equitable school system. In response to the outcry for more explicit legislation concerning programming for students with special needs, a comprehensive review titled *The Manitoba Special Education Review: Final Report* (Proactive Information Services, 1998) was completed and published near the end of the twentieth century. Ultimately, the review concluded that the province needed to enact such a legislation that would mandate school divisions to provide consistent appropriate education for every student in the province, and have policies in place that ensured this took place.

After several years of perceived inaction on the part of provincial government, and largely due to the mounting pressures placed upon them by several local advocacy groups, the recommendations made by the *Manitoba Special Education Review* (1998) were finally transformed into legislation. In November 2003, *Bill 13 - The Public Schools Amendment Act (Appropriate Educational Programming)* was introduced by the Manitoba Government. Bill 13 allowed the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth to develop regulations regarding appropriate educational programming and dispute resolution. The Bill made an amendment to the Public Schools Act. On October 28, 2005, Bill 13 and supporting regulations were proclaimed.

In the past ten years, Manitoba has announced significant legislation and produced numerous policies directing inclusive education (Reimer, 2012a). All rights and responsibilities related to inclusive special education belong to Manitoba's Ministry of Education. These are

defined in Manitoba's *Public Schools Act* and in the *Education Administration Act*. Currently, Manitoba Education is the provincial government department that oversees all matters related to education. Provincial legislation mandates that appropriate educational programming must be provided to all registered students in Manitoba schools. However, Manitoba Education allows for each of the 37 Manitoba school divisions to oversee their particular areas of the province. Manitoba Education regularly assists these school divisions with information on how appropriate education of all students should be provided.

Manitoba Education should be applauded for taking on the challenge of producing policies and documents mandating the right to attend schools. They have taken great strides in recognizing and promoting equitable education as an essential human right for those with special, diagnosed needs (Reimer, 2012a). Have similar efforts been made to assist those youth who end up dropping out of school? More specifically, Manitoba has advanced the universal right for youth to attend one's regular neighbourhood classroom and school, but have they achieved the goal of having all youth attend their regular neighbourhood classroom and school until they graduate?

Inclusive Education Definitions and Values

Internationally, nationally, and provincially, there is strong support and consensus for inclusion and inclusive education (Reimer, 2012a). There are, however, numerous interpretations of what the terms 'inclusion' and 'inclusive education' actually mean. Berry (2011) noted that a "shared definition and standardized models of inclusion do not exist, and so practical and conceptual confusions continue" (p.628). As reported in Chapter 4, the teachers in this study shared their interpretations of inclusion and inclusive education as they relate to high schools.

Consequently, I include a summary of Manitoba's interpretation of these constructs in the following section.

Berry (2011) argued that critiques of inclusive education have not yet become as prevalent as those of special education, perhaps because it has become such a "powerful rallying-cry" (Dyson, 1999, p.49) against inequitable learning opportunities. The danger is that without such scrutiny, as Dyson (1999) proclaimed, inclusive education could "become an empty slogan, reduced, perhaps, to a basic concern with [the physical] 'place' (p.49) where students are educated, instead of the philosophy of inclusion. A closer examination of both the Manitoba interpretation of inclusion and the unique nature of high schools may help to resolve conflicts in ideology and delivery of services in high schools.

Manitoba's *Standards for Student Services* (2006) stated that it was, "committed to fostering inclusion for *all* people" (p.1), and that inclusion "provide(s) the foundation for a richer future for *all* of us" (p.1). Second, Manitoba (2006) also stated that in inclusive schools, "All students come from diverse backgrounds and want their differences to be respected" (p.5). Third, equitable access to learning was highlighted as an essential component of Manitoba's interpretation. For example, Manitoba (2006) stated that, "an inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and *equal* access to the benefits of citizenship" (p. 1).

Manitoba's laws do provide some guidelines for "appropriate programming". These guidelines are located in *Manitoba's Public Schools Act* and in the *Education Administration Act*. The most significant piece of legislation guiding inclusive special education in Manitoba is the *Public Schools Amendment Act* (Appropriate Educational Programming), which was proclaimed on October 28, 2005. This act stated, "Manitoba's commitment to providing all

students with appropriate programming that supports student participation in both the academic and social life of schools” (Standards for Student Services, 2006a, p. 1).

Manitoba seems to strongly promote appropriate educational programming as students learning in the same classroom (Reimer, 2012a). Manitoba's *Standards* (2006) stated that, “The first and foremost consideration in the placement of all students is the right to attend the designated catchment school for their residence in a regular classroom with their peers or in a program designated by the school board if the school does not provide it” (p.9). A closer inspection of this statement suggests that Manitoba's language does mandate that every student be in the regular classroom, regardless of age and grade level. For example, Manitoba's *Standards* (2006) also specified, “Arrangements that ensure that teachers have the instructional and other supports to welcome and include all learners, in all of their diversity and exceptionalities, in the regular classroom, in the neighbourhood school with their age peers” (p.6).

Based on this review, the preceding analysis concludes that Manitoba's interpretation possesses the following characteristics.

1. Inclusive education is meant to benefit all children and youth.
2. Diversity among learners is a positive phenomenon that should be honoured.
3. Inclusion and equity are invariably linked.
4. All students should learn in their neighbourhood schools.
5. Appropriate educational programming for all students is emphasized, with the ideal (but not compulsory) choice being that students learn in the same classroom as their same-aged peers.

As these characteristics can be found in Manitoba's interpretation, it seems reasonable to assume that these principles are expected to apply to all youth in Manitoba, including those in high schools. Further, it seems that Manitoba's idea of inclusion places significant focus on applying to students with diagnosed special needs who exercise their right to be taught in an inclusive learning environment. Has the same attention been provided for students of high school age who may or may not have documented special needs, but just stop showing up for school altogether? Is similar attention warranted?

Manitoba Schools – An Overview

In the next session, a closer inspection of Manitoban high schools, the students who are supposed to attend them, and the classroom teachers who work in them is conducted. Education is primarily the responsibility of each provincial government in Canada. In Manitoba, education is governed principally by *The Public Schools Act* and *The Education Administration Act* as well as regulations made under both Acts (Manitoba Education, 2013). In this legislation, all the rights and responsibilities of the Minister of Education, school boards, principals, teachers, parents and students are explicated.

Legally, children “who are six years of age or older on December 31 in a given year have the right to attend school from the beginning of the fall term of that calendar year until they receive a graduation diploma, or until the last school day of June in the calendar year in which they become 21 years of age” (Manitoba Education, 2013, para. 2). The compulsory school age in Manitoba begins at 7 years of age and ends when students become 18 years old. Legally, parents and legal guardians of a child of compulsory school age are responsible for sending him or her to school. Manitoba's school system includes public schools, independent schools (funded and non-funded), and home schooled students (Manitoba Education, 2013). Public schools

operate directly under the Minister of Education. In addition, some students in Manitoba attend First Nation's schools operated under federal government jurisdiction. However, they are beyond the scope of this study.

Although there are several ways in which Manitoba youth can attain high school diplomas, it is important to state at this time that my study intended to investigate the thoughts of classroom teachers within public high schools. Therefore, the next section of this paper focuses on the unique nature of these high schools so that a better understanding of their unique systems and structures can be attained.

Manitoba Education's Promotion of Strategies and Social Construct Theories

Manitoba Education's *Standards for Student Services* (2006a) highlighted several strategies to create an inclusive environment that have been shown to have the potential to promote the inclusion of diverse learners in the regular classroom (Reimer, 2012a). Specifically, Manitoba Education's *Standards* (2006a) referred to "universal design" as a means to achieve inclusive schools. Manitoba Education (2006a) referred to it again, stating, "In education, universally designed schools, classrooms, curricula and materials provide all students with access to the resources they need, regardless of their diverse learning needs" (p. 9).

In order to better facilitate inclusive educational practices, some other significant learning theories that have gained prominence in Manitoba include differentiated instruction (Hall, Strangman, and Meyer, 2007) and Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences. Hall, Strangman, and Meyer (2007) defined differentiated instruction as a "process of teaching and learning for students of differing abilities in the same class" (p.2). They were referring to the fact that teachers needed strategies in order to deal with increasingly diverse classroom populations.

Scaffolding, experiential learning, and inquiry-based learning environments are just some examples of differentiated instruction (Reimer, 2010).

The need for differentiated instruction is reinforced by Gardner's (1983) ideas about the nature of intelligence and learning. He proposed that, rather than having one type of intelligence that is measured as an intelligence quotient (IQ), people have multiple intelligences. These included: linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, and naturalist intelligence. Consequently, Gardner (1983) posited that learning activities should be differentiated to respect students' multiple intelligences.

Levy's (2010) Reification Error. The aforementioned theories have gained increasing popularity in inclusive education, primarily because they have been very useful models that help describe different phenomena. However, are these theories actual facts? As these social theories are not directly measurable, they are what Levy (2010) referred to as *construct* theories (p.11). Unlike *event* theories, which Levy (2010) stated could be "verified or proven" (p.11), construct theories provide explanations that are not directly measurable, and can never be proven. Instead, they are "intangible abstractions" (p.11) that should be evaluated for their usefulness, not their correctness. Levy further cautioned that when construct theories are mistaken as fact, there is a tendency to believe they must be "obeyed" and never "violated" (Levy, 2010, p.12). Levy (2010) referred to this error in thinking as the "reification of theory" (p.12). Levy (2010) noted that, "To reify is to invent a concept [or construct], give it a name, and then convince ourselves that such a thing objectively exists in the world" (p.9). Howard Skipper, a pioneer in cancer chemotherapy, once stated that, "A model is a lie that helps you see the truth" (Mukherjee, 2010). Although his words may at first sound harsh, especially for those educators who have made the error of

reifying construct theories like universal design, multiple intelligences, and differentiated instruction, does Skipper's statement hold truth?

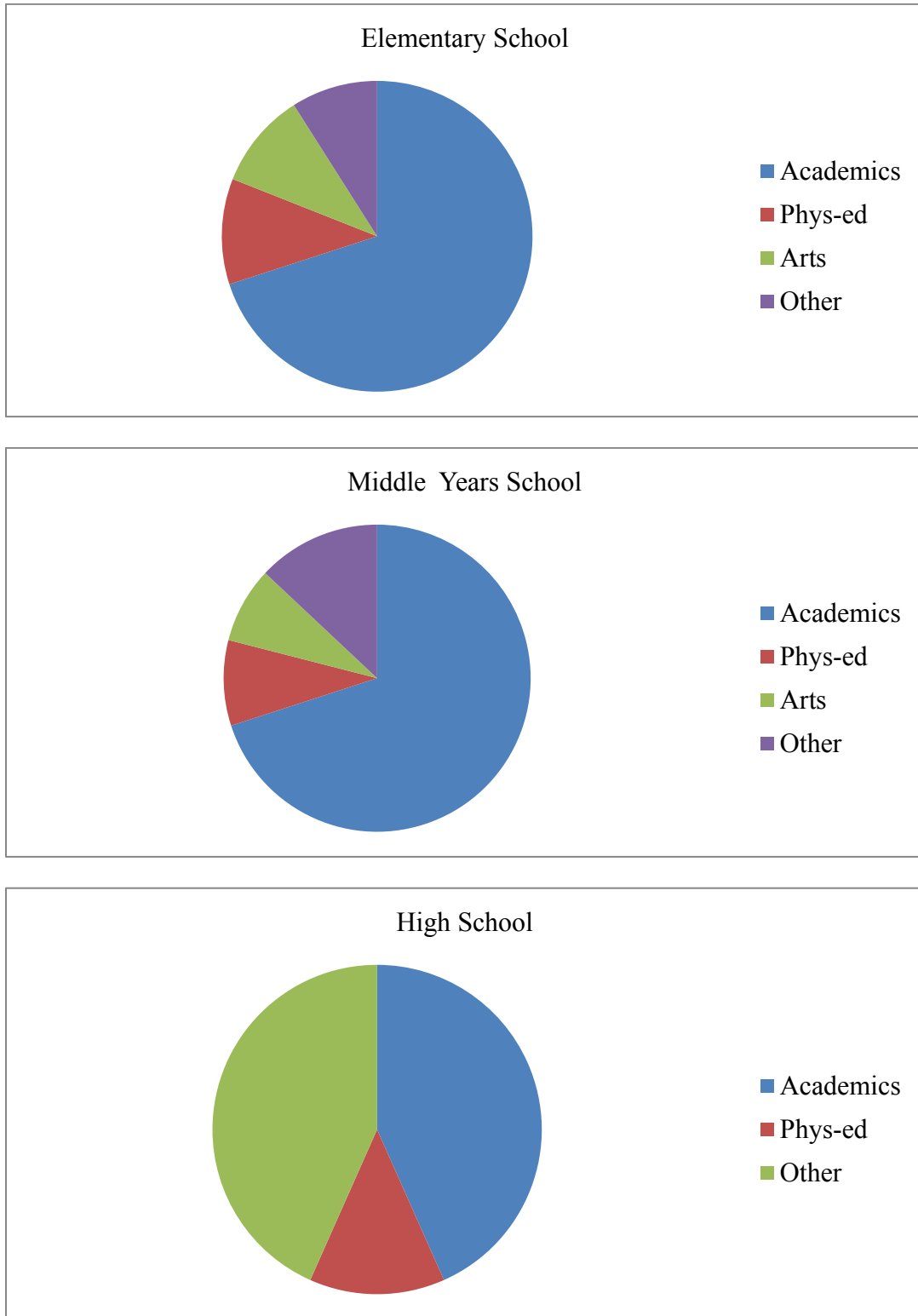
Whatever the conclusion, it is widely accepted that universal design, multiple intelligences, and differentiated instruction have all been very useful social constructs theories in the areas of inclusive education, which may in turn reduce the dropout rates. Although they cannot be proven as true, is it possible that construct theories like these are incapable of being improved upon? Levy (2010) posited that they can, noting that Einstein's model of gravity was superior to Newton's because it better explained why objects in the universe could be attracted to other objects in the universe (p.12). It would be interesting to hear what high school classroom teachers have to say about these theories, how well they correlate with their day-to-day classroom activities, and their suggestions for improvements.

Unique Nature of High Schools

The transition from elementary to secondary school is a normal life event that affects different students in different ways. Elementary schools and high schools are both components of the Manitoba's school system, yet there are several distinct and noteworthy differences between the two. The following section highlights some of the literature concerning these differences. In Chapter 4, teachers in this study share their own thoughts on many of these differences.

One of the major differences relates to programming. In elementary schools, Manitoba Education (2013) mandates that 70% of the daily programming must be focused on regular academics (such as English language arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies), 11% on Physical Education, and 10% in Arts Education. In the middle school years, 70% of the daily programming must be focused on academics, 9% on Physical Education, and only 8% on the Arts (Manitoba Education, 2013).

Figure 2.1. Time Allocation in Manitoba Elementary, Middle Years School, and High Schools



The high school model appears to be much more flexible in design, allowing students a significant amount of choice. Grade 9 is also the first time that students are part of a “credit” system. In order to graduate from a Manitoba high school in the regular English program, a student needs to obtain 30 credits (Manitoba Education, 2012). Only thirteen of the 30 credits (or 43.3% of programming) must be focused on regular academics such as Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies, and 4 credits (or 13.3% of programming) must be in Physical Education. The remaining 13 credits (or 43.3% of programming) can be comprised of options that the student is allowed to select (Manitoba Education, 2012).

In most Manitoba high schools, there are a significant number of options that students can select. In larger high schools, the variety is even more impressive. The types of optional credits offered in schools vary widely, depending on student needs and available resources (Manitoba Education, 2012).

Depending on the types of compulsory programming and options that students take, there are a number of optional programming and diplomas that students can earn. For example, if students earn 8 to 14 Technology Education credits, they can obtain a “Technology Education” diploma (Manitoba Education, 2012). Manitoba Education (2012) allows students the option of taking “International Baccalaureate” and “Advanced Placement Courses”, along with the “Special Language Credit Option”, which allows students to earn a maximum of four credits in a language (including American Sign Language) other than English or French. Students can also obtain credits if they are registered in the “Royal Winnipeg Ballet professional program”, and the “Private Music Option” allows students who have successfully obtained standing in the Conservatory Canada Programs or Royal Conservatory of Music up to four credits (Manitoba Education, 2012).

Unique Challenges of High School Students

The majority of students entering high school have high expectations, see academic and social advantages to entering a new learning environment, and view the transition as a relatively easy and natural process of life (Tilleczek and Ferguson, 2007). Still, Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007) reported that the transition from elementary to secondary school has been recognized as a stumbling point for many students, and that it is often associated with “dips in academic achievement, dips in self-esteem, and increased social anxiety” (p. 9). Some studies, like Babb, Sabourin, Andruchuk, and Polyzoi's (2013) research on building success in high schools, have explored the unique nature of high school students and sought out methods to address these specific needs. For this study, a closer examination of the reasons behind these stumbling points provides me with some of the possible root causes of the dropout phenomenon. Shreiner (2013) believed that these dips were the result of four unique challenges that high school students face.

1. They can be behind academically.
2. They may have educational malaise.
3. They may struggle with self-identity.
4. They are being prepared for the real world.

Some high school students are far behind academically. Many contend that students who are physically present in a general classroom still risk feeling like they do not belong socially or academically, particularly as they enter middle years and high school (Kauffman, Bantz, & McCullough, 2002; Woolfolk, 1998). High schools depend upon the earlier grades to help prepare students academically and equip them with the skills necessary to succeed in secondary school. Unfortunately, it appears that while the diversity in academic levels may be relatively small in earlier grades, the gap widens as children enter their teens. In a study focused

on the academic success of children in government care, Ferguson and Wolkow (2012) stated that the “lag in grade level attainment increased with the age of the child. Eight percent of 10 year olds were behind while 54% of 18 year olds lagged behind” (p.1146). Shreiner (2013) describes the situation as follows:

Often, students arrive in high school ill equipped, without the basic knowledge necessary for success. This presents a problem both for the student, who now cannot complete the requisite work, and for the teacher, who must make modifications to her curriculum to accommodate these unprepared students. In addition, these students are all at varying levels, creating a situation that's extremely challenging for secondary-school teachers to cope with (para. 2).

Some high school students experience educational malaise. Although Shreiner (2013) referred to this problem as a “high school malaise”, it appears that this phenomenon actually begins years prior to entering high school. The American Psychological Association (APA) (2013) stated that the phenomenon known as the *middle school malaise* often can coincide with several major changes for young adolescents. The APA (2013) stated, “Most [adolescents] are in the throes of puberty; they're becoming more self-aware and self-conscious, and their thinking is growing more critical and more complex. At the same time, adolescents are often in a slump when it comes to academic motivation and performance” (para. 1). Many high school teachers struggle to cope with student apathy (Schreiner, 2013). This can often be a difficult challenge for teachers. Schreiner (2013) argued that high school teachers must not only teach their students, but also constantly motivate many of them to come to class every day and learn.

Academic failure can result in increased levels of truancy, gradual departure, and then ultimately school alienation (Reinke & Herman, 2002). Pharris-Ciureja, Hirschman, and Willhoft

(2012) indicated that dropping out was a gradual process, which made the event more difficult to track, and therefore more difficult to prevent.

The underlying problem is that high school attrition is not a clearly defined event. What may begin as a spell of absenteeism may be the first step toward dropping out. For a long period, neither the school nor the student may know if a spell of missed schooling is a temporary or permanent interruption in schooling (p.712).

It could be argued that the malaise that occurs as students progress through their school-aged years is not the result of apathy, but due to physical changes within students, socioeconomic factors, or feelings of being overwhelmed by new academic environments. Pharris-Ciureja, Hirschman, and Willhoft (2012) found that “9th grade shock, an unpredicted decline in academic performance upon entering high school, is a key mechanism behind the continuing crisis of high school attrition” (p.709). They posited that many students encounter failure during their first term in high school, which was not necessarily evident while they were in middle school. Further, they claimed that students from disadvantaged backgrounds were particularly susceptible to the ninth grade shock, but “low grades in the first year of high school are far more pervasive and consequential than what would be predicted from background variables alone” (p.710). As this phenomenon seems to occur to students across all socioeconomic and demographic boundaries, developmental factors need to be considered.

Developmental theories suggest that the high school age is a period in life when unique antisocial behaviours that conflict with academic success often appear suddenly in adolescents, only to disappear as they grow into young adults. Some argue that antisocial adolescence is more the result of social influences than antisocial behaviour that arises during childhood (Harden, D'Onofrio, Van Hulle, Turkheimer, Rodgers, Waldman, & Lahey, 2009; Moffitt, 1993). For

example, crime rates tend to spike as perpetrators enter their latter teens, and drop as they become young adults. Moffitt (1993) asserted that, "When official rates of crime are plotted against age, the rates for both prevalence and incidence of offending appear highest during adolescence; they peak sharply at about age 17 and drop precipitously in young adulthood" (p.675).

Although both parties agree on the approximate ages that people will most likely commit antisocial acts, Moffitt's theory distinctly categorizes perpetrators into two categories: adolescent-limited and life-course persistent. According to Moffitt (1993), adolescence-limited antisocial behaviour is the result of lack of developmental maturity and peer pressure.

Frankfort-Howard and Romm (2002) stated, "It is not unusual for some antisocial behaviors to emerge during the normal course of adolescence, but in milder forms and with fewer serious consequences (p.54). Cauffman, Steinberg, and Piquero (2005) believed that "adolescence-limited delinquency is both normative and typically social in nature, this sort of offending is usually group-oriented and relatively minor" (p.138). While serious, it is reasonable to presume that occasional high school truancy is likely be one of the "milder" and "relatively minor" forms of antisocial behaviour that they describe. However, once a habit, occasional truancy can become the gateway to dropping out altogether.

Moffitt (1993) further contended that there were marked individual differences in the stability of antisocial behavior. As parental influences become reduced, peer influences increase the likelihood of maladaptive behaviours in youth. She argued that many people temporarily behave antisocially, and it is largely based on the situations in which they find themselves. On the contrary, Moffitt (1993) noted that antisocial behaviour is chronic for only a small percentage of people, stating, "Temporary, situational antisocial behavior is quite common in the population,

especially among adolescents. Persistent, stable antisocial behavior is found among a relatively small number of males whose behavior problems are also quite extreme” (p.674).

Moffitt (1993) also stated that, “the steep decline in antisocial behavior between ages 17 and 30 is mirrored by a steep incline in antisocial behavior between ages 7 and 17” (p.675). As these youth become young adults, most adolescence-limited delinquents are able to live typical adult lives. Therefore, a logical argument can be made to support the notion that antisocial behaviour can be serious, but it is also both typical and temporary for many adolescents as they enter high school.

Still, adolescent-limited behaviour cannot be trivialized as simply a phase. Frankfort-Howard and Romm (2002) posited that adolescence limited young people are not immune to drug dependency, teenage pregnancy, and incarceration. In short, adolescent-limited antisocial behaviour can have negative consequences, but is likely not a terminal condition (Reimer, 2012b).

Cauffman, Steinberg, and Piquero (2005) believed that inadequate parenting, disrupted family bonds, poverty and other adversities tend to exacerbate the effects of the child's liabilities as they reach adolescence, or high school age. McGee, Wickes, Corcoran, Bor and Najman (2011) posited that other factors that associated with teenage antisocial behaviour included shorter relationship periods between the mother and her partner, maternal smoking during adolescence, the number of times the child lived with someone other than the mother. They concluded that the “disruption of parenting” (p.418) is an important component in the development of antisocial behaviour, which manifests itself most prominently during the teenage, or high school aged years.

The strength of adolescent-parent relationships also appears to correlate with high school success (Reimer, 2012b). Englund, Edgeland, and Collins (2008) conducted a study with 96 men and 83 women from low-income households in the United States from birth to age 23. They discovered that “expected graduates had higher levels of parent involvement in middle childhood, more supportive parent–child relationships in early adolescence, and higher levels of social competence with adults than unexpected dropouts.” (p. 77).

Many high school students struggle with self-identity. Secondary school students often have much to distract them from learning, as they develop their self-identity (Shreiner, 2013). This quest to define themselves can be a consuming distraction that causes adolescents to continually lose focus on their education. Adolescence is a period of identity formation, and also of shared feelings of rejection and disrespect. It may also be a time when many experience abuse. Smith, Ireland and Thornberry (2005) conducted a study that, “aimed to investigate the impact of adolescent maltreatment on antisocial behavior, while controlling for prior levels of problem behavior as well as socio-demographic characteristics” (p.1099). Their study examined the development of antisocial behaviors in 884 urban youths, and followed from them from age 13 into adulthood. Among the maltreated adolescents, Smith et al. (2005) reported that, “14 experienced sex abuse, 36 experienced physical abuse, and 32 were neglected or emotionally abused. Different types of adolescent maltreatment, including neglect, appear to produce similar adverse behavioral consequences (p.1099). They concluded that, “Adolescent maltreatment necessitates increased attention in view of its enduring and potentially wide-ranging impact on the life span” p.1099).

Some of these wide-ranging impacts create unique issues in high schools, particularly when their peers use diversity to hurt each other. For example, Ontario's Ministry of Education

(2009) states, "Homophobia has risen to the forefront of discussion. Cyber bullying and hate propaganda on the Internet were not issues ten years ago but now are major concerns for parents and students. In recent years, there has been a documented increase in reported incidents of anti-Black racism, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia in Canada" (p.7). These are issues that are likely not as prevalent in elementary schools as they are in high schools.

Struggles with self-identity, combined with weakened parental controls, often form the basis for group and subcultural formation (Short, 2002). Smith and Utting (2011) stated that, "Young people have become a more conspicuous and identifiable group, spending most of their time with people around their own age and displaying distinctive, sometimes spectacular, youth cultures. Such an identifiable and separate group can readily become the focus of fear and stigmatization" (p.68). The vast majority of adolescents have the need and tendency to value peers over other reference groups, and to align themselves with certain groups of peers (Parks, 1995). Palermo (2009) stated, "According to the social disorganization theory, a weak system of social relations due to the dissolution of the family, joblessness, and poverty brings about - especially in large cities - residential instability and anonymity. This is often followed by the social emargination of young people, who live as 'urban nomads'" (p.616).

It appears that, as parental influences are reduced, peer influences increase the likelihood of maladaptive behaviours in youth. From a social disorganization perspective, gang activities are one of the products of the weakened social controls of adults of immigrant groups over their youth, and the breakdown in social order within immigrant groups as they come to a new country (Reimer, 2012b). Gangs provide an alternative form of social order for youths in the event of the loss of traditional social controls (Bankston, 1998). Unfortunately, ethnic minority groups in society suffer from the greatest inequality and social disadvantage, and are the most likely to

affiliate with gang activity (Wortley & Tanner, 2004). Gangs in high schools have the potential to create a "tenacious framework" for school violence (Gaustad, 1991).

This framework has become even more dangerous in recent times, as youth now have more access to firearms (Blumstein, 1995), gang clashes have become increasingly lethal (Anderson, 1999), and schools with gangs are also more likely to have drugs available on school grounds (Bodinger-deUriarte, 1993). High school educators cannot choose to ignore or dismiss gang activity or any other type of violent behavior (Reimer, 2012b). As youth get physically bigger and can gain access to more weapons, these behaviours have the potential to cause serious harm to those engaging in it, along with innocent student bystanders and adults in and around the school. Therefore, high schools are often required to examine different strategies to reduce and/or prevent violent and criminal activities from pervading their schools (Reimer, 2012b).

High school students are preparing for the “real world”. Schreiner (2013) stated the following on this topic:

The real world is well within sight for many high school students. These learners will soon enter the work force. It is the responsibility of secondary school teachers not only to impart the necessary academic lessons but also to help these students make decisions about their future (para. 6).

One of the most pressing issues facing most high school aged children is, “What am I going to do with my life after high school?” Considering their age, this is an entirely appropriate question to ask. As discussed earlier, the most common way to obtain human capital is to build up one's credentials. According to some functional theorists, one of the main public purposes of education is that it sorts and selects individuals for different jobs and levels of educational achievement (Tannock, 2007), and also organizes individuals to fill distinct positions in society

and the workplace (Wotherspoon (2009). Whether one agrees with this statement or not, schooling has become the key path for social promotion and status (Davies & Guppy, 2010). Davies and Guppy (2010) later explained that schooling has this power because it is able to, “impact of organizing the teaching of knowledge in ways that are bureaucratic and that create formal pathways to jobs and labour markets through the proliferation of credentials” (p.14).

High school is often the first formal experience for many students to earn credentials in the form of high school credits. Additionally, it signifies the first time that some students might fail a course, thereby failing to earn a credit that their peers may have earned. Although it sounds harsh, high school may be the first experience for many children to learn that society still primarily leaves it to the individual to obtain higher levels of human capital. Secondly, high school classroom teachers are the ones expected to ensure that they all have equal opportunity to acquire it.

Unique Nature of High School Teachers

High school teachers hold the unique position of being intimately familiar with the high school system, and the youth who are expected to attend school up to age 18. They are the only educators that have daily interactions with youth who are at risk of dropping out, and the only ones able to provide opportunities for them to stay and receive much needed human capital. As a result, their perspectives on how to keep high school aged youths in schools may provide a key piece of the puzzle on how to successfully accomplish their mandate. Otherwise, the dropout crisis affecting so many of Manitoba's youth may continue.

Criticisms of High School Teachers

Still, there are critics who have poor general impressions of high school classroom teachers, and contend that the crisis may only be made worse due to the characteristics and

attitudes of these teachers (Elfers, Plecki, & McGowan, 2007; Leithwood, 2008; Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007). It is important for the purpose of my study that these criticisms be investigated, as they may provide a potential source of causal factors contributing to dropping out of high school.

High school teachers have it too easy. Leithwood (2008) conducted a study sponsored by the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) in which he reviewed surveys received from 264 secondary teachers (who had previously taught in elementary) and 2,765 elementary teachers from the province. Leithwood (2008) concluded in the report that, "Working conditions are more favourable for secondary teachers. That is the simple conclusion of our research on the experiences of elementary and secondary teachers in Ontario's public schools...even though differences on many separate measures appear to be small" (Leithwood, 2008, p.7).

The differences not only appeared admittedly small, but questions need to be asked about the validity of such a conclusion. For example, the ratio of surveys completed by elementary to secondary teachers was more than 10 to one, the vast majority of teachers asked to complete the survey were identified only because they were on ETFO's mailing list, and the only secondary teachers who were surveyed had previously taught in elementary schools. Still, it did not dissuade Leithwood (2008) from dramatically highlighting the following teacher quotations from the surveys in large, emboldened font at the top of several pages in the final report.

1. Teachers in secondary have no idea how good they have it. They have a way more relaxed day. They have way more freedom (p.3).
2. It is ten times easier in secondary (p.7).

3. In secondary I can breathe versus the faster pace in elementary, which leaves me exhausted at the end of each day (p.8).
4. I only have to plan for two or three subjects in secondary versus planning for every subject in elementary (p.10).
5. I can get 90% of my work done in secondary during the day (p.10).
6. In secondary we only have two semesters versus the three semesters in elementary. This reduces the amount of reporting and paperwork in secondary (p.12).
7. In secondary when I am 'on call' I can bring my marking into the class and am also exempted from duty that day (p.12).

High school teachers are cold and impersonal. Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007) recently conducted a large literature review on the topic of elementary to secondary school transition, based on approximately 100 international reports, academic papers, and policy pieces for the Ontario Ministry of Education. They concluded that, "Secondary schools have been found to be relatively bigger, more heterogeneous, more compartmentalized, less tolerant, more rule bound, more concerned with ability, and less personal, than are elementary schools" (p.29). With high school teachers, the study stated, "Student-teacher relations become less personal, less positive, less supportive, less caring, and teachers were found to trust students less" (Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007, p.31). On the contrary, Tilleczek and Ferguson's (2007) study concluded that, "Elementary teachers trusted students more and used less control in their discipline than did secondary teachers" (p.31).

Part of a Manitoba Association for Community Living's (2009) report asked whether parents felt supported by someone within the school system. In response, "86% felt supported at the middle school year's level, 77% felt supported at the elementary school level and [only] 63%

felt supported at the high school level” (p.19). Although the survey consisted of only 43 parents, this 23% reduction of perceived support between middle school and high school is significant, and could support the impression that high school teachers are not as supportive as their early and middle years counterparts.

One of the contributing factors to being viewed as cold and impersonal may have to do with the differences in the students they teach on any given day. For example, the Government of Alberta (2013) noted that high school classroom teachers in larger schools see up to 150 students or more a day, while elementary teachers were usually responsible for a homeroom class of 20 to 33 children. Given the large disparity in volume of students taught per day, it would be clearly more difficult to develop as close and personal relationship with all your students when high school teachers see 5 to 7 times more students on a daily basis.

High school teachers enjoy too much autonomy. Elfers, Plecki, and McGowan (2007) conducted a large study of 14,065 teachers located in 329 of Washington State's high schools concerning teacher retention. They learned that high school teachers reported a greater appreciation for the autonomy their job provided, when compared to elementary school teachers. Elfers, Plecki, and McGowan (2007) noted that high school teachers most often collaborate with their own department members.

Tilleczek & Ferguson's (2007) study concluded that this individualistic culture seemed to pervade secondary schools, stating, “In general, the principles of care and control [that] are seen as the core of elementary school culture while academics, student polarization, and fragmented individualism have been found to pervade secondary school cultures” (p.31). When each of these impressions are taken into account, it is easy to see how critics might conclude that high school teachers would have little to offer in terms of solving the dropout crisis. Therefore, a closer

inspection of the similarities and differences between high school teachers and their elementary and middle-years colleagues will occur in order to better understand some of the nuances between the groups.

High school teachers hold the distinctive position of being closely connected with the high school system, and they are the only educators that have daily interactions with the youth that tend to vanish from Manitoba's high schools. They also may be at risk of not having their voices heard due to exaggerated or false opinions of them. Rather than overlooking these teachers due to unfortunate misperceptions of a few, perhaps effective high school classroom teachers hold the key to helping students, otherwise at risk of dropping out, to continue to attend, or even helping those who have already left to reappear. In order to better understand the uniqueness of high school classroom teachers, a closer inspection of how and why they compare and contrast with elementary and middle-years teachers might be helpful.

I will once again follow Levy's (2010) "point of critical distinction" (PCD) to better compare and contrast high school teachers with their elementary and middle-years colleagues. Specifically, I will first highlight some of the similarities between the groups, and then highlight some of the PCDs, followed by a closer examination of some of the differences.

Elementary, Middle School, and High School Teachers Similarities

There are some general commonalities that classroom teachers in Manitoba share, regardless of the grade level they are teaching. For example, most classroom teachers teach a designated group of students in classrooms located within school buildings. Many teachers are the sole adult in the classroom, although some teachers teach collaboratively for part or all of the day, and educational assistants are sometimes assigned to their classrooms. In order to teach in Manitoba's provincial schools, all classroom teachers must be temporarily or permanently

certified by the province (Manitoba Education, 2013). According to Manitoba Education (2013), the “minimum requirements for a Permanent Professional Certificate in Manitoba are an undergraduate degree beyond the Manitoba Grade 12 standing, plus a two-year Bachelor of Education for a total of five years of post-secondary education or a total of 17 years of schooling”. Classroom teachers in Manitoba are also required to teach provincial curricula, plan lessons, take attendance, mark and grade student work, be available to parents, and are expected to perform other tasks as their school or division requires.

Elfers, Plecki, and McGowan (2007) conducted a large-scale school-level analysis of 14,065 teachers located in 329 of Washington State's high schools. Using the state's personnel data, they examined information related to teachers' age, ethnicity and years of experience, in an effort to increase understanding of how high school teachers are situated compared to the overall teacher workforce. They discovered that the characteristics of high school teachers closely resembled all teachers in Washington State in terms of age range, ethnicity, and years of teaching experience. Additionally, Elfers, Plecki, and McGowan (2007) noted that surveys of high school teachers revealed that high school teachers' reasons for entering and staying in the profession are similar to the responses given by teachers at all levels. Some highlights of entering and staying in the teaching profession according to Elfers, Plecki, and McGowan (2007) included the enjoyment of teaching kids, interest in the subjects they teach, collegiality within the profession, and the vacation time afforded to them.

The universal adoption of inclusive education policies and subsequent changes in job expectations. The adoption of inclusive education policies in Canada's schools (Education Canada, 2011) has impacted the practices of teachers across all grades and levels. Both elementary and secondary teachers have adapted in many ways to meet the challenges of recent

government legislation and policies that “diminished the line between general and special education, (but) also broadened the responsibilities of general classroom teachers” (Winzer & Mazurek, 2011). Emily Noble, past president of the Canadian Teacher’s Federation stated, “I think that the whole idea of teaching has changed in the last 15 to 20 years. People are dealing with more high-needs students, with more multicultural issues and with no-fail policies” (Smol, 2009). As demands have risen, so too have the stress levels for teachers.

This sentiment seems to be one shared across the nation and for teachers of all grades. A study by the Manitoba Teachers Society (2009) of 15,000 teachers determined that 73% reported that on the job stress negatively impacted their job performance, and that differentiating, adapting and modifying instructions, and trying to meet curriculum outcomes for all students was a major cause of such stress. In Saskatchewan, 40 percent of teachers polled in a recent study reported taking time off work due to stress (Worobec, 2007). In addition, 31 percent of all Quebec English school teachers recently left the classroom due to stress and burnout (CBC, 2006). And in Newfoundland, high school teachers reported that the biggest reason for on-the-job stress was the fact that they were poorly prepared to deal with full integration of students with learning disabilities in the regular classroom (Younghusband, Garlie, & Church, 2003).

Therefore, while inclusion in our schools may have caused a reduction in student dropout rates over the past twenty years, the subsequent rise in classroom responsibilities may have inadvertently caused an increase in teacher job stress across Canada (Goddard, 2000; Naylor, 2001; Dibbon, 2004). It is fair to say that many of the challenges faced by all teachers, no matter the grade level they teach, are universal in nature. Although elementary and secondary teachers share many similar challenges, however, there are also several unique characteristics that differentiate the two groups.

Points of Critical Distinction (PCD)

Earlier in this paper, some criticisms specific to high school teachers focused on the impression that their jobs were easier than those of elementary teachers, that they did not and could not personally connect with their students as well as elementary teachers, and that they preferred autonomy more than elementary teachers. In Manitoba, some other key points of critical distinction between high school teachers and kindergarten to grade 8 teachers revolve around differences in teacher training and certification, specialization in subject areas, and resistance to change due to the pressures of standardized provincial testing at the grade 12 level. The intent of highlighting these PCDs for the purpose of this study is to better understand the influences that contributed to some of the thoughts, perspectives, and values that high school teachers tend to hold. In turn, a better understanding helps me to better comprehend the teachers that participate in this study.

Differences

PCD in training and certification. In my study, I wanted to examine some of the differences between high school teachers and their colleagues, as I singled out these teachers as specialists in the unique environment known as high school. One of the major differences between elementary and secondary teachers is the manner in which many of them were trained. Currently, in order to be eligible for permanent professional teacher certification in Manitoba, a person must complete a minimum of 150 credit hours of university level coursework, of which a minimum of 60 credit hours must be in education courses. Additionally, you must have a recognized Bachelor's degree from a university and a Bachelor of Education (University of Manitoba, 2013). Although certified teachers in Manitoba are technically permitted to teach at any grade level in Manitoba, the university training for each level differs in several areas.

There are some distinctions in certification requirements in Manitoba. For example, the University of Manitoba (2013) Faculty of Education offers program streams in *Early Years* (Kindergarten – Grade 4), *Middle Years* (Grades 5–8), and *Senior Years* (Grades 9-12). Regardless of the streams entered, each student must declare major and minor subject areas. In the *Senior Years* stream, teacher candidates must take additional coursework in their declared major and minor subject areas. In the early and middle years streams, the training is more generalized in nature, and applicants are not required to take as many courses in their specific major and minor subject areas. All applicants in early and middle-years streams are required to take 18 credit hours in a teachable major; and 12 credit hours in a teachable minor, along with compulsory credit hours in English, Social Studies, Math, and Science. In the senior years stream, the training is more specialized in teachable areas. All applicants are required to take 30 credit hours in a teachable major and 18 credit hours in a teachable minor.

Some secondary teachers are certified through joint programs between universities and colleges in order to further specialize their studies. For example, technical vocational teachers in Manitoba receive their certification by studying their first three years at Red River College and their final two years at the University of Winnipeg. Their first year involves an intense 45 credit hours of vocational training and work experience within their specific trade (Red River College, 2013). As high school teachers spend significantly more time training in specific disciplines, it is understandable that they may gravitate towards collaborating with colleagues who have studied and taught in similar disciplines.

PCD regarding specialization in subject areas. It is interesting that middle school years training is so similar to elementary training, given that many view elementary school as Kindergarten to grade 6, and secondary as school as grades 7 to 12. For example, the

Government of Alberta (2013) identified secondary school teachers as grades 7 to 12, and defines them as, “generalists or subject area specialists who provide instruction to young people in junior and senior high school (Grades 7 to 12)”. Further, they state that secondary teachers often take on the role as “academic specialists”, especially in large urban schools. As stated earlier, high school classroom teachers teach up to 150 students or more a day, primarily in only one or two subject areas. The Government of Alberta (2013) does acknowledge that, “In smaller rural schools and schools with a generalist approach, secondary teachers are required to teach a broader range of subjects and grades”.

In contrast, most elementary teachers' roles are more generalized and cross-curricular in nature. The Government of Alberta (2013) stated that elementary teachers are usually “responsible for a homeroom class of 20 to 33 children and teach most subjects. Some teachers team teach or teach Music, Second Languages or Physical Education at different grade levels”. They further state that some elementary teachers specialize in *Early Childhood Education*, more readily preparing them to work with children from kindergarten to Grade 3.

The key difference in training may help in accounting for the creation of “subject subcultures” (Grossman & Stodolsky, 1995) among high school departments. Elfers, Plecki, and McGowan (2007) noted that, “High school teachers most often find the center of their professional identity and community among subject matter peers and their department” (p.5). Grossman and Stodolsky (1995) reported the following:

An emerging line of research suggests that high school teachers belong to distinctive subject subcultures; these subcultures are characterized by differing beliefs, norms, and practices. We report findings from surveys and interviews with high school teachers that illustrate salient aspects of subject subcultures. Shared beliefs about the possibilities and

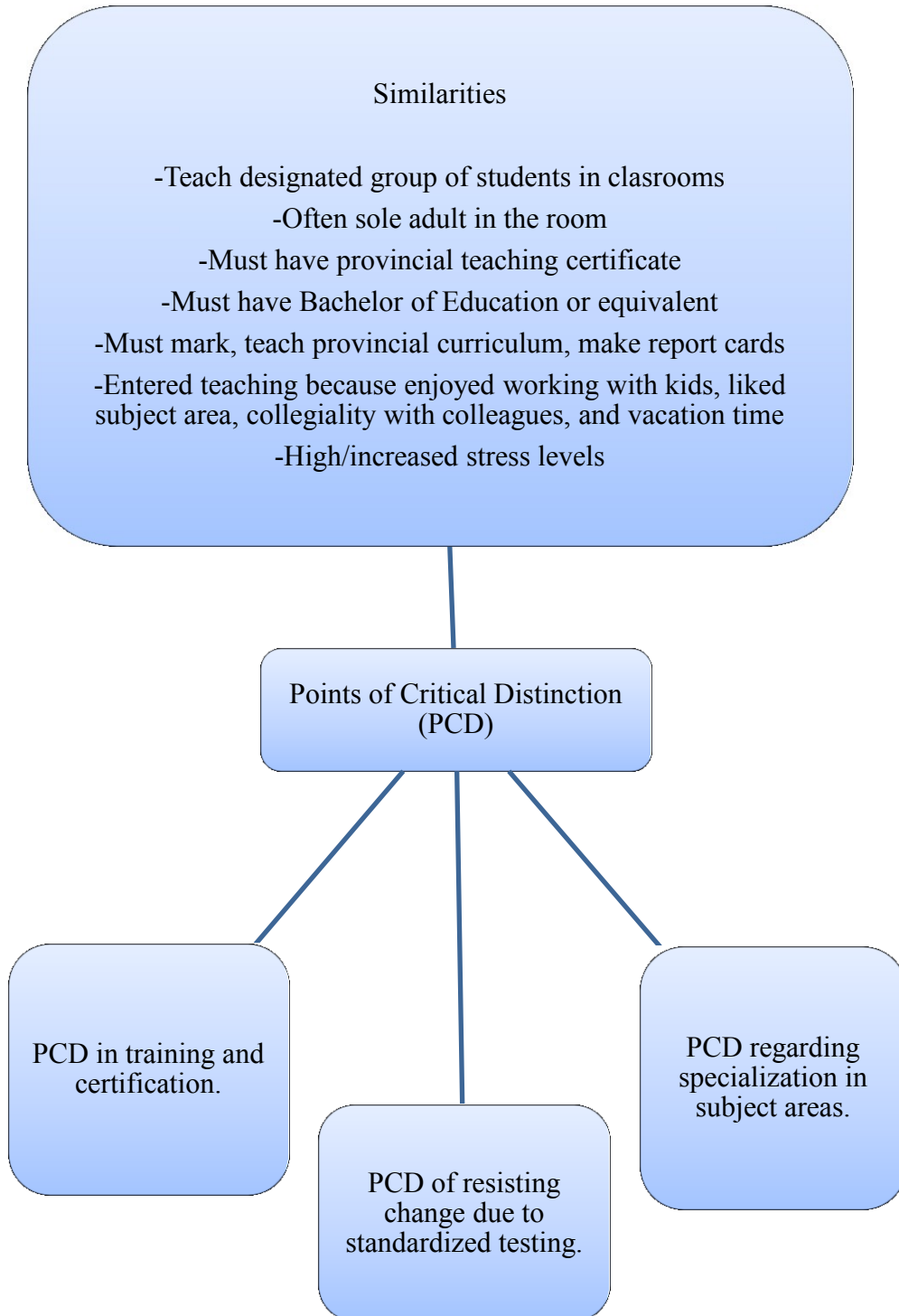
constraints posed by different school subjects may complicate efforts to restructure high schools or redesign curriculum (p.5).

PCD of resisting change due to standardized testing. According to Elfers, Plecki, and McGowan (2007), another significant difference between primary and secondary teachers is their response to attempts to change or reform the structure of the school system. They note that, while elementary teachers have been more responsive to calls for change, high school teachers have expressed many more concerns and reservations about proposed reforms. Their concerns focused primarily on clarity of expectations for teaching as a result of the reforms, and the impacts it would have on standardized testing, and how that might reflect on their teaching.

In Manitoba, grade 12 provincial standardized tests are administered each semester in English Language Arts, Français, and Mathematics (Manitoba Education, 2013c), and so it is reasonable to assume that the findings of the aforementioned study may correlate with the feelings of high school teachers in this province. The results of these examinations are most significant in English, as they account for “30% of students’ final course grades for language arts” (Manitoba Education Policies and Procedures for Provincial Tests, 2012, p.1).

William (2010) noted that when it came to the results of standardized tests, “the stakes were much higher for teachers than for students” (p.109). This assertion supports Elfers, Plecki, and McGowan’s (2007) earlier findings stating that high school teachers were more reluctant to accept school change due to potential impacts on standardized testing, and how the results might reflect on their teaching. While high school teachers may be criticized by some for being resistant to change, it is understandable that the pressures of being held accountable for provincial grade 12 exam results may make them more cautious to changing classroom methodology. After all, there is still the added pressure for students to pass these inevitable

Figure 2.2. Elementary/Middle Years Teachers & High School Teachers



components of high school graduation, particularly for those deemed at risk of dropping out.

After completing the preceding review of the uniqueness of high school teachers, I conclude that there are many distinct differences between high school teachers and their elementary/ middle school year counterparts. I have also concluded that there are many valid reasons why these differences exist, as many appear to be predictable responses to the unique nature of high schools and the students they serve. Consequently, I have further concluded that high school classroom teachers might have distinctive ideas, suggestions, and recommendations on the primary concerns that I hope to address. Those concerns are to find ways to increase Manitoban students' graduation rates and decrease their dropout rates. In Chapter 3, I outline the methods of the study I conducted which explored these ideas with some high school teachers.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to seek out Manitoba high school classroom teachers and invite them to participate in a think tank designed to capture their voices in order to better understand what they believe they do to help adolescents stay in school and graduate. I used qualitative methods, and in this chapter provide a detailed account of those methodological procedures. I conducted this study between June 2013 and January 2014 (see Appendix K).

Research Proposal

Based upon this literature review, I have concluded that the voices of high school classroom teachers need to be better heard because they may have valuable information about increasing graduation rates in Manitoba. While there are many similarities that high school teachers share with their elementary or middle school years counterparts, the literature also revealed many notable differences in their training, their students, the systems they work in, and the demands of their jobs. As I stated earlier, I believe that these teachers might be in the position to offer insightful perspectives concerning sociological issues and education, inclusive education, compulsory school age and education, standardized testing and education, and the structure of high schools.

Therefore, the purpose of my study (as described in Chapter 3) was to seek out Manitoba high school classroom teachers, invite them to participate in a special type of focus group, and capture their voices in order to better understand what makes them successful at helping adolescents stay in school and graduate. In this study, I attempted to capture and honour these voices using qualitative methods. Specifically, I hoped to establish an interactive discussion group of high school teachers.

I hoped to reduce the risk of "moderator acceptance bias" (Hoets, 2013), where respondents provide answers that they believe will primarily please the moderator. I also hoped to reduce the risk of what I characterize as "socio-political acceptance bias", where participants feel overly pressured to sacrifice their true thoughts for political correctness. My rationale was that if the culture for open, honest responses could be fostered within the group, then teachers might feel more emancipated to confidently and thoughtfully share their perspectives.

Moderator Acceptance Bias

I had concerns that those who were willing to take part in my study might taint their responses in order to provide me with the answers they thought I was seeking. For example, I was concerned that if teachers learned that I was studying in inclusive education, they might not share whatever concerns they had regarding inclusion, preferring instead to speak glowingly about a phenomenon that, in reality, they struggled with on a regular basis. To reduce this risk, a shift in power needed to take place so that they viewed themselves as authoritative experts on the subjects we discussed, while my role was to learn from them. Therefore, instead of surrounding myself with sycophants, I sought to find what Caliva and Scheier (1992) referred to as "responsible iconoclasts". As they explained:

'Let no assumption go unchallenged' might be our motto, provided we're not wrecking conventional certainties for the sheer perverse joy of it. We should understand that analysis often produces even greater faith in previous assumptions, because now we understand why.

Sociopolitical Acceptance Bias

While reducing the risk that moderator acceptance bias might affect the results of my study, I also tried to reduce the risk of the effects of "sociopolitical acceptance bias". As

illustrated earlier in Chapter 2, the inclusion and inclusive education movements appear to hold incredibly powerful social and academic potential in combating the ill effects that segregation and inequality have had on our most vulnerable and marginalized peoples. However, the recent swell of public attention devoted to this issue has also made it very political, which may have prompted the subjects in my study to deliver what they regarded as “politically correct” responses, rather than honest ones.

Berry (2011) argued that objective investigations of inclusive education are not as prevalent as those of special education, primarily because inclusion has become such a ‘powerful rallying cry’ (Dyson 1999, p.49). Levins (1985) noted that many people involved in scientific research use the phrase, “it’s a scientific fact” (p.4) whenever they hope to support their claims, and that, “Nothing evokes as much hostility among intellectuals as the suggestion that social forces influence or even dictate either the scientific method or the facts and theories of science” (p.4).

Willis (2007) cautioned readers on the dangers that political pressures, no matter how well intentioned, can have in biasing empirical research. The “Lysenko Effect” (Roll-Hansen, 2004) illustrated the crippling and distorting consequences that political pressures can potentially have on scientific objectivity. In the 1920s, an uneducated but influential Russian politician named Trofim Lysenko dismissed the Darwinian theory of evolution, and promoted French scientist’s Jean-Baptiste Lamarck’s theory (Roll-Hansen, 2004). Some scientists who rejected Lysenko’s popular viewpoint were “sent to gulags or to undocumented deaths after the secret police arrested them in the middle of the night” (Willis, 2007, p.29). The Lysenko Effect has been characterized as “the biggest scandal in twentieth century science” (Roll-Hansen, 2004, p.12). Roll-Hansen (2004) posited that although the Lysenko Effect ultimately led to disastrous

outcomes, it was initially born out of an attempt to “transform science into a better instrument for social progress and justice” (p.13). In this way, it offered a valuable case study on how the ideals of a social movement, if not properly taken into account, can potentially distort the results of objective science anywhere.

I wanted to greatly reduce the risk of transferring any political or social pressure from me, as a researcher studying the field of inclusive special education, to those who agreed to participate in my focus group. Therefore, I needed to use a model of focus group that shifted the power from me as a researcher to the high school teachers as subjects. By using such an approach, I hoped the teachers would feel emancipated to earnestly and confidently share their true thoughts.

Think Tank

While I could have interviewed high school classroom teachers individually, there appeared to be numerous benefits in gathering teachers together into a group think tank. In fourth century B.C., Aristotle posited:

For each individual among the many has a share of virtue and prudence, and when they meet together, just as they become in a manner one man, who has many feet, and hands, and senses, that is a figure of their mind and disposition. Hence the many are better judges than a single man (Jewitt, 1885, p.86).

Aristotle's views concerning the astuteness of collective voices have been echoed by more recent authors. Surowiecki (2004) described the merits of collective insights as “the wisdom of crowds” (p.3). Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and Switzler (2002) acknowledged the advantages of allowing all stakeholders an opportunity join in conversations and add to the

collective “pool of shared meaning” (p.21). Miller (2010) noted that the wisdom of crowds was most effectively extracted when the moderator followed three key steps.

1. Seek a diversity of knowledge.
2. Encourage a friendly competition of ideas.
3. Use an effective mechanism to narrow your choices (p.43).

My hope was that by assembling a group of high school classroom teachers from different subject areas, schools, and divisions, I would successfully seek out a diversity of knowledge. In order to better encourage friendly competition among these teachers, the mechanism that I thought might be most effective at reducing some of the aforementioned biases and obtaining the best insights was a "think tank" model (Weaver, 1989). By creating a mechanism for both cooperation and competition, I hoped to get what Charles (2000) referred to as a *coopetition*.

Caliva and Scheier (1992) believed that think tanks support free, honest questioning and analysis, noting, “Responsible iconoclasm is the main characteristic distinguishing think tanks from ordinary problem-solving” (para. 57). Think tanks should not be confused with professional learning communities (PLCs), although both groups could gather teachers together to solve educational problems. PLCs assemble professionals together for the purpose of “learning together” (Dufour & Dufour, 2012); while think tanks assemble professionals to “think together”. Therefore, a think tank could be described as a “Professional Thinking Community”.

Think tanks have recently enjoyed popularity and academic interest as a research subject, particularly in the English-speaking world (Pautz, 2011). One of the reasons for this rise in popularity is because think tanks allow scholarly autonomy. Pautz (2011) argued that autonomy was a critical component to the credibility of the think tank.

Figure 3.0. Highlights of support for think tanks

Person	Comment
Aristotle (4 th Century B.C.)	“For each individual among the many has a share of virtue and prudence, and when they meet together, just as they become in a manner one man, who has many feet, and hands, and senses, that is a figure of their mind and disposition. Hence the many are better judges than a single man” (Jewitt, 1885, p.86).
Weaver (1989)	“Universities without students” 1. Source of ideas. 2. Source of and evaluator of policy. 3. Evaluator of programs. 4. Source of expertise. 5. Punditry, or authoritative sources of information and opinion (pp.568-569).
Caliva and Scheier (1992)	“Responsible iconoclasm is the main characteristic distinguishing think tanks from ordinary problem-solving” (para. 57). Capable of producing “some unsettling but potentially energizing responses” (para. 11).
Charles (2000)	A coepetition, which is part group cooperation, and part group competition.
Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and Switzler (2002)	“Pool of shared meaning” (p.21).
Schneider (2002)	“An institute, corporation, or group organized for interdisciplinary research - as in technological and social problems” (p.6).
Suroweicki (2004)	“The wisdom of crowds” (p.3).
Miller (2010)	1. Seek a diversity of knowledge. 2. Encourage a friendly competition of ideas. 3. Use an effective mechanism to narrow your choices (p.43).
Pautz (2011)	“Think-tanks, in their different and changing organizational expressions ... continue to play a role in the cooperative networks of societies with increasing need for professionalized expertise” “Scholarly autonomy is important for an organization if it is to be classified as a think tank (p.422)”.
Reimer (2014)	“Professional Thinking Community”.

Using a think tank model, I hoped to encapsulate some of the concepts, methods, and practices these teachers successfully incorporate into their classrooms to help students stay in school until graduation. I hoped that the classroom teachers participating in the study might view themselves as sources of ideas and expertise, evaluators of policies and programs, and authoritative sources of information and opinion, as these are critical components of a think tank (Weaver, 1989). I also wanted them to feel autonomous when they participated, as this is necessary for a think tank to be effective (Pautz, 2011).

Structuralist, Pathological, and Interventionist Perspectives

Again, I hoped to gather together an autonomous group of intelligent high school classroom teachers, allow them to freely share their insights, which may eventually lead to new ideas that can help to increase graduation rates in Manitoba. Although the autonomy of educators within the focus group may seem great and diverse, Skrtic (1995) believed that when discussing topics like diversity, disability, and democracy, people tended to identify with the structuralist perspective, the pathological perspective, or the interventionist perspective. Freeze (2013a) applied these archetypes to how educators viewed challenges faced by school systems. I highlight these different perspectives because I am curious which type of perspective(s) the teachers in this study tend to see their world.

Freeze (2013a) described structuralists as people who “believe a pro-active approach to institutional and pedagogical reform grounded in a critical sociology of systems dysfunction due to wrong-headed beliefs, policies, provisions, and practices” (p.9). Those who adopt the pathological perspective believe that school failure is the result of deficits within the student. Freeze (2013a) stated that educators “who adopt this perspective believe in a re-active, institution-strengthening approach” (p.10). Freeze (2013a) noted that those who adopt the

interventionist assumption believe that, “whatever the problem or opportunity, a properly researched, designed, and implemented intervention will make things better “(p.8).

I hoped to get representation of each of these perspectives within my study, as it would only increase the likelihood of obtaining exciting and innovative insights that could eventually be used to increase high school graduation. Perhaps a classroom teacher who provides a pathological perspective could lead to the creation of a novel intervention. Or, an intervention could be discovered that in time can lead to improved social change. In a recent conversation with my advisor, Dr. Rick Freeze (2013b), he noted that because a problem or condition might be best described through one discipline, the solution to the problem may be found in another discipline. He stated, “You might best describe blindness through the lens of biology, but provide opportunities for the blind through a model of inclusive schooling that did not arise through a biological lens”.

Levy (2010) underpinned Freeze’s position with what he called the “intervention-attribution fallacy” (p.104), warning that a “solution to a problem does not inherently point to its etiology”. As an obvious example, Levy (2010) highlighted the medical procedure of removing kidney stones to support his claim, noting, “We may be able to surgically remove a kidney stone, but our ability to do so does not, in any way, explain what originally caused the formation of the kidney stone” (p.105). The corollary of Levy’s reasoning is, if the cure does not prove the cause, solutions to problems do not necessarily need to be directly linked to the cause of the problem. High school classroom teachers may not have caused students from dropping out, but they may hold key evidence of what can be done to reduce the rate of dropouts.

Still, I wanted to be careful not to overestimate my expectations from the group. Caliva and Scheier (1992) cautioned:

Unrealistic exceptions can poison any process, especially think tanks. From prior think tank participants, the following are some reasonable, expected outcomes: General mental challenge, consciousness raising, shift in focus/new approaches/fresh perspectives, creative ideas, new and better questions and problem statements, support and understanding of colleagues, catharsis/ventilation, renewal and rededication.

Freeze (2013a) noted, "It is almost always better to do an exceptional job solving a small number of problems or initiating a small number of new initiatives, than to run from crisis to crisis resolving none" (p.15). For this study, I hoped that teachers could share some of new initiatives, as one never knows the large effects that "tiny" ideas and insights can create when developed by those working within the system, itself. Gladwell (2005) stressed the potential impact of one such "home-grown" initiatives when he shared the story of trombone player Abbie Conant.

Abbie Conant and the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra. In 1980, Ms. Conant was given an audition with the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra, even though the invitation was addressed to "Dear Herr [Mr.] Abbie Conant". When she arrived at the auditions, she was informed that a screen would be placed in between her and the selection committee to ensure fairness, as a relative of a current member of the orchestra was also auditioning for the part. Out of 33 auditions, Conant's was unanimously selected as the best. Her audition was so spectacular that the conductor called off the auditions and sent many home without a turn.

When the screen was lifted, however, the selection committee was in collective disbelief (Gladwell, 2005). In an industry dominated by men, Abbie Conant was initially seen as an unwelcome anomaly. The orchestra had only two women at the time, and they played much more "feminine" instruments like the oboe and the violin. The situation caused such a fury that it

eventually led to several court battles, with Conant prevailing in the end. Gladwell (2005) explained that although it was obvious that the classical music world had a problem, the best solution did not necessarily lie in creating affirmative action programs, awareness programs for gender bias, or having long discussions about social discrimination (p.273). Gladwell (2005) argued that maestros were “powerful, brilliant, single-minded, highly entrenched men who run their organizations like their own private fiefdoms” (p.274). Any attempts to explain how their long buried biases against women would have ultimately gone nowhere, leaving many with the idea that, “we would just have to wait until the current generation of maestros – with their ingrained biases against women – was replaced by a younger, and hopefully more open-minded, set of conductors” (p.272). Gladwell (2005) noted that instead of seeking a sociological solution from the outside world for a sociological problem within their confines, they solved their own problem by using a temporary visual barrier. In short, the classical music world managed to solve its own problem by simply putting up a screen. Essentially, the purpose of my research is to identify some of the “screens” that high school classroom teachers may have already discovered, which can help us with the larger, overwhelming sociological problem of kids dropping out of school.

Stance of the Researcher

“I respect faith, but doubt is what gets you an education.” Wilson Mizner (1876 - 1933)

As I conducted qualitative research as a part of this study, it is important to outline my values and beliefs as a researcher. Therefore, I will briefly describe the past personal and professional experiences that have led me to this study.

I was born in Winnipeg, Canada. It is the capital city in the province of Manitoba. I was raised in a Mennonite, Christian home, and my first language was English (although my parents

also spoke to me in German until I entered the provincial school system). Both my parents were immigrants from Paraguay, and received their high school education in Winnipeg. I always liked school, and was encouraged at home to do well in academics.

I was always educated in the public school system, and my father taught and was a school administrator in Winnipeg. In high school, I was educated in a streamed system, and I enrolled in the academic stream that enabled me to enroll in university. I received my Bachelor of Education from the University of Winnipeg in 1992.

I was trained as a secondary school teacher, and have worked in four different high schools in two different Manitoba school divisions since 1992. After several years of teaching in mainstream classrooms, I took a position teaching in a segregated low enrollment class for students diagnosed with severe behavioural and emotional disturbances. As it guaranteed me a permanent contract in the division, I accepted the position.

After five years of teaching in this program, I moved on to another alternative, segregated program for high school students who, for a variety of reasons, were thought to be unable to achieve in the regular classroom. While working in this program, I grew more curious at the increasing number of students that required specialized classes. Therefore, I decided to return to university and take some courses in guidance and special education. I first became intrigued with the concept of inclusive education in one of these courses, received a Masters in Inclusive Special Education, and am now working towards my PhD in Inclusive Special Education.

Whenever I attended inclusive education classes and workshops, or heard dynamic speakers talk about the merits of inclusive education, it felt easy to join in with the other attendees. While mostly I believe that inclusive education is the best way for all students, I still

face issues with the concept as I go through my current life as a Vice Principal in a large high school in Winnipeg.

I want to see inclusive education succeed. I try to be a *responsible skeptic* and I think there is cause for me to struggle with the wide disparity of interpretations for the word “inclusion”. This struggle is only magnified when the interpretation of inclusion greatly affects other operational definitions for terms like “appropriate programming”, “least restrictive environment”, and “integration”. This struggle is amplified additionally when one considers that, by the time students enter high school, the range of academic, cognitive, behavioural, and socioeconomic diversity of students can appear immense and overwhelming.

Still, I see many brilliant, hardworking, dedicated high school classroom teachers who somehow creatively and collectively find solutions for such monumental challenges. As my job now allows me to observe how others teach, and I have the opportunity to talk with many teachers about teaching and learning, my admiration and respect for high school classroom teachers has only grown. When we just employ models requiring attendance at professional development sessions, or pressure resource consultation upon them, it risks making high school classroom teachers feel defensive and filled with shortcomings. Instead, I believe that they should be sought out and asked for their acumen. They are the only educators who have intense, daily contact with many students at once. They are the ones who have an intimate understanding of the high school system. They are the ones who convert inclusive policy, philosophy and pedagogy into practice. They are the ones who are obliged to listen to policy makers, school administrators, parents, resource teachers, university professors, and learning experts, and the students they teach. I think that it is crucial that their voices be heard.

My Approach to Qualitative Research

From a scientific perspective, I wish that I could be certain that my research was entirely objective. However, I acknowledge that all researchers bring their own sets of beliefs to research projects, and I recognize that my own interpretive views will undoubtedly permeate many aspects of this study. I am concerned about the trustworthiness of my research, and so it is important to share the paradigms or worldviews that influence my approach to this study (Creswell, 2007).

As stated earlier, a mix of several logical positivist and post positivist research paradigms have heavily influenced me. Logical positivists emphasize logical analysis (Yu, 2003). Additionally, I believe in the post positivist position that inquiry should come from “multiple perspectives from participants rather than a single reality” (Creswell, 2007, p.20). I also align myself with the post positivist position that no study can ever definitively “prove” anything to be true, but can only assist in supporting or dismissing theories (Willis, 2007).

My approach is not entirely positivist, as I also am influenced by the advocacy/participatory approach to qualitative research. For example, I want my research to “contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researchers’ lives” (Creswell, 2007, p.21). Therefore, my research questions will revolve around the social issue of reducing the number of high school dropouts and graduating more students in Manitoba. I hope my research inquiry is practical and collaborative, and conducted “‘with’ others rather than ‘on’ or ‘to’ others (Creswell, 2007, p. 22). Therefore, the teachers that participate in the think tank will assist in designing questions, collecting the data, analyzing the data, and shaping the final report (Creswell, 2007). By making the participating teachers active collaborators in this research, I hope that that the participants’

voices become heard. Consequently, I have chosen to adopt a narrative research approach to this particular study, as it seems to best align with the advocacy/ participatory nature of my study (Creswell, 2007). Clandinan and Connelly (2000) strongly advocated narrative inquiry when conducting qualitative research with teachers, and have incorporated this approach in several studies concerning teachers and teacher knowledge. They posited that narrative inquiry was especially useful for studies that are focused on obtaining teacher “experiences” (p.2) and “teacher knowledge” (p.3), which is precisely what I am aiming to accomplish.

Narrative Research

In narrative studies, Creswell (2007) noted that, “narrative studies do not follow a lock-step approach, but instead represent an informal collection of topics” (p.55). Still, he has recommended the following four steps in collecting data, which I intended to follow.

1. Determine if the research or question fits best in narrative research. Narrative research is best for capturing the life experiences of the lives of a small number of individuals. Creswell (2007) also highlighted the importance of finding “individuals who are accessible, willing to provide information and distinctiveness for their accomplishments and ordinariness or who shed light on a specific phenomenon or issue being explored” (p.119). My study lent itself to the narrative research approach because I sought out teachers who wished to share their strategies for getting students to stay in school and graduate.

2. Select one or more individuals who have stories or life experiences to tell, and spend considerable time with them gathering their stories. I incorporated the concept of the purposeful sampling of teachers in order to develop a collective story of their experiences (Creswell, 2007). Incorporating purposeful sampling in a narrative inquiry is convenient because the storytellers (teachers) can and should have diverse experiences. In addition, the availability

of the participants and their willingness to participate were key attributes to me, as a researcher, for practical reasons, in conducting the study (Creswell, 2007). In this study, I hoped to get teachers to volunteer to participate.

3. Collect information about the context of their stories. It is recommended that researchers analyze the participants' stories, and then "restory" them into a general type of framework. The qualitative data analysis may be a description of both the story and the themes that emerge. I obtained my data using a think tank model, which will resemble an open-ended focus group interview. I recruited a research assistant to help me in audio taping the sessions, and then transcribed the sessions.

I wanted to do my best to avoid creating an imbalance of power in the interviews where I am viewed as the authority. Therefore, I followed Greene's (2008) model for empathic listening where he posited that the listener must first suspend his or her judgments and then listen intently to the person talking. Second, he suggested that it was helpful to clarify participants' concerns by echoing what the listener hears them say. Finally, he stated that the best intentions of the listener are less important than the perception of the speaker, and so one must be vigilant to ensure that the optics for everyone were that the participants' voices were the expert ones.

4. Collaborate with participants by actively involving them in the research. It allows epiphanies to occur (Creswell, 2007, p.56-57). Although the think tank shares many similarities to traditional focus groups, I wanted to create a climate where the teachers were considered to be the "experts" in the study, and the researcher acted as the "learner". In this regard, their epiphanies were not just personal, but provided new and innovative insights to the education system-at-large.

Within the qualitative research field, I positioned that the think tank method aligned itself nicely with “Narrative Inquiry”, because it captured the life experiences of the lives of a small number of high school teachers. Second, the think tank allowed teachers with diverse experiences to participate if they are available and willing to participate. Third, the think tank allowed me to contextualize their stories, which is an important component of Narrative Inquiry. Fourth, the think tank model encouraged me to collaborate with the teachers and encourage epiphanies to occur.

Triangulation

I asked that the participants and my research assistant keep some notes throughout the sessions. After I deconstructed the transcripts, I sent out a copy of the emergent themes that I had found to the participants and the research assistant, and ask them to reply with feedback consisting of shared perspectives corrections, clarifications, or alternative viewpoints. Triangulation has become a widely accepted as a way to improve the analysis and interpretation of findings from various types of studies (Hales, 2010). For the framework of this study, I used “investigator triangulation” as a means of ensuring better validity. Hales (2010) defined investigator triangulation as:

The use of more than one investigator, interviewer, observer, researcher or data analyst in a study. The ability to confirm findings across investigators, without prior discussion or collaboration between them, can significantly enhance the credibility of the findings.

Investigator triangulation is particularly important for decreasing bias in gathering, reporting and/or analyzing study data (p.15).

For the purpose of this study, I compared and contrasted my viewpoints of the sessions with the participants and the research assistant.

Procedures

After receiving approval by my advisor and my PhD dissertation proposal examining committee, and obtaining approval by the ENREB ethical review board at the University of Manitoba, I needed to recruit teachers for my study. In order to recruit these teachers, I was required to receive permission from the school divisions in which I planned to conduct the research. My initial intention was to conduct my study with teachers from a number of high schools in several school divisions. The ENREB ethical review board at the University of Manitoba stipulated that I approach one school division at a time, and only contact additional divisions if I did not obtain my minimum number of participants of 8 to 12. I honoured this requirement.

I first contacted School Division A by sending a letter to the Chief Superintendent (see Appendix A), requesting permission for me to conduct this research. The Superintendent granted me permission to conduct my research in the division, but stated that I was only permitted to ask teachers to volunteer themselves. Although I originally hoped to have a combination of teachers who nominated themselves and teachers who were nominated by their peers, I accepted this arrangement. My thinking was that, if I did not obtain a reasonable number of participants from this division, I would approach a second (or third) division asking for teachers through a nomination process.

Upon receiving the Superintendent's approval, I then proceeded to contact the principal of several high schools in the division by email (see Appendix B), as the Superintendent requested. Attached to this email was a letter (see Appendix B), and a compendium of the questions that I might use as probes at the think tank (see Appendix H). Principals who agreed to allow their teachers to participate signed a consent form (see Appendix C). All teachers from the

school's staff were invited by the principal to participate in the study. They were given a letter outlining the nature of the study (see Appendix E, and Appendix H). Participation in the study was optional, and this was made clear to all teaching personnel. Teachers who were interested in participating were invited to contact me.

I invited the teachers that contacted me by phone or email to volunteer. All were required to give written consent prior to the commencement of the study (see Appendix F). Once I received written consent from these teachers, they were all invited to assemble together in order to form a "think tank". I hoped to get 8 to 12 volunteers, although numbers could be as small as 5 (Caliva & Scheier, 1992). If more than 12 teachers volunteered to be part of the study, my plan was to send letters (see Appendix G) to teachers indicating their services were not required. None of these letters needed to be sent. It should be noted that all conversations and responses in the think tank were collected in aggregate, so that no one participant was singled out by the researcher when the data was shared in the study's final results portion of the dissertation.

In order to find an effective think tank model for this study, I went to Google Scholar and entered, "qualitative research think tank models teachers education". I received approximately 20,400 results. I looked through the first 31 results, and only found that 5 of them highlighted the term "think tank" within their description. Each of these results highlighted think tanks as important, but none of them provided the reader with a detailed method of how one should be conducted.

One think tank model that I did come across, and the one that I chose to follow for my study is Caliva and Scheier's (1992) *Center for Creative Community* model, as it provides logical, sequential steps to organizing think tanks, and seems especially sensitive to working with volunteer participants. While I was looking for extraordinary high school classroom

teachers based on qualities such as number of years in the classroom, education, professional development presentations, or awards won, “qualifications for think tank participation are based more in the character and style of the person and are far better judged from the inside (by the individual) than from the outside” (Caliva & Scheier, 1992, para. 26).

After sending emails to all the high school principals outlining my study, three of them invited me to teacher staff meetings to speak about it. By email, the principal emailed teachers on staff my invitation to participate. In the end, 9 teachers from two large high schools emailed me indicating an interest in participating in the study. I sent all participants who agreed to take part in my study another email outlining possible dates and locations for three focus group meetings. I asked that they reply to my email with their preferred choices. Additionally, attached to this email was a teacher consent form and a short information sheet (see Appendix F) for them to fill out and return, regarding factors such as number of years they had taught, post-secondary education they had completed, and awards and other recognition they had received related to teaching.

Participants

Although all of the teacher participants (n=9) were currently teaching in one of two high schools in the same school division, their backgrounds varied in many ways (see Figure 3.1). Six of the teacher participants were male and 3 were female. Two of the teachers indicated that they were between 20 to 29 years old, three indicated they were between 30 to 39 years old, two indicated that they were 40 to 49 years old, and two indicated that they were over 50 years old. The range in teaching experience in Manitoba varied dramatically. Three participants had taught in Manitoba for less than 5 years, two had taught between 5 and 10 years, two had taught between 11 and 20 years, one had taught between 20 and 25 years, and one participant had

taught for over 40 years. It should be noted that two of the 9 participants had lead professional development workshops for school or divisional staff. Additionally, three participants had received some type of recognition or award for teaching at some point in their career, although none elaborated as to what specific award it was that they received.

Collectively, the teachers taught in a wide variety of subjects and at all high school grade levels. Two participants had or were currently teaching in Industrial Arts Programs, and one participant taught Physical Education part of the time. Participants also taught academic subjects, including Mathematics (Pre-Calculus, Essential), English, Social Studies, Geography, History, Chemistry, and Biology. Two teachers indicated that they assisted in the Resource department, one was assigned to Guidance, two taught in a credit recovery type programs, and one teacher provided "English as an Additional Language" (EAL) support. Other courses that participants stated they taught included Leadership, Philosophy, Aboriginal Studies, and Law.

Teacher participants' post-secondary education also varied. All participants had obtained their Bachelor of Education. Five of the participants also obtained a Bachelor of Arts, and 3 obtained a Bachelor of Science (one with Honours). Two participants had diplomas in Industrial Arts. Two participants had obtained a Masters in Arts, and 2 had obtained a Masters in Education. Finally, two participants stated that they had obtained their PhD in Education.

Data Collection

After receiving responses from all teachers (n=9) involved in the study concerning meeting times, I emailed them all again with a schedule of the first meeting date and location, and "topics for discussion". I hoped to conduct this think tank over a three day period, preferably over the course of a weekend. Caliva and Scheier (1992) noted that:

The "ideal" think tank allows time for the participants to become acquainted, adequate time for in depth discussion, and wrap-up time. A pattern utilized by most "Challenge" think tank organizers has been to start on one evening, proceed over one full day, and wrap-up by mid-afternoon of the third day. This pattern allows for the basic elements to take place and is functionally compatible with most people's work week or can be conducted over a weekend (para. 32).

Recognizing that the "ideal" was not going to be a Friday to Sunday weekend assembly, as it did not match the participants' personal or professional obligations, I invited them to a meeting on a weekday evening and extended the first meeting time to four hours. This way, I could decrease the number of meeting dates to two, instead of three. Based on the email responses I received back from the participants, this was unanimously the most preferred option. Attached to this email was a list of topics, questions, and probes (see Appendix H) that might be discussed at each meeting. Please note, I did not necessarily ask the probe questions, as my primary focus was to allow the teachers to lead the discussion in the direction they felt most appropriate. However, I made some references to them when required in order to keep discussion flowing. Also attached to the email were power points that I had created in order to highlight each meeting's "topics for discussion". Following Caliva and Scheier's (1992) recommendations, I asked each member of the think tank to review the applicable power point prior to the next meeting, so that they had some background information and might be better prepared to discuss each of the topics.

1. I was fortunate to find a research assistant to help me in preparing all materials, refreshments, and venue for the first meeting. This person earned a Masters in Education, and had some prior experience in assisting in studies. Several days before the think tank

convened for the first time, this research assistant informed me that she could not assist me at the meetings, but agreed to assist me in preparing some refreshments and materials for the event. Given the short amount of time that I had between receiving this information and my first meeting, I was unable to find an alternate assistant, and so I decided to conduct the sessions alone, and find another qualified person to review the written transcripts at the conclusion of the sessions. 48 hours before the first think tank session, two participants informed me that they were unable to attend the first session. It also became evident that one additional member may decide not to participate at all. Given the fact that six were still committed to attending, I decided to proceed with the think tank as scheduled, as the remaining six had cleared their schedules in order to attend. Regarding the chronology of the think tank, Caliva and Scheier (1992) recommended that the following key points to consider as it provided an idea of the average process, which I followed. I acted as moderator to discuss climate setting guidelines. As part of this general overview, I outlined Caliva and Scheier's (1992) recommendations to the group concerning the importance of establishing a climate of "trust, support, sharing, flexibility and tolerance" (para. 52).

2. I facilitated participants introducing themselves both as resources and as seekers during the first gathering of the group.
3. I discussed and clarify relevant conditions, expectations, etc.

We all discussed, clarified and allowed for modifying of the starting question. For this think tank, the starting question was, "What is it that you do in your classroom that you think reduces the risk of students dropping out, and increases the probability that students will graduate?" All agreed that this was a suitable question to ask.

Figure 3.1. Teacher Participant Information (n=9)

Gender	Age (years)	Teaching Experience (years)	Subjects/Areas Taught	Post-Secondary Education (Degrees)	Awards/Recognition	Provided Professional Development in school/division
M (6)	20 to 29 (2)	Less than 5 (2)	Industrial Arts Physical Education	Bachelor of Education (9)	3	3
F (3)	30 to 39 (3)	5 to 10 (2)	Pre-Calculus Essential Math	Bachelor of Arts (5)		
	40 to 49 (2)	11 to 20 (2)	English Social Studies Geography	Bachelor of Science (3)		
	over 50 (2)	20 to 25 (2)	History Chemistry Biology	Industrial Arts Diploma (2)		
		Over 40 (1)	Resource Guidance Credit Recovery EAL Leadership Philosophy Aboriginal Studies Law	Masters in Arts (2) Masters in Education (2). PhD in Education (2)		

4. The process matured as the group's energy came to bear on the issue. Identification, enumeration, and analysis of possible factors revolving around the issue were raised.
5. Throughout this think tank, issues were initially raised by myself, through the earlier distribution of topics and questions (see Appendix H). This was followed by a critical examination of underlying assumptions by the group, and sometimes recommendations for future action.

I also followed Caliva and Scheier's (1992) recommendations to have the following supplies at each of the meetings.

1. A sign-in/welcome area.
2. Extra copies of previously provided materials.
3. Copies of updated or additional materials.
4. Bring needed supplies: flip chart or butcher paper, markers, and masking tape.
5. Nametags were provided.
6. Check daily with facilities' staff regarding plans: confirm meals, room arrangements, breaks, etc. For all meetings, participants insisted that coffee, juice, water, and muffins were sufficient, the meeting place was convenient, and breaks would be short and taken when needed. No participant asked that time be taken up for meal breaks.
7. Provide for special needs of participants, as necessary. The only provision of needs required was child care for one participant, and one ride home for another. (para. 40)

On day one of the think tank assembly, I introduced myself, thanked everyone for coming, and reminded everyone of the importance of being supportive, tolerant, and (above all) confidential participants. I also collected all signed consent forms and participant information forms (see Appendix F), and "pledges of confidentiality" forms (see Appendix K). I then

reiterated the primary, “Big” question to each participant, “What is it that you do in your classroom that you think reduces the risk of students dropping out, and increases the probability that students will graduate?” As this is the primary focus, this question was asked often in each session. Then, I provided a general verbal overview of the study. I asked that each participant introduce themselves, where they work, and what they teach. I made snacks and refreshments available to the participants.

I asked participants to sit down around a table, where I first reviewed some guidelines for the group to assist in facilitating discussion. For this study, I asked that the group adhere to Socratic seminar “ground rules”, such as speaking so that all can hear you, listening closely, talking to each other (not just to the leader), and considering all viewpoints and ideas.

Two additional guidelines attributed to Socratic teachings were also highlighted.

1. Anyone who does not wish to answer a question can state that they would like to pass.
2. While it is appropriate to disagree with a person's ideas, please do not criticize the person who has offered them. (Stem Resources, 2013, para. 12)

After reviewing these guidelines, I asked the participants to share their thoughts on what they do in the classroom that they think reduces the risk of students dropping out, and increases the probability that students will graduate. I allowed as much time as necessary for this first question.

I then reviewed some highlights from this meeting's related power point presentation(s) that I had earlier sent out via email. The “big” question, “What is it that you do in your classroom that you think reduces the risk of students dropping out, and increases the probability that students will graduate?” was again highlighted. Again, if conversation stalled I stated that certain probes that I had earlier distributed (which were generated from my literature review)

would be asked to the group as required. I provided each participant with a hard copy of these questions to browse through if they desired. I then turned the conversation over to the big group.

Before I began discussing the findings of the think tank, I first wanted to explain the manner in which we agreed to meet. After discussions with the group, it became apparent that there was no mutually convenient time for us to gather again as one large group. I explained to the group that the think tank model I was implementing (Caliva and Scheier, 1992) allowed for the think tank to meet in smaller break-out groups, if this was most convenient. After several dates over the next few weeks were offered and determined to be unsuitable for some, we agreed that the option of meeting in smaller break-out groups was the best option. Therefore, one group of two asked that they stay later this first day, and continue discussions for two additional hours. A second group of three asked to meet on the following Saturday morning, and so I arranged to meet with them for three hours on that date. A third group of two, comprising of the two who were unable to attend the first session, asked to meet early the next week at a different, mutually agreed upon time and location. Finally, the one participant who seemed hesitant to join agreed to meet with one remaining participant as the last group of two, and asked that we meet later the following week, after school hours, at a different, mutually agreed upon location. I decided it was in the best interest of the study to temporarily allow for such a modification, and met with the first break-out group of two after the larger group meeting.

After discussing this option with my advisor several days later, we agreed that this option was acceptable as my study still aligned itself with my original proposal to follow Caliva and Scheier's (1992) model of a think tank. That is, Caliva and Scheier (1992) noted that smaller break-out groups were encouraged if deemed more convenient for its members. Once this was confirmed by my advisor as acceptable, I contacted the remaining seven participants and

reaffirmed our proposed meeting dates as acceptable, and informed the two who met after the initial session that our meeting was adequate for the study.

For each of the next smaller break-out meetings, I once again had refreshments available (i.e. coffee, tea, juice, fruit), and followed a similar, albeit scaled down version of the format used at first meeting. I again briefly reviewed some highlights from this meeting's related power point presentation that I had earlier sent out via email, and asked the "big question" stated earlier. Upon completion of these discussions, I thanked the group for their participation, reminded them that they were welcome to request a copy of the study when completed, and then dismissed the participants.

All meetings were audio taped, and detailed written notes of the participants' responses to the process were be collected in order to analyze themes in their perceptions, self-evaluations, and opinions of issues discussed. Again, all participants had the option, through information provided on the consent form, to receive a written summary of the results of the study when it was completed. They were informed that all of the audiotapes and transcripts were to be stored for 2 years under lock and key in a filing cabinet located in a locked office at the researcher's home. The audio-tapes were then to be smashed by hammer, and the transcripts were to be shredded through an industrial shredder.

Again, there were no risks to participants or a third party involved in this study. There were also no direct benefits, other than the possibility that their participation might contribute to a greater understanding of their own practices. There was no deception of the participants in this study. Although the researcher knew the identities of the participants, their names were not used in any documentation. Additionally, all identifying information regarding the schools they taught at was kept out of any documents for distribution. All information was and will continue to be

kept strictly confidential. In fact, school administrators were not informed which staff members participated in the research study and who opted out. All subjects had the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason without consequences of any kind. Participants were never compensated for their participation, although I did provide some light refreshments, arranged for one ride home for one of the participants, and arranged for child care for one of the participants, during each of the think tank meetings.

Data Analysis

After comparing and contrasting all the transcripts and notes from each of the think tank assemblies, I focused on the most apparent and pertinent themes (and sub-themes) that arose. Based on analysis of all the teacher interviews, it was hoped that further insight could be attained regarding what exactly makes them so successful in a senior high school setting. In particular, I anticipated that the focus group sessions would generate a wide variety of ideas.

I read through each of these think tank sessions, identified and coded emergent themes and sub-themes, and then to assigned think tank group quotations to the themes and sub-themes. I found that themes emerged from the participants' voices. After all think tank sessions were completed, I first arranged to have a retired private retired office clerk, who had no professional connections to any school division, transcribe all of the interviews. To my knowledge, this individual did not live near the school division where the participants worked, and had never met or even heard of any of the participants in this study. Upon completion of the transcripts, any and all records of the transcripts were deleted from this person's computer, and no hard copies of the transcripts were left in this person's care. Again, all ideas presented were placed in aggregate, and no names were typed into the transcripts, so that no idea could be linked to a single speaker.

I read each of the transcripts, seeking out emergent themes, reoccurring ideas, examples, counter-examples, and outlying quotes that did not quite fit in. I then coded my data sources to highlight common themes into different colours, and then organized them by cutting and pasting them electronically on my computer.

Upon completion of this task, I wanted to reduce the risk that I had based my findings upon my own biases. Therefore, I asked that the participants keep some notes, as they felt necessary, throughout the sessions, with the intent that I could later conduct a "member check". I also found a new research assistant to review all of the transcripts and independently search for themes. This research assistant had obtained a Masters in Education, and is a retired school administrator from a different school division. Although this assistant did not have any professional connections with the participants of the study, I deleted all names from the transcripts prior to handing them over for member checking. Simon (2011) describe member checking as follows:

Member checking is the process of verifying information with the targeted group. It allows the stake-holders or participants the chance to correct errors of fact or errors of interpretation. Member checks add to the validity of the observers' interpretation of qualitative observations. When discussing the credibility of the data observed in your dissertation make certain that you describe in detail, how the results of the member check altered (or not) the data (p.1).

After I deconstructed the transcripts, I sent out a copy of the aforementioned themes that I found to the participants and the research assistant, and asked them to reply with feedback consisting of shared perspectives corrections, clarifications, or alternative viewpoints. As stated earlier, triangulation is considered a way to improve the analysis and interpretation of findings

from various types of studies (Hales, 2010). Berg and Lune (2011) stated, "Investigator triangulation consists of using multiple rather than single observers of the same object" (p.6). For the framework of this study, I used "investigator triangulation" as a means of ensuring better validity. Specifically, I compared and contrasted my viewpoints of the sessions with the participants and the research assistant.

After they each had an opportunity to read and respond to my findings, I made the necessary adjustments. I initially sent out five themes that I independently found after reviewing the transcripts to all of the participants in the study. Only one of the 9 participants emailed me back, and agreed with the comments. My research assistant was assigned to independently seek out themes, and we compared my list to the research assistant's list over telephone. There was general consensus between our two lists, but we both agreed that we needed to discuss our interpretations further in an attempt to better align them. We spoke four separate times by telephone during the day, and in between telephone calls independently worked on our themes and emailed each other altered versions of the themes. Although at times I found this process to be tedious and time consuming, I followed Wilcott's (2001) advice to, "Listen actively. Don't argue, don't explain, don't defend. Take the advice under advisement, show your appreciation, and make sure that you understand anything that your critic will tell you".

At the conclusion of our discussions, the research assistant and I agreed that the five original themes could be reduced to three, and we were both satisfied with the new list. Once again, I sent out the new list of themes to the participants, along with the original five themes. Six of the participants wrote me back stating their agreement to the themes, although two of them asked that I include one or two observations that they noted in the think tanks. I assured both of them that their observations were incorporated in the themes. One participant wrote me

back stating he preferred the original themes to the updated ones, because of an issue with the wording of one of the new themes. I emailed the participant back with an updated wording of the theme, and asked the participant to email me back if there were further concerns. The participant responded in favour of the amendment. Eight of the 9 participants later responded positively by email with the three updated themes, as did the research assistant. I never received a response from the ninth participant, despite writing the person two emails. At this point, I decided that the three themes were appropriate for my study.

In the Chapter 4, I analyze the emergent themes that we agreed upon as a collective group in order to determine their significance with respect to my research question, and to prior research, implications for practice, and possible future research.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, AND ANALYSIS

As explained in Chapter 3, I conducted a qualitative study that sought out Manitoba high school classroom teachers and invited them to participate in a think tank. The purpose of the study was to capture their voices in order to better understand what makes them successful at helping adolescents stay in school and graduate. As outlined in Chapter 3, nine teachers agreed to take part in this think tank. In this chapter, I identify the themes that emerged from the think tank sessions, and provide numerous quotes from participants to support each theme. These themes were chosen as they tended to surface repeatedly in each of the think tank sessions. The participants and my research assistant agreed that these themes were prominent in the sessions. In this chapter, these three themes are discussed individually, and connected to the bigger issue of understanding what makes teachers successful at helping adolescents stay in school and graduate.

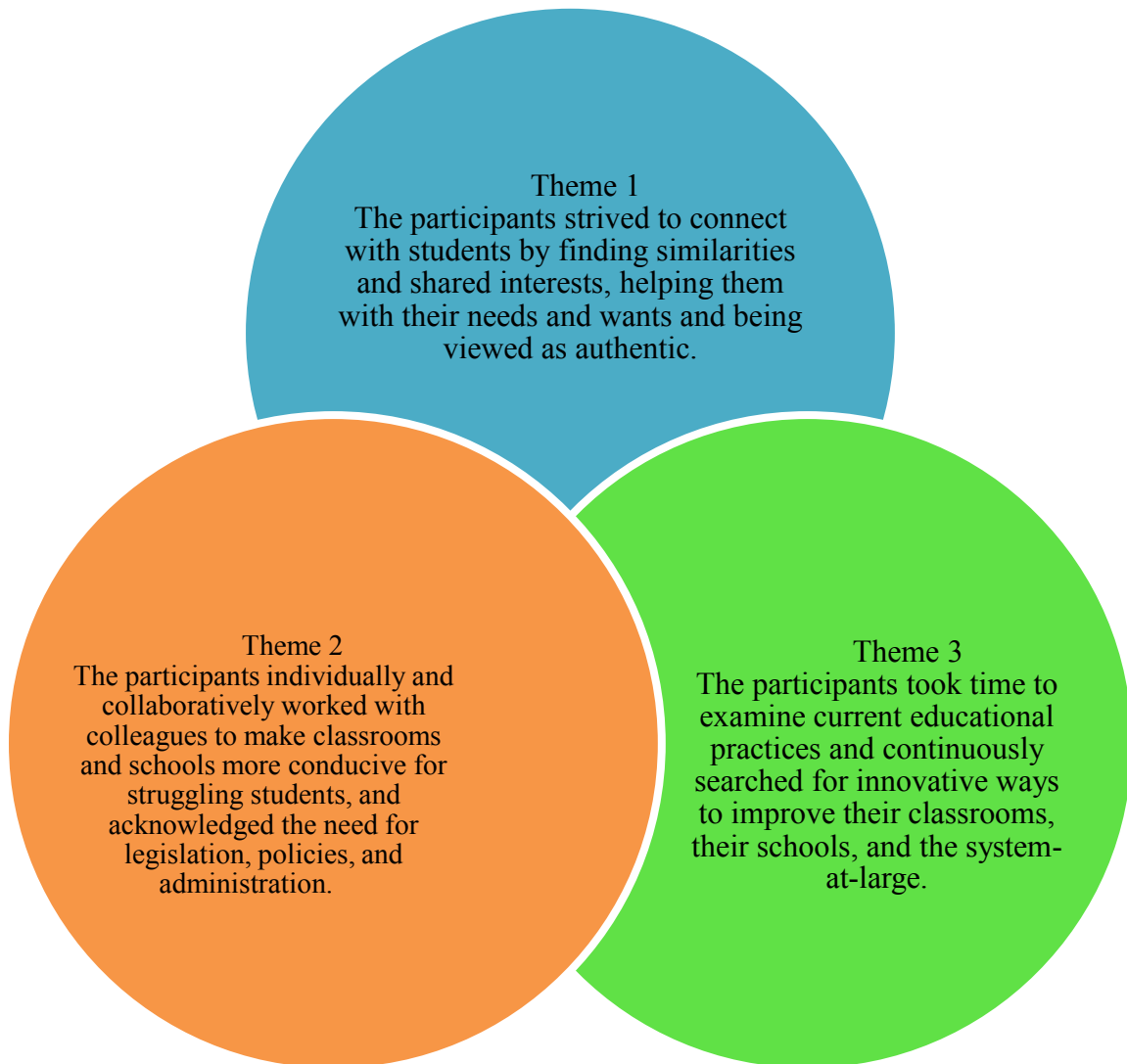
As each theme is discussed, I compare and contrast the participants' responses with some of the literature reviewed Chapter 2, along with a few new research sources. Within this section, I also incorporate some of my own personal observations, insights and questions, based on my studies and 21 years working as a classroom teacher, special education teacher, resource teacher, counselor, and administrator in four Manitoba high schools.

Three Themes

Upon completion of the aforementioned study, the following three themes emerged from the teacher think tank.

1. The participants strived to connect with students by finding similarities and shared interests, helping them with their needs and wants, and being viewed as authentic.

Figure 4.0. Themes of Study



2. The participants individually and collaboratively worked with colleagues to make classrooms and schools more conducive for struggling students, and acknowledged the need for legislation, policies, and administration.
3. The participants took time to examine current educational practices and continuously searched for innovative ways to improve their classrooms, their schools, and the system-at-large.

Theme 1

The participants strived to connect with students by finding similarities and shared interests, helping them with their needs and wants, and being viewed as authentic. If there was one dominant theme that continuously surfaced throughout all of the think tank sessions, it was the emphasis that all of the participants made great efforts to connect with their students. In fact, this theme was the first one that teachers wanted to address, and arose several times throughout each session.

I introduced the first session with the question, “What is it that you do in your classroom that you think reduces the risk of students dropping out, and increases the probability that students will graduate?” - and then asked each person around the table to comment. The first participant I asked immediately offered:

The main thing I do is connect with students, that's a big thing I do. Connecting with them socially, engaging with them academically as best as I can. All of these things – connecting with home, all of these things to keep them in school. I think connecting with kids also goes into the classroom. We have to establish connections with the kids, and that is a very important thing so that we are sure that students who are there want to be there, and if we can provide a sense of belongingness.

In each of the think tank sessions, the high school teachers shared many examples that demonstrated the importance of connecting with students in order to combat the sobering dropout statistics. First, the participants shared ways in which they connected with students by finding similarities and shared interests. These included finding similarities in culture and language, age, personal and emotional hardships, hobbies, clubs, humour, and popular culture. Although each of the participants found different ways to connect with students, there was unanimous consensus that to be effective in the classroom, teachers benefited greatly by finding similarities and shared interests with their students. Each teacher shared examples of how he or she had connected with his or her students by helping them with an issue or problem. Many of these examples involved assisting students when economic imbalances were involved, but they also included examples of teachers providing students with personal and academic assistance. Third, the participants noted the importance of being viewed as authentic in the students' eyes.

Initially, the teachers promptly agreed that connecting with their students was a crucial component to achieving success in their classrooms. For example, one teacher quickly stated, "Absolutely, I agree, I mean making meaningful connections with students by having authentic conversations with them is important". Another said, "I think that it has a lot to do with the relationships that you make with the students. It was important that I built those relationships with them and it's kind of how I spent the last 2 months was building those relationships just getting to know them, their interests. I've kind of become a person who they trust" A third teacher offered that connecting was an essential component of high school success, noting, "I felt there was a real need to connect. They (students) didn't know me and I didn't know them but I just need to connect and I know that they will need it too".

When asked to describe what “connecting” with their students meant, a teacher offered the following statement.

It's a lot about building a rapport with them and making sure they are comfortable in the room. I think that some, it's kind of come to my attention with a few of them where they have said they just don't feel comfortable in some of their classrooms, and so they didn't go. So, I think that is really important in any classroom, actually having those relationships with the students and making them feel comfortable and not just academically but on a personal level as well.

Challenges to Connecting

In the literature review, I highlighted several challenges that teachers faced when attempting to connect with their students. Causes of adolescent antisocial behaviours were also explored in the literature review from sociological (Harden, D'Onofrio, Van Hulle, Turkheimer, Rodgers, Waldman, & Lahey, 2009), psychological (Moffitt, 1993), criminological (Cauffman, Steinberg, & Piquero, 2005), and educational (Pharris-Ciureja, Hirschman, and Willhoft, 2012) perspectives. The unique nature of high school students was reviewed, and attention was given to Shreiner's (2013) assertion that high school students can be behind academically, may have educational malaise, and may struggle with self-identity, while being prepared for the real world.

According to responses made in the think tank sessions, it appeared that connecting with students was easier said than done, particularly with students of high school age. The challenges were primarily focused on a variety of difficulties that students face as they transition from elementary and middle years environments to high school settings. Specifically, the think tank participants highlighted the following challenges.

1. Middle school transition.

2. Inadequate student preparation.
3. Adolescent malaise.
4. Finding adequate student-teacher contact time.
5. Students' physiological and psychological changes.
6. Competing with increased distractions,
7. Increasing job demands.
8. Misperceptions of high school teachers.

The challenge of middle school transition. One teacher noted that connecting with students is more difficult as they make the transition from middle years to high school, stating, "We have several assumptions; we think that these kids, when they come to our room, will adjust quickly (to high school). But no, there's a different culture even within a culture and so that I thought we need to be able to connect and for kids to be able to have that sense of belonging is so important".

Many of these challenges, specific to high school aged youths, were brought forward by the think tank participants. One teacher offered a glimpse into the magnitude of this task by outlining some of the challenges high school teachers face with the following narrative.

I think it took basically years to build a relationship with (one) kid, It was basically the same thing, he's got various issues – addiction issues, home issues, getting all kinds of things going on. I mean it's a 4 or 5 year project, and he has come a long way. But it's that, you got to care for these kids and you've got to prove it. And that's a good starting point.

Sometimes, the teachers encountered students who had no identifiable supports in their own lives. This can be very frustrating, as one teacher noted when describing the plight of one particular student.

See what I find frustrating is that we... here's a child who is basically a street kid before she came in here. I won't go into details, but she's struggling. I asked her well, "Who's your contact, who's your support?" and she goes, "Well nobody". She has something, but not to the level of the designated special needs people and here she is falling through the cracks here, and I'm thinking here's somebody who could potentially has the cognitive ability to do something with her education, but is struggling. She lives on her own. She has to feed herself. She feels totally alienated and expresses it. I feel for this child and she comes to me during class asking basically for help, and I have a classroom full of children waiting for me and I am taking time, and I am looking for somebody to help me. I mean this person is asking basically for help and she doesn't have it there. It's not that we don't care I just don't think there are the resources there.

The teachers shared many examples of challenges to making vital connections with their students. Drawing on their own personal and professional experiences to illustrate the undertaking they faced, several teachers commented on how the challenge of connecting to students increased as they progressed in age from elementary to middle years and finally to high school.

I find that teaching elementary kids, it's easier than teaching middle years kids, because they are keen to how you talk, how you look, everything about you. They look at you and they can comment on you. My kids, they love you, hug you, kiss you, like you are someone who is a mom or dad. Like, it's just a different thing. In elementary school they

are more fresh learners and they are more curious to ask more questions than elementary students. They are more curious and more creative also I think more of a fresh learner.

Based upon this comment, it appears that high school teachers face the challenge of teaching students who come to school without the enthusiasm for learning that they may have had when they were younger. They seemed to suggest that the novelty of learning had worn off for many of students, and was replaced with feelings of malaise, boredom, and fear. One teacher noted the challenges faced by students as their attitude towards school transformed from seeing it as a place one attends because it is enjoyable and entertaining, to an institution requiring more individual accountability and credit completion.

The kids need their credits to graduate and it is a slightly different ballgame. I haven't done a lot of middle years, a lot of kids come into grade 9 and they're having a tough time adjusting to that whole credit system. So, it's kind of a shift in thinking, I think. In respect to elementary schools like it's the district differences. Elementary school kids take it more like fun going to school.

The challenge of inadequate preparation. The topic of whether or not students were adequately prepared for high school came up often in the think tank sessions. Some participants seemed overwhelmed when they discussed whether or not students entered high school with an adequate knowledge of basic facts, or had acquired the necessary skills required for success.

I find like kids are getting passed each grade and are coming to grade nine and some of them, their level is so low, I was just wondering how they can get into grade nine, if they're not able to write one correct sentence, they get so many spelling mistakes in one sentence. In another social studies class, there are some kids who don't know even about

who is the Prime Minister of Canada. They can't even write a single sentence, how are they coming into grade 9 and grade 10?

The participants tended to agree that success in high school was largely dependent on whether or not the student had acquired the necessary skills in earlier years. One teacher referred to the elementary and middle years of schooling as the "preparation years" for high school. Another participant noted the following when discussing the importance of being prepared for high school.

I think if the kids are well prepared in middle years, especially in grade 7 and 8 for a high school life. I think they would be able to adjust quickly when they reach grade 9. But, sometimes you see a gap where kids haven't enjoyed their middle years and have not really prepared for a high school life. Then when they reach grade 9, they think that, they're really shocked because they think, "Oh, now it's real". You have to study hard, you have to do this assignment and we have to pass grade and you have to do the tests and all requirements, and so more responsibility now than before. The kids that have got a good training during their middle years, they are easy to adjust in high school life, because they are prepared for that.

The participants offered that students often were "shocked" to find that they did not come from middle years equipped with the skills necessary for high school success. For some, this shock grew even greater as they quickly fell behind in their subjects, and were unable to acquire compulsory credits.

We have grade nines in our high school. So they theoretically would be deemed prepared. Wouldn't they? It seems like a shock, isn't it? It is a shock and grade nine in our school we offer a lot of support, just because of that shock that comes. I think they

are the same kids from grade 8 to grade 9, but they come to the system, they come into this credit system and the at risk kids are way more at risk as soon as they get into high school because all of a sudden they are half way through the year and maybe are failing courses, and they see themselves falling behind. These at risk kids are disengaging because they are kind of giving up. They are kind of going, "I'm never going to graduate." You hear that a lot. "I'm never going to graduate, right?"

The challenge of malaise. As some students' attitudes towards the purpose of school attendance shifted, the teachers perceived a common pattern of growing student malaise. One teacher offered, "I found that the kids were more enthusiastic about school (in the middle school years) and I felt that everything was new and fresh. Teaching high school now, it sometimes feels like they already know a lot of this stuff and bored by that. So, I think in terms of achieving that, their attention is a little bit different."

One teacher shared that this shift was not surprising, given the enormous physiological changes occurring in students as they transition from the elementary to middle years of school.

You feel more attached to more elementary kids than with middle years because that's the puberty stage where they're also having some difficulty about their own selves. To understand oneself it's already difficult. How would you be able to understand another person? That's where the difficulty is in the adjustment period.

The participants noted this shift to be a confusing time for students. For example, students entering high school are accustomed to having had contact with only a few teachers during the school day.

I think some of the problem may also lie in that the middle years students are used to one teacher and they develop a really strong relationship with that teacher and then they come

to high school and suddenly they have four or five different teachers. I think that can be very overwhelming for a kid.

The challenge of finding adequate student-teacher contact time. Another teacher posited that the shift in individual student-teacher contact made an enormous difference in the ability to connect in high school.

I think because of the time that we lack as high school teachers, we only meet them one subject for an hour and twenty minutes, unlike the middle years and elementary we have them the whole day. It's a huge difference in time contact.

Another participant in the think tank responded that students entering high school were often shifting their notion of what was deemed to be a comfortable and appropriate amount of student-teacher connection.

I mean when they are younger, they want more contact. When they are older, they can't waste any time in the classroom. They can't wait to be dismissed, right? It's just because they don't want to have these conversations or that type of relationship. They are polite and all that, but when they are younger, they really want to get to know you.

The challenge of physiological and psychological changes. Several teachers remarked that this malaise towards connecting was heavily influenced by natural psychological changes within the students as they matured and entered their high school years. One teacher commented as follows.

Is it also may be just people starting to get their own identity as they get older and starting to need us less and maybe wanting to explore a little bit more as they get older and as they mature other things are pulling them away from this too. I guess they could be more independent, right? Which means that they don't have to go to school? They

could skip more, they could do their own thing. So, at times they are more at risk, because all of a sudden, they can disappear, right? It is easier to disappear out of a high school than it is in middle years.

Some participants noted the frustration of having students disappear before the opportunity to connect with them even presented itself. One teacher stated, "That's not happening with all the students, (they are) not making those connections and they don't seem connected and we're having a really hard time reaching them. So they're not coming to school so we can't have the conversation about what's not meeting their needs". To emphasize the enormity of the attendance problem, this teacher noted that, "I got students who are at 45 absences, you have never seen them before and then there are also students who are off and on and they have got all sorts of other things going on in their lives".

Several participants in the think tank did not believe that the recent provincial law raising the compulsory age to 18 would not necessarily translate into regular attendance. One teacher stated, "I mean I work with at risk kids all the time and it makes no difference as far as I have seen. You can't say to these kids 'you have to be here, it's the law, or call their parents who don't, or aren't involved in their life anyways; it doesn't make any impact that I've seen. Maybe others have seen it, but I haven't." Another teacher commented, "I don't know why we did the compulsory school age to 18." A third agreed, stating, "I don't understand why they raised this thing to 18."

Although some participants questioned the effectiveness of the law, some noted that students might attend longer because school is now compulsory to age 18. Still, they stated that the law did little to change the attitudes of students who were not really invested in their schooling. One teacher noted, "The biggest challenge that teachers have is trying to teach to a

population of people who are not there of their own accord, that are not there voluntary participants, but they are involuntary participants. You get a group of people just thrown into this mix and with a spectrum of needs and here you are as a teacher who will teach them.”

Participants noted that they all made attempts to personally contact the home when students “disappeared”, but this was difficult. As one teacher noted, “Where I am having issues, it’s hard to get in contact with people at home.”

The challenge of competing with increased distractions. While chronic non-attenders were difficult to connect with, students who regularly attempted to depart class for parts of the period also presented their own unique challenges. One teacher described the phenomenon as “Vriblevrits”, a Low German expression that, when loosely translated, means, “Ants in the pants”. Another teacher referred to the phenomenon as “Happy Feet”.

I have a student who I call “Happy Feet” and he is in my history class. He can’t stand still. There will be times when he gets antsy. He knows it, he’ll go for a hallway walk and he will say, “Thanks, you could tell, I was getting happy, right?”

One teacher offered that the problem of being drawn outside of the classroom for extended periods of time had less to do with “ants in the pants” or “happy feet”, which probably is an issue at all grade levels. Instead, this participant thought that this phenomenon had more to do with the constant barrage of calls and texts that high school students receive from other students looking to connect during class time. The teacher noted, “We are competing with outside sources. We are competing with technology, right? Who is more interesting, the iPhone or me? In many respects, the iPhone. I can’t compete. Elementary kids don’t have those.”

One participant noted that when student attention was taken away by external distractions, and combined with the shortened amount of student-teacher contact time and increased curricular content, a difficult scenario to make meaningful connections was created.

High school is more contact driven. I think that whole thing of being able to have connections is harder for high school teachers because (you're) given too many kids and getting through the stuff is tougher because you don't know them as well as the younger kids, right, and kids in elementary school don't have cell phones.

The challenge of increasing job demands. According to the think tank participants, students were not the only ones having their attentions focused on a multitude of tasks throughout their school day. One participant shared the following observation.

Teachers have to do so many things. It is not only in teaching the classes, they are in charge of so many committees, they're members of so many clubs and committees, then doing T.A. and meetings and so many other things. They have a lot of pressure and they also have obligations with their families also at home. I saw the teachers working here in school still till 5:00 o'clock and till 5:30 and some teachers stay here till 8:00. There is a lot of workload. One more thing, here teachers every year get the different subjects to teach. You're teaching here Social Studies and ELA and you never know in the second semester you are going to get something different to teach, and that's another point of stress, right? Then you know once you are in the job, you are going to teach these two subjects which are your major and minor for throughout four or five, six years. Then you will not be that stressed, because you keep adding up in your assignments every year.

The challenge of misperceptions of high school teachers. It appeared that perceptions and misperceptions of high school teachers also served as distractions for some of the

participants as they performed their duties. When asked to highlight some of these, some participants offered examples that probably were universal to all teachers at all grade levels. For example, one teacher commented that they often hear comments like, "Such a long holiday. I had a friend who was really like, 'Oh, teachers get all summer off, you slacker'".

There were some comments that participants heard that seemed to single out high school teachers, in particular. For example, one participant noted, "I think that is the biggest thing, that we don't care and as a high school teacher, we don't care and that we are kind of in it for the money. I don't think that is true, and that we don't put in a lot of time. I think that is another one that I have heard from a lot of people." Another participant had heard from elementary and middle school teachers that teachers in high school were more "arrogant". Another teacher stated that the perception is that high school teachers have little prep work compared to elementary teachers, and simply, "Pull out the filing cabinet, clear out the bottom and teach."

Although it should be noted that there was some chuckling and laughter as teacher participants shared perceptions and misperceptions of high school teachers, there was indication that these comments seemed to bother some of the participants. One teacher noted frustration over being viewed unfairly by others.

And they don't realize, that we do care and that we do take a lot of this home. I know that all of us here do care, because if we didn't, I wouldn't be talking about students to a colleague between classes because I thought it was important to see if there is something I needed to do after school. I think the elementary teachers spend more time with the kids. But, the high school teachers spend more time doing the work. So, I think there are a lot of high school teachers who work a lot in terms of course content, not so much in connection because we all have little time.

To conclude, the participants in the think tank sessions highlighted many challenges to connecting with high school aged youth, including external sociological factors, lack of student preparation or readiness for high school, shifts in the structure of the school day, reduction in personal student-teacher contact time, physiological and psychological changes in the student, outside distractions, and misperceptions of the high school teachers. Despite these challenges, teachers provided numerous ways in which they connected with students.

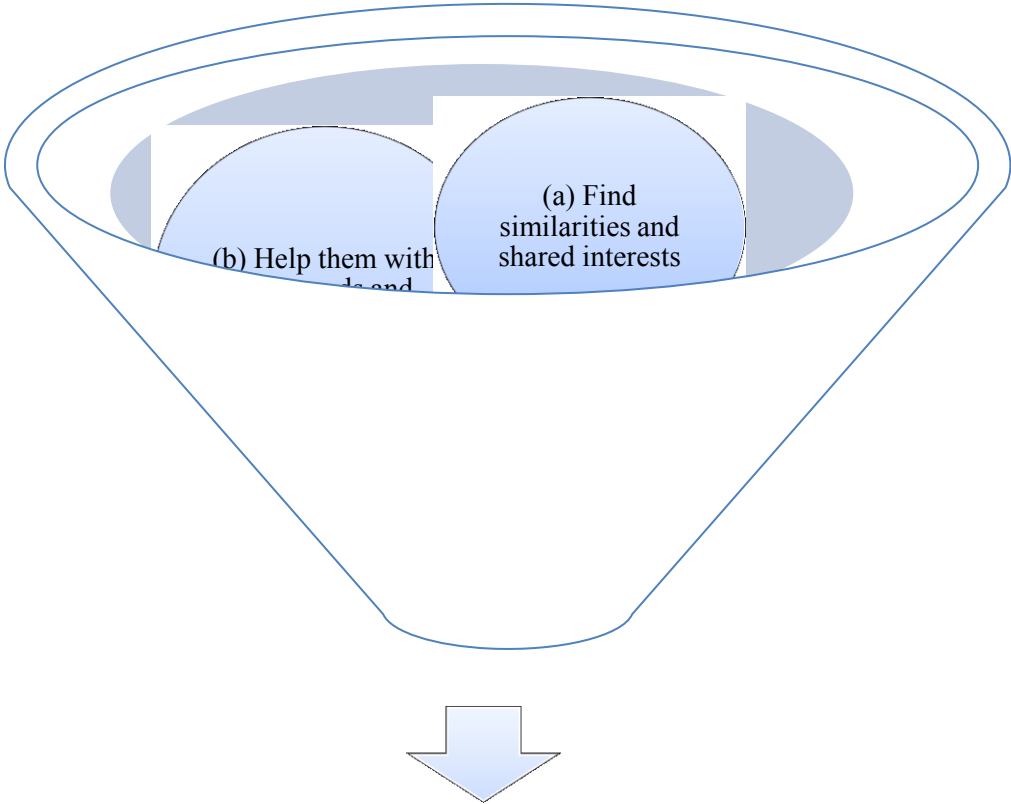
Connecting Strategies

To counteract the aforementioned challenges, many useful strategies and examples were offered by the teachers regarding how they make connections with students. After reviewing the transcripts from the think tank sessions, it appeared that their approaches focused on finding similarities and shared interests, helping students with their needs and wants, and being viewed as authentic.

Participants found similarities and shared interests. Many teachers shared personal anecdotes that exemplified a great desire to find common ground with their students, based upon their own personal interests and values. For example, one teacher noted, "I think of the word 'communal', or things that we have in common are really important because we (teachers and students) actually have a lot in common. I find that we're a lot more similar than we think". Common ground is sometimes obvious to find, as is illustrated in one teacher's example of how shared culture and language provided an invaluable link with the student and his home.

I can recall a particular situation where a couple of weeks ago there was a newly arrived student from the Philippines, and I know for a fact that a kid from the Philippines would presumably be able to adjust quickly in a new environment. But when the parents sent

Figure 4.1. Participants' Connecting Methods



Keys to Connecting with Students

their kid to school (they) said “oh, if you happen to have any questions then just give me a call” and I gave my personal number. That day the kid only attended one class, and he didn't want to go back to school after that after that experience. The parents phoned me and said that their son didn't want to go back to school. He is afraid and still adjusting and he just arrived 2 weeks ago. It was very hard for the parents and me to convince the child to come back to school and just trying it out. We did some adjustment and after 3 weeks we convinced him to come back. Now he was only away once because he was sick but otherwise his attendance is perfect. Every time I see him in the halls and in class I ask him “how are you doing”, and “are you doing well”. So it was great in my case. I was culturally connected to him. And so that was my advantage because I have a language connection as well, right.

There were suggestions offered as to how teachers connected with cultures that were different from their own. One teacher shared an example of how inviting someone like a guest elder into the classroom helped many students with similar customs, stating, “I brought in a guest, who is really an enigmatic, a charismatic, and powerful elder. And they make good connections.”

Sometimes teachers drew upon their own emotional experiences growing up, and made connections that way. For example, one teacher noted that he could readily identify with students who were at-risk to harm themselves, stating, “I was suicidal when I was a teenager. I never actually attempted suicide, but I was there. I looked it in the eye more than once.”

Another teacher shared some of the difficulties encountered as a student, allowing an opportunity to empathize with the students that the participant works with today.

I think I would have failed school actually, if it had not been for great fabulous teachers who believe in me and helped me through my career, because I was not strong in school, because I had other issues at home. So, I could sort of empathize with a lot of these kids, because I had my own issues in school that were reading, well who cares about reading, when this is going on at home, right, and I think that is what we have to do as teachers.

Yes, education is important and we want to do the content but we have to see where they are coming from as well. That's why I tell students, "If I did it and you knew me when I was . . . you can do it to and it's possible."

One teacher thought that there were benefits to being similar in age to the students, as it made connecting with them much more natural.

I'm getting to know them because I'm actually not much older than a lot of them so I'm able to relate to a lot of the things that they tell me and I found that having those positive relationships and keeping them in class, and not kicking them out if they get a bit disruptive, so they can leave and cause more troubles, I'm trying to keep them here and returning day after day.

One teacher stated that finding common hobbies or shared interests presented an invaluable opportunity to connect with students, particularly those deemed at-risk. This participant provided one such example of how sharing a seemingly extraneous pastime contributed significantly to connecting the student with academics.

A student wanted to start a hip hop club and in the school and so he came to me and said he wanted to start a hip hop club, because I talked to him about hip hop, and I said of course I would love to. In the process of starting a hip hop club we met one student who was a poor attender and doesn't do very much work. He's failing English but has a cell

phone full of hip hop songs that he's written. While he will not call it poetry he has a cell phone full of poetry. He just happens to call them raps and rhymes so we had a conversation and it opened up. It was just by sharing what I'm passionate about.

Shared interests seemed to provide the impetus for clubs being formed in schools. In the teachers' eyes, these clubs seemed to provide highly effective ways to link teachers and students. One participant cited the following example of how clubs connected students with teachers.

One of the specific things for (student's name withheld) was the moccasin making class. Her partner sits in my class, and one day said, "I heard you make moccasins." I said, "Very bad ones." And she said, "I want to make moccasins for (student's name withheld) and for her sister and for her cousin who also goes to the school and is not supported and failing very seriously. So I said," Great, at lunch we can make moccasins.

The participants thought of other effective, less formalized strategies to connect with students. One teacher noted that using humour appropriately and being aware of popular culture provided an effective opportunity to connect with students.

I tell really bad jokes, and I'll talk about whatever the news of the day is, whatever happened the night before. What was on T.V, I'll talk about this T.V. show. We'll talk about movies, video, whatever the big thing of the day. We'll sit there and kill 10 or 15 minutes. In an 80 minute class, that's probably what they are going to remember more than the fact that I taught them that an electron is moving in one direction constitutes something, They're not going to remember that. They're going to remember what I talked about.

To summarize, each of the participants shared numerous ways in which they connected with students by finding similarities and shared interests. These included finding similarities in

culture and language, age, personal and emotional hardships, hobbies, clubs, humour, and popular culture. Although each of the participants found different ways to connect with students, there was unanimous consensus that to be effective in the classroom, teachers benefited greatly by finding similarities and shared interests with their students.

Participants helped students with their needs and wants. Although there was consensus among all of the teacher participants about the advantages of finding similarities and shared interests with their students, all agreed that this was not always possible. In one of the earlier think tank sessions, teachers were rapidly exchanging how they used similar interests as a means to connect with students viewed as at-risk, when one teacher quietly noted, "I'm thinking about kids that I don't have a lot in common with which I have a few of, like the real at risk kids, I don't have a lot in common with like I don't hang out downtown, and do all the things they do, but I find that one of the things I do to connect is just helping them out".

This comment seemed to swing the focus of the conversation from connecting by finding shared interests with the students to connecting by finding ways to help students. A conversation suddenly ensued about the differences in needs that all students had, and the best ways to address these concerns. One teacher felt strongly that teachers needed to assist students any way they could, even if it meant providing more assistance to some than others. This teacher stated, "That's what we call equity over equality." Later, a teacher noted, "“Yeah, you have provided a need that you are able to give. It is something that is negotiable, this is not a non-negotiable.”" Another participant added, "I think meeting their hierarchy of needs, you know like finding out if there are certain things missing from their day to day life that I are integral to their day to day life, whether its food or having a sympathetic ear or a place or a person they perceive to be safe.

Just dealing with those day to day needs.” Another teacher offered that different students came to school with different forms of capital, and that teachers needed to be cognizant of this.

I think what you're saying is very similar to the idea of capital. Everyone has certain capital that they have whether it's economic, social or socioeconomic, or all of these things and but we are as teachers we are sort of told that we have to teach to a standard, right? Not everybody comes from the same background, not everybody has the same head start so we have to take that into account when we teach.

All teachers indicated that they had helped students in the past. Many of these examples involved assisting students when socioeconomic imbalances were involved. One teacher expressed the delicate nature of providing such assistance, especially as these students got older.

Kids are extremely astute when it comes to those things and then we retroactively try and fight against those things, so things like including a food program in the school or dresses and tuxes for grads, or after school tutoring for people whose parents aren't active in their education, so I think we are quite proactive at excluding some of those practices that create some of those imbalances called the cost of things. But also I think that we manage to make things a level playing field by encouraging the best possible community we could create.

Interestingly, one teacher noted that one way to help students, especially those who often found themselves in distress, was to, “not sweat the small stuff.” When asked by a second think tank member what the first teacher meant by that, the teacher responded, “I'm not going to sweat the small stuff, because (a particular student) has big issues beyond the classroom really, and I don't want to stress her out, you know.” The teacher who asked for clarification then stated, “I love that”. The first teacher then added, “I found that keeping them in class, and not kicking

them out if they get a bit disruptive, so they can leave and cause more troubles, I'm trying to keep them here and returning day after day."

One teacher highlighted one positive result that occurred after meeting with a student's mother, which eventually assisted in "building their assignments around those relationships".

There's a student who has dyslexia and his mother has spoken in great lengths to me. The student is a very intelligent young man, and he did an oral presentation that was second to none. I told him today that it was one of the best I've seen but you ask him to write it down and, the poor guy, it looks like he's scribbling and I could empathize with that because my son has dyslexia. I just told him that the next test we're having – because he bombed the last test we wrote because it was a written one – he could come at lunch and he's going to have an oral test. I know he knows this stuff, he just can't put pen to paper so, I think I made a connection with this guy because this was a guy who was acting up, and acting silly, and at the parent interview it was sort of clarified you know, he does it because he feels inadequate and he compensates by being the class clown. I'm not saying that I'm going to be 100 % all the time. I drop the ball all the time. But sometimes you don't, and that's good.

Sometimes, teachers helped by facilitating connections for students with adults outside of the classroom who could assist in areas where the teacher could not help, such as access to school administrators or external social agencies. One teacher stated that students often needed assistance with issues that occurred outside of the walls of the school, and teachers needed to help with those concerns. This teacher stated, "I mean asking them with what bus they need to get home, or could you call my social worker – sure I'll call your social worker." An example of this is illustrated in the following narrative offered by another teacher:

We have a girl, I just looked at her file, she is in the 3rd year of grade 9, and this year she will be 17 years old. She's a smart kid. She always starts the year with a good marks, she could be tops in the class, whether its math, science social, or English but after several weeks we're talking about attendance issues. She would not show up. I talked to her social worker. It happened in the past and she's doing it again. I tried to email my vice principal to recommend that the kid could be in the credit recovery program because I just learned that she could earn 2 credits in grade 9 and 10 at the same time through the credit recovery program.

In some instances, teachers helped by facilitating students in solving some of their own social problems. One teacher cited the following example.

We did a class wide inquiry project on bullying. We made a Facebook page and talked about a plan for change. One of the first things they picked up on was suspension doesn't work. It came from the kids. They see suspension as a voluntary holiday. This came directly from the mouth of a student, "When I want a day off, I can light the toilet paper in the bathroom on fire and I get a day off." The student's suggestion for something like that is to have them have a one on one with other students. This is after the event has happened of some type within their lives. That is essentially what they are saying, just discussing the issue and then connecting the people that need support with support. So the kid that didn't show up because they wanted to avoid the quiz, they did something to get suspended to avoid their quiz. They would still have to do their quiz. That was the kid's suggestion; I think it's perfect. School restitution is what they suggested. If you keep it inside the school, the problem tends to stay there.

While the think tank participants recognized the value in assisting students with personal, social, or socioeconomic issues that often had origins outside of the school, teachers focused much of the discussion on how to best help facilitate learning inside the classroom. As one teacher noted, "Every kid is different. We got to teach a class of 25 kids and we have to teach them all the same material. They don't all run the same and I get that." One teacher questioned whether or not a very small minority of students with significant special needs still required specialized attention that the regular classroom teacher was not equipped to address, recalling two particular students when he noted, "She rarely can formulate putting sentences together; she spends most of her time in the hallway and sings the same song every day. There is another student who has a bike, who rides the bike from one end of the school to the other and then the E.A. pushes her back and that happens every day at a certain time."

Despite some apparently noteworthy differences in each student, all teachers spoke about taking efforts to make the curriculum accessible to all of their students, regardless of their skill-sets. One teacher bluntly stated that to do this, sometimes, "You have to collapse curriculum area walls", noting that the teacher felt that not every facet of the curriculum could possibly be covered. Therefore, the teacher thought that it was her duty to occasionally select and highlight the most important components of the curriculum, rather than do a poor job attempting to cover all of it.

Another teacher noted the importance of students, "getting a bit of a say in what we do, whether it's democratically voting on things, or accessing the curriculum in ways that are more meaningful to them." Another teacher offered, "Content is obviously important, right, we do have to do curricular, but I think, we also look at people as individuals." A third teacher echoed

these sentiments, and shared the following story of a recent attempt to connect the student to the curriculum.

I had a kid today (who) has been having trouble staying in school. He started working and for the last two classes he shut down. I let him shut down for the first class. Today I walked up to him and I sat down with him and I said "What are we going to do? Are you giving up are you shutting down? Is this it?" And he goes, "Well, yeah." I go, "Well what happened?" He goes, "Well I don't want to do this and this and this." So, I said, "Okay, so, I tell you what, you come up with an idea that I can incorporate that I can twist into the curriculum somehow and I'll do it. And he said, "Really?" And I went, "I can do that, but you got to come up with something. You know, and hopefully he is going to come back tomorrow with something.

The teachers commented on two particularly challenging but critical areas where helping students access the curriculum was paramount. The first area was the grade 9 curriculum, in general. One teacher discussed the difficulties both teachers and students had with the sheer volume of information they were being asked to cover in this already difficult year.

The grade 9 curriculum, it's a heavy thing. There's lots of content you need to cover. They are absolutely lost, and that is maybe because we focus so much in grade 9 on clearing the curriculum, getting it through. I find the stuff that bothers me is the curriculum. If you say it's a guide, it's what you should try to do. Try to get the spirit of the curriculum done. You have to sacrifice this outcome to have the kids better understand this deeper. You know, that's what's important.

Mathematics also seemed to be an area that the participants viewed as difficult for many students to access. One teacher noted the following as an example of how many students felt about math, especially when lacking in necessary skills.

I had a student who at the first day of school, she did not want to enter the class because she was afraid of doing math. She did not want to enter the class because she was afraid of doing high school math that much. So, right away, I am going to have to spend the first two months trying to get her used to being in math class and try to slowly build those things up there.

There were a number of strategies that teachers shared in dealing with these challenges. One teacher emphasized the importance of creating the right environment, saying, "It's all about having a positive learning environment. Often you need to have trust with the students before they'll trust you enough to kind of let you into work with them." One teacher commented on the importance of accommodating the multiple intelligences within the classroom.

Catering more to different learning, right, different intelligences, whereas at the beginning you are catering to one type of intelligence, right? As you get better at it and you become a more knowledgeable as a teacher, you are able to incorporate and make it more multi-intelligence "friendly". Is that the word?

Another teacher agreed with these sentiments, and described how she attempted to structure her classroom in order to accommodate for multiple intelligences.

I set up stations with different activities that they need to do, that try to reach all the multiple intelligences. So they spend maybe 15 minutes at this one, and they either finish this one or you would say, I need to come back to this one and go over there to that one. But it has been kind of a challenge with this particular group of students that I had in the

last part of the semester, with them getting up and actually moving to another table. It was okay, (but they asked) “just bring that station over here to me.” I found that has worked in terms of having them experience the same outcome in different ways.

According to the participants, setting up classrooms like this was easier said than done, but was well worth the effort. One teacher remarked, “It’s a lot of prep. But I don’t mind it. I love what I am doing and I hope I can keep on as well, but it is a lot of work. You do improve on it every year I’m improving on it and trying to, that’s my goal to get it more interesting. But the first year, it was brutal.”

“Am I breeding the dysfunction?” Although the participants noted numerous examples of how their efforts to help students were necessary and benefited their students, some almost reluctantly shared concerns as to whether providing too much assistance was detrimental to students. One teacher appeared visibly uncomfortable when he stated, “I almost can’t believe I am saying that, because I believe so much in adapting towards what kids need and constantly faced with the question, ‘Am I breeding the dysfunction in there by adapting?’ Immediately following this statement, another participant agreed, noting, “I think we all agree on that. I mean I know because I struggle with that all the time. If someone were to ask me, I would struggle with that all the time”. This seemed to be a key point in the think tank sessions, as it represented that a trust was being built with me as a researcher. I state this because the teachers shared their own vulnerabilities around the issue of accommodations and support. This continued, as a teacher then added the following commentary.

I find myself in that eerie situation, where I was like, we need to make accommodations, but we can’t make total accommodations because then we are breeding this dysfunction

and we are wanting them to be dysfunctional. We are wanting them to have attendance policies, but we can't be too stringent because it's going to make them not attend, right?

The teachers shared several examples of how this struggle surfaced throughout their teaching careers. They all seemed to want to help students with their needs, but not at the expense of creating unnecessary dependency. The following is one example shared in the think tank that illustrated this struggle.

Let's start over with a breakfast and lunch program, by supplying a breakfast and lunch program is there a parent out there who literally saying, you know, "I'll let my kid sleep in twenty minutes more and I'm not going to worry about their breakfast, cause they can literally go to school and get a some breakfast". So, again, this slippery slope.

One participant asked, "How right are those teachers? Those older teachers, how right are they, to say, 'Listen all I do is teach because parents can't. Teachers teach. Like teachers parent, parents don't parent. To what extent are they right? How wrong am I? I am overly coddling this?'" In response to this questioning, one teacher offered the following.

But, I am wondering is, do we really parent those students that already have parents? Or are we trying to help those that don't have that parent at the home? Yeah, I think of being a parent to . . . if you can call it that, maybe you are being compassionate to this person, who doesn't have that at home.

Finally, one teacher attempted to summarize this line of conversation by placing it in the context of how teachers best approach helping high school aged youth.

There is a fine line, you got to play the game, you got to know the kid, you got to know the background and that's tough in the classes as you don't always know all of this. And by the time you know it, it's almost too late, right?

The issue of what is the appropriate amount of assistance arose again when discussion regarding standardization surfaced. The dilemma of serving the role as classroom teacher versus being a full-time parent seemed to trouble many of the participants. As a result, finding an appropriate balance between the roles was challenging to many in the group.

This challenge only increased as participants believed in teaching students where they were at, but had difficulties adhering to this philosophy when discussing the subject of standards. One teacher put it this way.

Everyone comes from a different place. Some people have exposure to things others may not have. But then you add that to the cost of meritocracy, which obviously happens around us constantly. Do you have the social conditions necessary for success? Somehow we all agree on what are the social conditions necessary for success, those are the merits in society ultimately, those are the things that we experiment with and so no, don't steal for example. We have these concepts in society of what is right and wrong and what's a good trait and what's a bad trait and what we would like kids to do and not do. So, we have to have some sort of standardization.

Standardized testing was a significant dilemma for the participants. To one participant, this form of testing was described as a "necessary evil." One teacher was in opposition to this form of testing if applied rigidly, stating, "I think that a standard is something common to everyone and everybody is held up to that standard. I think realistically, we've all talked about this, not everybody has that ability for whatever reason, right, or can achieve that." The participant later stated, "But we can still have expectations and you can still honour their abilities, whatever they may be. Have the expectation for them to maybe improve their reading, or to improve their math, maybe even though it's not to the standard that might be way above

them.” Another participant stated, “When it comes to standardized testing, we need something that represents a communal concept of learning.”

Although the participants stated numerous ways in which they could navigate their way through the variety of curricular outcomes and local school testing, they did vocalize continued difficulties with the pressures of ultimately having students meet the outcomes of grade 12 English and Math provincial exams. One participant stated these concerns in the following way.

Provincial exams, in particular, our goal is for them to pass the provincial exam and hopefully (chuckles) not to look too bad compared to the other schools thinking that, “Oh our school scored lowest in math” or “Oh, our school scored lowest in English”, but sometimes we are forced to really look at the curriculum and see if our kids are really getting it. That is where I find that there is a gap, that we want to help the kids to really be involved in what we are doing, and feeling connected, and then there is another side of us that we need to do something because there is also an obligation on our part to make these kids pass the provincial exams, right?

In summary, the participants noted many challenges they faced when working with high school students. These challenges included treating students equitably, responding to students' social needs, dealing with academic deficits while catering to multiple intelligences, and accommodating individual needs without creating excessive dependency. Although these challenges appeared daunting, my overall impression was that the participants in this think tank seemed confident that they could effectively respond to most of these difficulties.

Response to Sociological, Socioeconomic, and Capital Deficits. The teachers provided several examples where they attempted to meet sociological and socioeconomic needs through small, individual actions. The teachers seemed sensitive to the negative effects of socioeconomic

imbalances, and the dire consequences of not responding to them. If students needed money, they provided examples of loaning money and finding grants. If students needed food, they provided examples of their involvement in breakfast and lunch programs, and even baking bread. If students required shelter or other primary needs, they provided examples of contacting social workers on behalf of the students in order to ensure these needs were being met. These solutions, although generally consistent with expectations woven into provincial, divisional, and school policy, were personally initiated by high school classroom teachers. In the literature review, deficiencies in capital were considered to be prominent reasons for dropping out of high school.

Response to Cultural Capital Deficits. Whitaker (2006) defined the cultural capital that was vital for school success as the “cultural practices, including language patterns and experiences such as visits to museums, that provide knowledge of middle and upper-class culture – the culture of schools” (p.15). Bourdieu (1998) believed that parents from working class families were less likely to cultivate this type of capital in their children compared to middle and upper-class families. Schatzman and Strauss (1955) and Mueller (1973) posited that some students received much more valuable school capital in the form of elaborated communicative modes than others before they even enter school for the first time. The teachers in the think tank sessions provided several examples of ways they attempted to identify and appreciate the cultural capital that students came with, and the ways they sought out to enhance the various forms of capital crucial for school success.

The teachers shared many examples of building bridges between home and school by attempting to find commonalities through popular culture. The participants thought of other effective, less formalized strategies to connect with students by these means.

Response to Behavioural and Academic Deficits. The literature review supported the existing correlation between students' social, socioeconomic, and cultural capital and their behavioural and academic capital. For example, Reinke and Herman (2002) concluded that interventions aimed at improving academic performance among students decreased antisocial behavior and delinquency. The teachers seemed acutely aware of these links, and incorporated strategies in attempts to address behavioural and academic gaps.

In the literature review, Moffitt (1993) spoke of common, temporary antisocial behavior among adolescents. The teachers in the think tank seemed to understand the temporary nature of many of the inappropriate behaviours of their adolescent students as common for their stage of life. Two teachers even noted that the simplest way to help students, especially those who often found themselves in distress, was to, "not sweat the small stuff. The teachers gave several other examples of minor behavioural issues that, while disruptive to learning, were not significant enough to warrant intervention. While participants expressed concerns for such behaviours, they seemed careful not to overreact to them.

Other behaviours, such as chronic non-attendance, had a much greater impact on academics. Some teachers remarked that this was heavily influenced by natural psychological changes within the student as they entered their high school years. Some participants noted the frustration of having students disappear before the opportunity to connect with them even presented itself.

The literature review highlighted that, in 2011, Manitoba's government raised the compulsory school age from 16 years of age to either graduation or 18 years of age through the amendment of Bill 13: *The Preparing Students for Success Act*. Several participants in the think

tank did not believe that the recent provincial law raising the compulsory age to 18 would necessarily translate into regular attendance.

In the literature review, academic capital was compared to social and cultural capital, in that it could be converted into economic capital, and can be passed on from generation to generation. When the participants discussed their frustrations about their inability to reach the parents of students with serious truancy issues, it related to Richards (2009) assertion that “In empirical analyses of parental influence, the two most important variables are usually parental education levels and family income” (p.19). Insights from the participants seemed to support the notion that parents who did not achieve academic success in school themselves, may not see school success as a high priority for their children.

Other factors, such as “grade 9 shock” and general high school malaise, were emphasized in the literature review as contributing factors to the lack of academic success of some students in high schools. This combination of student stress and boredom upon entering high school seemed significant. All participants shared examples of different classroom strategies they attempted to use to address the issues of student stress and boredom. These included, finding ways to cater to multiple intelligences, creating democratic classrooms, and other, more tailored ways to build individual students’ skill-sets. Much of the discussion was on how to best help facilitate learning inside the classroom. The teachers spoke about efforts to make the curriculum accessible to all of their students, regardless of their skill-sets. Still, some participants shared concerns regarding the appropriate level of assistance, and whether too much was detrimental to students. They also expressed continued difficulties with the pressures of ultimately having students meet the outcomes of provincial exams.

An Economic Response to Socioeconomic Issues?

Based on the review of the literature and the think tank sessions, it appears that the teachers in the think tank responded to the multitude of socioeconomically rooted problems with an economic response of their own. In simple terms, when teachers saw a need that they could assist with, they provided it. The motivation for the teachers was that, by assisting with these needs, students were more likely to attend and be successful in school. The support that teachers provided seemed to be incentives for students to attend. Levitt and Dubner (2005) contended that incentives were the root of economics. In this way, their actions seemed to draw parallels with the economic approach that Levitt and Dubner (2005) described.

I want to be careful not to force an unnatural correlation between the compassionate folk narrative that the participants provided with something as impersonal as the subject of incentives. The teachers in the study never referred to their help and support as forms of incentives, and their actions were compassionate responses, not economic ones. Having said that, I strongly believe that their supportive responses were very powerful incentives for their students. Therefore, an examination of some of these parallels between what the teachers did and what the economic literature says is worthy of exploration. Levitt and Dubner (2005) posited that, "Incentives are the cornerstone of modern life" (p.11), and, "Economics is, at root, the study of incentives: how people get what they want, or need, especially when other people want or need the same thing" (p.16). The first theme of connecting with students by helping them with their needs and wants seemed to be the highest priority for the teachers in the think tank. Levitt and Dubner (2005) defined incentives as, "simply a means of urging people to do more of a good thing, and less of a bad thing" (p.17). The teachers indicated that these acts of helping students often resulted in better attendance and performance, and reduced behavioural issues and truancy. Levitt and

Dubner (2005) stated that, “There are three basic flavors of incentive: economic, social, and moral” (p.17). While economic incentives were strong, “people also respond to moral incentives (they don’t want to do something they consider wrong) and social incentives (they don’t want to be seen by others as doing something wrong)” (Levitt & Dubner, pp.17-18). The incentives that the teachers described were at times personal, at times social, at times academic, and at times economic in nature. Levitt and Dubner (2005) explained, “Morality, it could be argued, represents the way that people would like the world to work – whereas economics represents how it actually does work” (p.11). Although several teachers indicated strong ethical and moral reasons for entering the teaching profession (one teacher offered, “We went into this profession because we wanted to help you.”), they often knowingly or unwittingly approached problems with students from an economic perspective of finding the appropriate incentives.

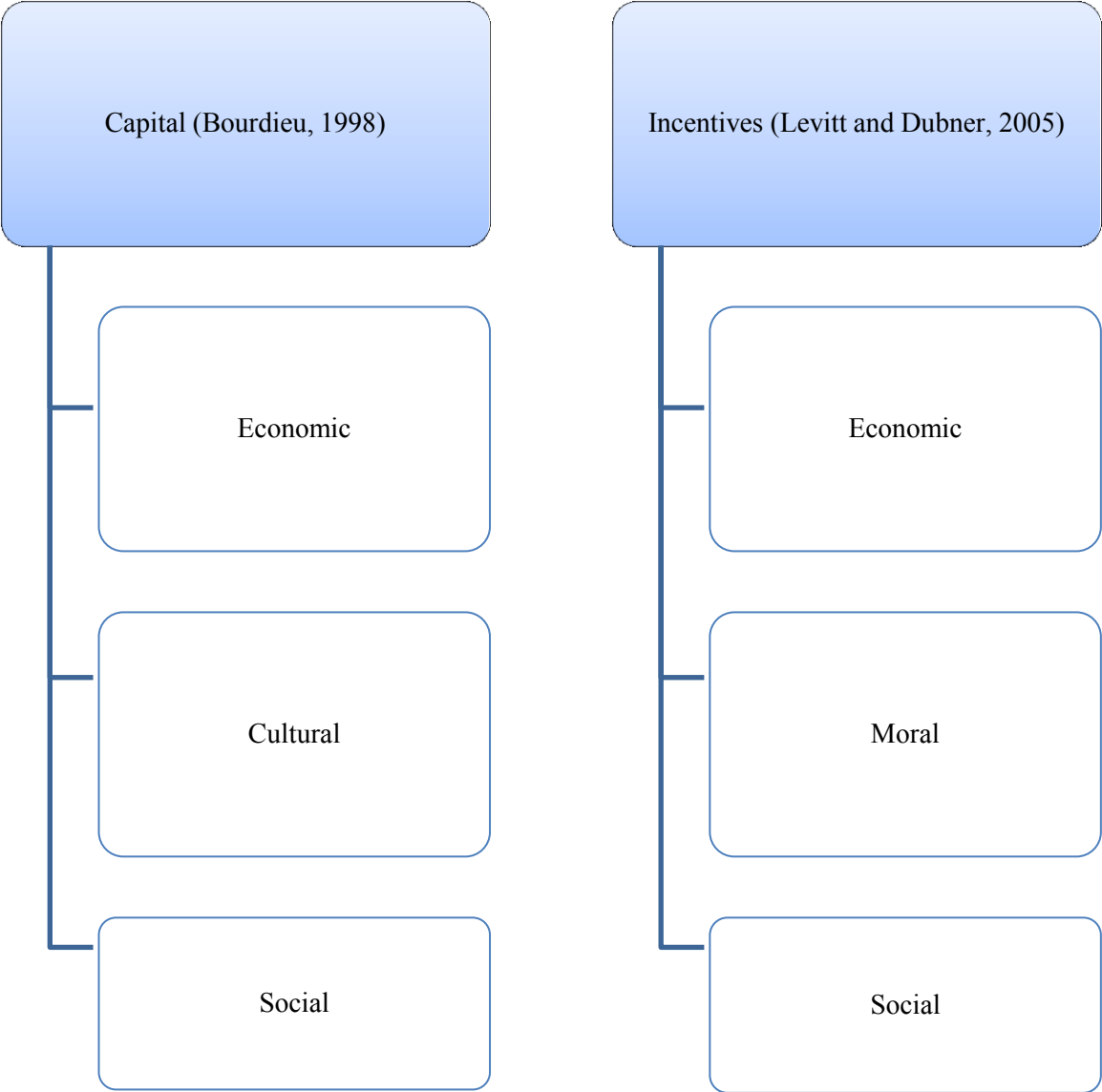
Based upon the aforementioned similarities between Levitt and Dubner’s (2005) writings on economics and the comments made by teachers in the think tank, it seems reasonable to contend that high school teachers employed incentives to keep adolescents in school. In this way, one might argue that socioeconomic issues of high school students elicit economic responses from high school teachers. In my literature review, I highlighted Bourdieu’s (1986) assertion that modern education reproduces inequalities, due to the perception of an unfair accumulation of capital by some and not others. Capital comes in the forms of economic, cultural, and social capital (Bourdieu, 1998). When it came to incentives, Levitt and Dubner (2005) stated that, “There are three basic flavors of incentive: economic, social, and moral” (p.17). Can it be argued that teachers consciously or intuitively respond to deficiencies in economic, cultural, and social capital with economic, social, and moral incentives (see Figure 4.2)? It is a compelling possibility, to say the least.

Still, the teachers stated that connecting with students meant more than just helping students; it also meant finding similarities, shared interests, and being viewed as authentic. Therefore, while the economic response of providing students with incentives may be a key component of the teacher response to dealing with struggling students, it only provided one component of the complete approach that the teachers have chosen to take.

Effective teachers are viewed as authentic. One key component of making connections that was shared by many teachers in different ways was the importance of being viewed as authentic in the students' eyes. One teacher offered that that students need to know that connecting was often, "a matter of building that trust, that authentic trust, then you can move on from there". Another teacher commented, "And you're not just playing the game – they understand when you're being authentic or not". Another teacher offered a similar perspective. [Teachers need to] be real, that's the thing. If you could be emotionally open and emotionally honest, the kids will love you, they will come to you and they will trust you.

Being emotionally open, being emotionally connected inside an institution of any kind is very difficult and it's very difficult in a school. For example, more than one participant described authenticity as being honest with the students when having conversations with them. One participant described the importance of honesty, stating, "I think honesty is very important, that's my philosophy. To be as honest as I can and as human as I can." One participant described honesty as, "Opening yourself up to them as much as you can, and kind of being honest with them is important. If you don't give anything up of yourself they won't give anything up of themselves." Another teacher commented on the significance of being viewed as "human", and described what that meant.

Figure 4.2. Three Forms of Capital vs. Three Types of Incentives



It's showing people that I'm a little more human. I always tell the kids, "Listen we're all human, teachers are not out there to ruin your life, trust me. We went into this profession because we wanted to help you. We actually decided a long time ago that maybe we had something that we could pass along and make a change, not just because we wanted to just collect a pay cheque and make your lives miserable.

Another teacher offered the subsequent comment.

I think "know thyself" is a very important statement, you know, if you know yourself it is much easier . . . like I have no visions of grandeur about what I do . . . I just do what I do. I don't need for somebody to pat me on the back and say "You're doing a good job" I don't need that. I enjoy what I do.

Another teacher elaborated on the significance of first being honest with ourselves and who we really are in order to appear honest with students.

One of the things I learned is, this goes back in my youth. We are victims of our image of ourselves. So, we have this image of who we are, which others help to create and we create it inside of our own heads, we dress certain ways, we act certain ways. This is who I am, right? And that image of our identity limits us and we start acting according to who we think we are so, if you can say, "I don't know who I am" and do things that are out of character for you, you can expand your own identity and open yourself to greater learning.

Several participants noted the importance of listening to students when they spoke. Although the teachers acknowledged that being "real" meant understanding who they were and how they viewed reality, it was crucial to also listen to students in order to grasp their own subjective reality. One teacher commented, "Listening to understand is a part of what I do, but

listening to be with the speaker is number one. Listening to be with the speaker. So, when someone is with you, try to be with them.” Another teacher phrased similar sentiments this way.

Often times I will take kids aside and I will talk to them, while the rest of the class is working & I will say, “Let’s go, let’s have a chat. What’s going on? I noticed that you are not doing really good today, you know, you’re not focusing. Is there an issue? You know whatever you tell me, stays with me, unless of course it is something that we need to discuss further.

According to all participants, connecting with students is an arduous but essential element of keeping students in school and ultimately graduating. All the participants acknowledged that making connections and developing relationships with students was not something that happened overnight. Still, the participants reported that by taking the time to connect by finding similarities and shared interests, helping students with their needs and wants, or being viewed as authentic; the odds of students completing high school greatly increased, especially for those those deemed at-risk. As one teacher finished describing all of the time, efforts and strategies he had made to connect with one particularly challenging student over several years in order to help him graduate, he proudly exclaimed, “This is the first kid in 21 years that brought me an apple. Only kid to ever bring me an apple, and again, it’s being human, being honest and being funny.”

The teachers stressed that helping students and finding similarities and shared interests were two important parts of connecting with students, but they also emphasized the importance of being viewed as authentic in the students’ eyes. Authenticity could be established by having honest conversations with them. These honest conversations enabled students to view teachers as “human”. This required considerable effort on the part of the teacher. One teacher noted that in

order to be viewed as authentic, one had to, “Dig deep into who you are and be who you are with courage, sensitivity, to passion, and a sense of humour. So, dig deep into who you are, with courage, sensitivity, compassion, don't give up. don't be cynical, roll with the punches, have a sense humour.” The participants thought that listening to students was helpful, so that teachers could grasp the students' own subjective reality. The participants reported that it took time to be viewed as authentic, but if successful, they thought that the odds of students deemed at-risk completing high school greatly increased.

An alignment between the teachers' need to be authentic and Gladwell's (2013)

“Principle of Legitimacy”. Many thoughts expressed by the teachers suggested that connecting with students was much more than a matter of simply finding the appropriate incentives for the students and then providing them. Rather, the teachers' repeated highlighting of authenticity aligned more aptly with Gladwell's (2013) emphasis on the “Principle of Legitimacy”, which he discussed in his book, *David and Goliath*. Gladwell (2013) posited that those in positions of authority need to keep this principle in mind at all times, stating, “The powerful have to worry about how others think of them – that those who give orders are acutely vulnerable to the opinions of those they are ordering about” (p.217). He described this principle as having three main components.

This is called the “principle of legitimacy”, and legitimacy is based on three things. First of all, the people who are asked to obey authority have to feel like they have a voice – that if they speak up, they will be heard. Second, the law has to be predictable. There has to be a reasonable expectation that the rules tomorrow are going to be roughly the same as the rules today. And third, the authority has to be fair. It can't treat one group differently from another” (p. 208).

Let us review Gladwell's three components of legitimacy, and compare them to some of the responses of teachers in the think tank. First, Gladwell (2013) noted, "The people who are asked to obey authority have to feel like they have a voice – that if they speak up, they will be heard (p.208)." Several participants stressed the importance of listening to students when they spoke. One teacher stated, "Listening to understand is a part of what I do, but listening to be with the speaker is number one. Listening to be with the speaker. So, when someone is with you, try to be with them." Many teachers emphasized the importance of creating opportunities to listen to the students.

Gladwell's (2013) statement and the teachers' comments both stressed the importance of allowing students the opportunity to have a voice, and demonstrated that their voices would not only be heard, but be honoured. Both responses suggested that teachers had to do more than just listen. As the authority figures in their classrooms, they needed to purposefully send the message to students that their voices would be honoured.

Gladwell (2013) also stated that the principle of legitimacy required predictability, saying, "There has to be a reasonable expectation that the rules tomorrow are going to be roughly the same as the rules today (p.208). In this regard, some teachers responded that predictability was a challenge for students because in the high school model, the "rules of engagement" suddenly changed from grade 8 to grade 9. They noted that the shift in the structure of the school day meant a reduction in personal student-teacher contact time. The participants noted this shift was confusing for some students, who were accustomed to having contact with only a few teachers during the school day. Other teachers shared that the shift in individual student-teacher contact made an enormous difference in the ability to connect in high school. The teachers then

offered strategies they thought were helpful to counteract this shift from what students were accustomed to in the school structure, and still respond to the variety of student skill-sets.

In the think tank, the teachers did not seem to think that predictability meant every teacher using the same method of instruction in every class. The teachers also were skeptical of any proposed “one size fits all” educational approaches. Instead, the teachers seemed to address issues surrounding predictability by trying to be dependable and reliable for their students. They noted the many “ups and downs” that struggling students often needed to contend with, and how they, as teachers, could always be depended upon to help them through these challenges.

According to Gladwell (2013), the third component of the “Principle of Legitimacy” was that authority figures have to be viewed as *fair*. Gladwell (2013) stated, “It can’t treat one group differently from another” (p. 208). In the literature review, it seemed that the most contentious issue that I could find centered around the variety of understandings of the word, “fair”, especially when applied to the modern day school system

It appears as though this small four-letter word has the power to evoke very polarizing and combative interpretations, responses and emotions. Within the context of this study, the teachers seemed to align their understanding of the word “fair” with terms like “equity” and “inclusive”.

A further review of some of the exchanges in the think tank sessions bears repeating, as it provides evidence of this alignment. When one teacher asserted that teachers needed to assist students any way they could, even if it meant providing more assistance to some than others, another teacher remarked, “That’s what we call equity over equality.” Later, a teacher noted, “Yeah, you have provided a need that you are able to give. It is something that is negotiable, this is not a non-negotiable.” A third teacher said, “I think meeting their hierarchy of needs, you

know like finding out if there are certain things missing from their day to day life that I are integral to their day to day life, whether its food or having a sympathetic ear or a place or a person they perceive to be safe. Just dealing with those day to day needs.” Another teacher offered that different students came to school with different forms of capital, and that teachers needed to be cognizant of this.

The teachers provided many examples of trying to level the playing field in terms of capital and its various forms. Many of these examples involved assisting with incidents when socioeconomic imbalances were involved.

It seemed as though the teachers were careful not to underestimate the “extremely astute” nature of their students, and misinterpret their need for assistance as a deficiency in capital. Although Bourdieu (1998) believed that parents from working class families were less likely to cultivate the type of capital that was valued in schools, he still posited that everyone received some form of capital from their parents. As stated earlier, the teachers provided several examples of the ways they attempted to identify and appreciate the cultural capital of their students, and the ways they sought out to enhance the cultural capital crucial for school success. As a result, the teachers did not want to make any false assumptions about the value of the capital their students came with, and create classroom environments that fostered unnecessary dependency in adolescents on the verge of adulthood. They indicated this by sharing concerns as to whether providing too much assistance was detrimental to students.

Based on a review of the literature and the responses of the teachers in the think tank, it appears that teachers are sensitive to the many issues revolving around fairness, equity, equality, inclusion, and meritocracy. As a result of this awareness, the participants indicated the need for

teachers to carefully navigate their way with individual students and the situations they found themselves in.

The precarious relationship of providing incentives and being legitimate. The first theme of this study stated that the participants strived to connect with students by (a) finding similarities and shared interests, (b) helping them with their needs and wants, and (c) being viewed as authentic. Based upon an analysis of the literature review and the participants' responses, it seems that the teachers relied on strategies that blended together Levitt and Dubner's (2005) position with Gladwell's (2013) stance. That is, in order to get people to do "more of a good thing, and less of a bad thing" (Levitt & Dubner, 2005, p.17), people in authority (i.e. the teachers) simply needed to find and provide the suitable incentives for people they had authority over (i.e. the students). Additionally, teachers also needed to be mindful of Gladwell's (2013) "Principle of Legitimacy", and did so by finding numerous ways to be viewed as authentic in the eyes of the students. It seems reasonable to assume that the most effective response to the multitude of socioeconomic problems that get in the way of high school completion is a creative alchemy of teacher authenticity and teacher assistance.

In the literature review, causes of adolescent antisocial behaviours were also explored from sociological (Harden, D'Onofrio, Van Hulle, Turkheimer, Rodgers, Waldman, & Lahey, 2009), psychological (Moffitt, 1993), criminological (Cauffman, Steinberg, & Piquero, 2005), and educational (Pharris-Ciureja, Hirschman, and Willhoft, 2012) perspectives. Based on the teachers' responses, it seemed as though their solution to these types of behaviours resembled a partially economic response. Although this part economic, part authentic response does not incorporate all of the nuances associated with the larger socioeconomic issue of disparities in capital, the literature review suggests that it is not necessary to do so in order to have positive

effects. As I highlighted earlier in my literature review, my advisor Dr. Rick Freeze (2013b) noted that because a problem or condition might be best described through one discipline, the solution to the problem may be found in another discipline. Levy (2010) also supported this position when describing the “intervention-attribution fallacy” (p.104), stating that a “solution to a problem does not inherently point to its etiology”. Again, the corollary of Levy’s reasoning is that solutions to problems do not necessarily need to be directly linked to the cause of the problem. High school classroom teachers certainly were not the cause of all of the socioeconomic incongruities in the populace, but they can still attempt to effectively respond to these issues in their classrooms.

Therefore, the marriage of providing assistance and being viewed as authentic seem to be an appropriate, albeit demanding, union. It should be pointed out that it is also not a novel concept in relation to other sociological phenomena, and has caused considerable debate in such areas as the study of crime prevention. Levitt and Dubner (2005) contended that criminal justice systems responded to criminal activity, “through a complex, haphazard, and constantly readjusted web of economic, social, and moral incentives, modern society does its best to militate against crime” (p.18). Although there is some merit in this claim, it seems insufficient for teachers to solely rely on this approach. First and foremost, teachers work with students, not criminals. Second, the criminal justice system has at its disposal numerous laws that have enforceable consequences on citizens, if they choose to break them. In Manitoba, the provincial government raised the compulsory school age from 16 years of age to either graduation or 18 years of age through the amendment of Bill 13: *The Preparing Students for Success Act*. Bill 13 was amended to state that a student 16 years of age or older, who refused to attend school, was liable and subject to a fine of up to \$200. The legal system has much more judicial authority to

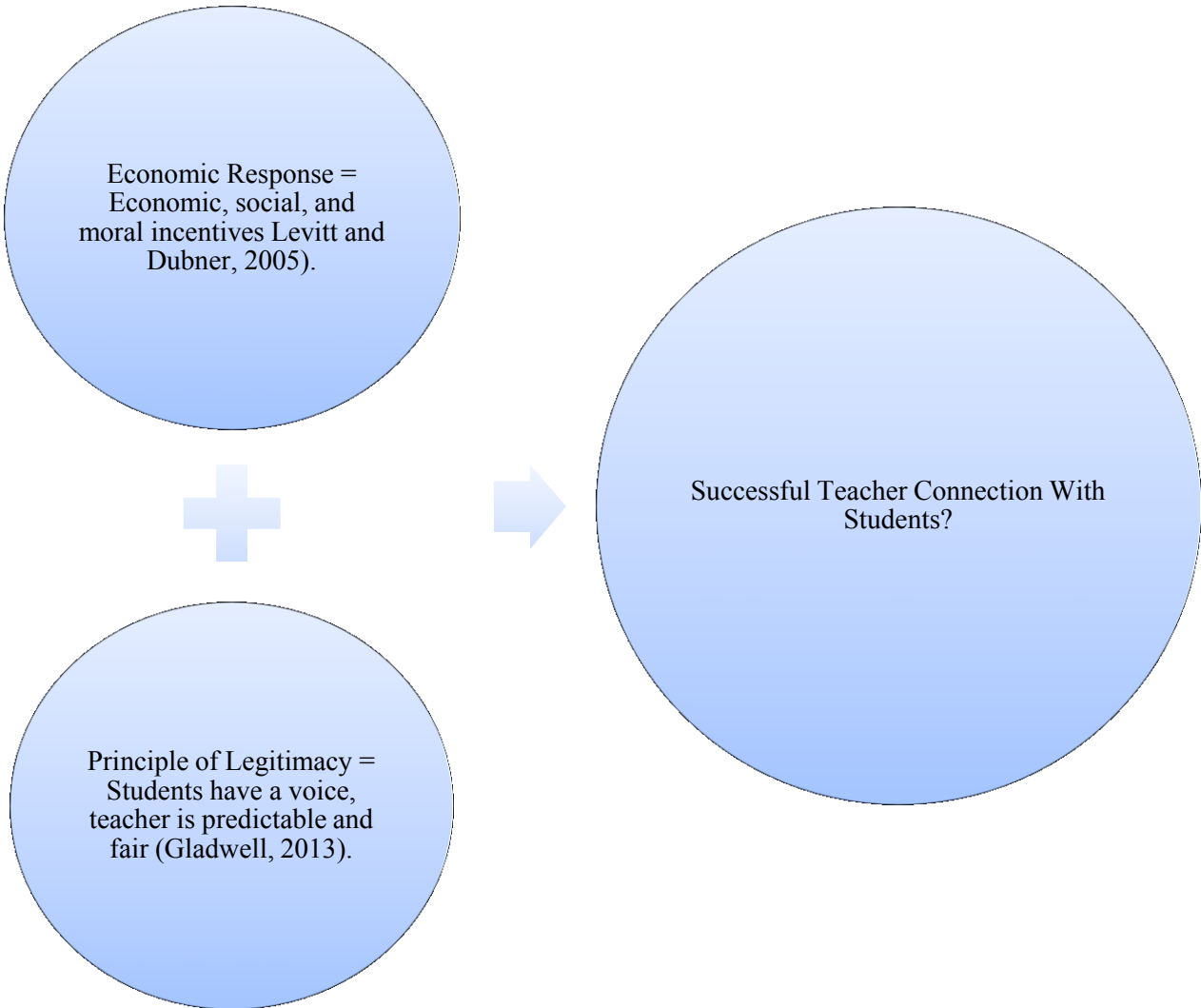
enforce its laws through hefty fines, mandated court appearances, and even prison terms. The penal system has been given the right to hold convicted criminals against their will. To my knowledge, a fine of \$200 has never been issued to any violator of Bill 13 in my division, or any other. Given that the law lacks the substantive “teeth” required to make it respected by citizens, I question the influence it has on deterring truancy, particularly in high schools. At the current time, society may place greater attention and resources on intervening when younger students miss elementary or middle school. High school aged students who do not want to attend school, however, are permitted, more often than not, to miss classes without any substantial repercussions. As one participant noted, “It is easier to disappear out of a high school than it is in middle years.” Several other participants in the think tank agreed that the recent provincial law raising the compulsory age to 18 would not have a significant impact on increasing attendance rates.

It should be noted that the teachers never used the word *incentive* in the sessions, they used the words *help* or *support*, and they used it often. I assert that the term *providing incentives* is a colder and more calculated phrase, while *providing help* infers a much more caring, compassionate, empathetic, and accurate phrase to describe the actions and motivations of the teachers.

Gladwell (2013) also asserted that such a response was insufficient and inaccurate, even at the criminal justice perspective, because of the misperception that, “The decision to obey the law is a function of the rational calculation of risks and benefits. It isn't personal. But that's precisely where they went wrong (p.208).” If the justice system fails to be viewed as legitimate in the eyes of its citizens, he argued that the effects of its rules are minimal. He further added that these inaccurate approaches to responding to crime was connected to achieving appropriate

behaviours in the classroom, noting, “Getting criminals and insurgents to behave turns out to be as dependent on *legitimacy* as getting children to behave in class” (p.208-209). In short, I believe that my study supported the notion that incentives can be used successfully in the classroom by high school teachers, as long as they legitimately come in the form of “help”, and the efforts are viewed by the students as authentic as the teachers who provide them.

Figure 4.3. Formula for Success: Economic Response + Principle of Legitimacy = Successful Teacher Connection with Students?



Theme 2

The participants worked individually and collaboratively with colleagues to make classrooms and schools more conducive for struggling students, and acknowledged the need for legislation, policies, and administration. The participants in the think tank seemed eager to share an abundance of innovative ways in which they taught students in their classrooms. They seemed proud of being innovative, but not in terms of using electronic technology. Instead, they described scenarios in which they were innovative in terms of being creative, adventurous, and independent when approaching issues within the classroom or within the school. One teacher spiritedly described his approach to the profession as follows.

I thought that the bounds of the education system were going to be my enemy. And as it turned out, my greatest challenges were my own limitations, it wasn't the public school system, it was my own capacity to imagine and manage and create appropriate environments for these kids. So it is a huge, huge learning experience and I then went from blaming to taking on personal ownership for my life as a teacher.

Independent Problem-Solving

In the think tank sessions, several indicators of teacher self-sufficiency outside of the walls of the classroom were shared. These indicators included examples of teachers independently relying upon themselves to accomplish their objectives, and creatively finding ways to collaborate with other educators. The participants described several instances of this independent spirit; explaining how they relied upon their own skills, efforts and finances to accomplish their objectives. One teacher described some monetary obstacles he encountered when attempting to organize a field trip, stating, "Listen, if 20 kids go and can pay for it and 10 can't, I will pay this \$70.00 bucks for those kids to go on this experience. Give me the bus at

least, I'll cover the rest, where's the bus?" Another teacher described efforts made to resourcefully find money to finance an endeavour viewed as important, saying, "I run a breakfast and lunch program and it is also for that same reason and so I found two different grants. One is kind of squirreled away money from last year and one that I got this year." A third teacher expressed the time required in order to make sports teams in the school as successful as possible, offering, "When I was coaching soccer, I would wake up at 6:00 in the morning to go there at 7:00 to coach the boys every day and the girls before school started." It appeared that the teachers were willing to sacrifice personal time outside of the school day to independently achieve effective results. One teacher illustrated this point as follows.

My second year of teaching, the amount of hours I had spent. It prompted me to actually log down the amount of hours that I spent and I would have had two weeks of vacation that year. I mean granted, I was a new teacher and I was really trying to get a permanent contract that year. But, I would have ended up with two weeks of vacation. In that year, I baked bread every morning for my students, every single morning, I baked bread. Just baking bread every morning took an hour. So, you can imagine, every hour, every day . . . so that is 200 hours just from every day that year.

The teachers tended to view their professional self-reliance as an essential component of teaching in high school, and tended to blur the lines between their occupation and their societal values. One teacher shared his benevolent approach to being a high school teacher.

I don't give my money to anything else to charity that I used to give, so I find this as part of charity. Just last week, I bought a \$300.00 digital mixer for my Hip-Hop club with the intent that somehow, somewhere I would find a grant that would eventually pay for this. This (other club) is working but it's a \$150 bucks just to buy the leather and mitt fleece.

Teachers in the think tank seemed proud to share instances of finding their own home-grown approaches to solving dilemmas. As one teacher offered when the subject of self-reliance surfaced, "Grassroots, that makes it work, right? If it makes somewhat sense to you, you've got to do it, this is the way."

The participants in the think tank seemed eager to share innovative ways to teach students in their classrooms, and seemed proud of being innovative. They described scenarios in which they were innovative in terms of being creative, adventurous, and independent when approaching issues within the classroom or within the school. Throughout each of the think tank sessions, it seemed as though these participants all provided moments in their teaching lives where the importance of having a certain self-reliant spirit as a high school teacher surfaced. Some teachers seemed more self-sufficient than others, but all provided indicators of independently resolving issues with and for students.

Please note, it would be a great exaggeration, and deeply misleading, for me to characterize the teachers as iconoclastic or overly autonomous in their approach to their profession. My study did not find evidence that high school teachers prefer autonomy over collaboration (Elfers, Plecki, & McGowan, 2007; Tilleczeck & Ferguson, 2007). Further, my study does not support the claims of Tilleczeck and Ferguson's (2007) study, who stated, "fragmented individualism have been found to pervade secondary school cultures" (p.31). On the contrary, each teacher provided many examples of how they benefited from peer collaboration, were significantly guided by legislation and policies, and felt notably supported by their school administration. Still, the participants each acknowledged many instances where they believed that their job was to find their own way to help students be successful at school. In short, I did not find that the teachers viewed self-dependency as a character flaw, but rather an essential

component of the job. In this regard, my study supported Elfers, Plecki, and McGowan's (2007) study which noted that high school teachers reported a great appreciation for the autonomy their job provided.

Are high school classroom teachers heuristic interventionists? The literature review also examined the different archetypes of teachers (Skrtic, 1995) and the perspectives each of them tended to bring to the profession. Freeze (2013a) applied these archetypes to how educators viewed challenges faced by school systems. In this study, I found that each participant did seem to lean toward one of these archetypes or another, depending on the issue that was being discussed. Still, while teachers did focus on systemic or structural challenges, or pathological challenges, most seemed to take on the "interventionist" role in the think tank sessions, and shared many thoughts on their own preventative practices.

One interesting observation that I noted from the think tanks was that the teachers seemed to speak with most pride when they were describing one-of-a-kind interventions they had created for unique situations. For example, one teacher was very animated when he described how a moccasin-making club engaged an at-risk student. Another time, a teacher spoke excitedly of how a hip-hop writing club engaged students in an English writing class. During another instance, a teacher shared how baking bread everyday helped bring in at-risk students to school early.

Pink (2009) stated that job tasks can be divided into two categories: "algorithmic" and "heuristic" (p.29). While an algorithmic task was one that had some easy to follow instructions, or an algorithm, in order for a worker to complete the task, a heuristic task was the opposite. That is, in order to solve a heuristic problem or issue, Pink (2009) established that "you had to come up with something new." It seemed that the teachers were independent in many respects

because many of the challenges they faced were heuristic in nature. Interestingly, Pink (2009) studied economics, and would appear to be in agreement with Levitt and Dubner's (2005) viewpoints that economics "wasn't the study of money", but rather, "the study of behavior" (p.25).

As indicated earlier, participants described several instances of this independent (or heuristic) spirit, relying upon their own skills, efforts and finances to accomplish their objectives. In the classroom, teachers reported how they personally sought out different classroom strategies (finding ways to engage multiple intelligences, creating democratic classrooms, building individual students' skill-sets) and incorporate them into their specific subject areas.

They relied upon their own independence to achieve successes outside of the classroom, as well. One teacher described some monetary obstacles he encountered when attempting to organize a field trip, while another teacher described efforts made to resourcefully find money to finance a breakfast and lunch program. One teacher once baked bread for his students every day for an entire school year. A third teacher shared that making a school team successful required him to be at school for 7:00 am every weekday. Personal time outside of the school day was often given so that teachers could independently achieve effective results. Teachers in the think tank seemed proud to share instances of finding their own home-grown approaches to solving dilemmas.

Each of these examples refutes some of the criticisms of high school classroom teachers have it too easy (Leithwood, 2008), or are cold and impersonal (Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007), as indicated in the literature review. Given that I have never taught in an elementary school, nor did my study include any elementary teachers, I am not in the position to accurately comment on whether or not high school teachers have it easier than elementary teachers. I can, however, state

that my experience in high schools and my study's findings indicate that a high school teacher's job is not easy.

The aforementioned examples provide just some of the many provided by teachers who volunteer many extra hours. High schools rely on after school sports teams, clubs, dramas, and musicals in order to create the culture that many students depend upon in order to be engaged. While some of these groups cater more to the students who are achieving academic successes, some have been intentionally formed to engage struggling students. Two examples that were identified as providing these supports were the moccasin making club and the hip hop club.

While I realize that clubs and teams also exist in elementary and middle years schools, to my knowledge they do not demand the same time commitment and planning as their counterparts in high schools. These senior high groups often meet, practice, perform, or compete early in the morning, during the lunch hours, late into the evenings, on weekends, and during the holidays. High school teachers in the study acknowledged that they do not get the same number of hours of contact time in the classroom with individual students, so many reported ways they connect with the students outside of the classrooms. This custom is unique to high schools, and the majority of these groups of students are started by and led by high school classroom teachers.

The narratives that the teachers provided connected well to the story of Abbie Conant and the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra, where Gladwell (2005) noted that in order to address the larger sociological problem of chauvinism that had infiltrated the orchestra world, they solved their own problem by using a screen as a temporary visual barrier during auditions. As teachers offered one example after another about creative ways they solved problems in the classroom, one teacher noted, "If it makes somewhat sense to you, you've got to do it, this is the way."

More parallels to Levitt and Dubner's (2005) Economic Model? It also seemed that some of Levitt and Dubner's (2005) descriptions of how economists view issues in the world can be correlated to many of the high school teachers' stories describing how they found their own individual ways to help students. For example, Levitt and Dubner (2005) stated, "The typical economist believes that the world has not yet invented a problem that he cannot fix if given a free hand to design the proper incentive scheme" (p.16).

Again, I want to emphasize that teachers never used the word incentive to describe what they offered their students, but rather used words like help and support. While I still have some difficulties believing that incentives and help are entirely synonymous with each other, I think that it is reasonable to find parallels between the economic model described by Levitt and Dubner (2005) and the high school model described by teachers that required independent problem solving as they deemed necessary.

Collaboration

Although they indicated examples of the need to work independently in order to help students achieve success, the participants in this study also highlighted the need to work collaboratively with colleagues to make classrooms and schools more conducive for struggling students. The literature review identified that high school teachers collaborate with other colleagues, but more with teachers within their own departments and disciplines. Grossman and Stodolsky referred to this practice as high school "subject subcultures" (Grossman & Stodolsky, 1995). Grossman and Stodolsky (1995) also reported that, "Shared beliefs about the possibilities and constraints posed by different school subjects may complicate efforts to restructure high schools or redesign curriculum (p.5). Elfers, Plecki, and McGowan (2007) noted that, "High

school teachers most often find the center of their professional identity and community among subject matter peers and their department” (p.5).

There were comments made by teachers in the think tank that supported this tendency to gather as departments or by subject areas. The comments made, however, suggested that meeting with teachers in the same department or teaching similar disciplines was so they could collect more strategies and approaches for their specific subject areas. Often, they found that more experienced teachers in their subject areas were valuable resources. Collaborating with seasoned teachers across different subject areas was also identified as helpful. The teachers in the think tank offered many reasons for gravitating towards collaboration with teachers of similar subject areas, which centred around the fluidity of the subject areas they were assigned to teach from year to year.

Still, the participants in the think tank favourably viewed opportunities to collaborate with other educators from all disciplines and grade levels. One teacher fondly recalled the best teaching years of his life, saying, “I had three magnificent years (at my first school), did a lot of innovative things in the classroom with very active support from my amazing principal, and a small very intelligent very well educated, free thinking staff of colleagues.” A number of teachers had prior involvement co-teaching with others, and offered their opinions on the experience. One teacher offered several benefits of collaborating with teachers, referring to an experience of formalized co-teaching with someone.

When two teachers are working together, they share their ideas, they think of different strategies to imply and they think of different kind of teaching assignments. We work together, whatever topic we are going to teach we use to discuss beforehand, okay, I'm going to teach this, I'm going to teach. In this way if you have some other ideas and you

want to implement and you want to incorporate those things also. So, we sit together and discuss each and everything. We also discuss what the students, and if there are students or if the problems are difficulties in learning or understanding, we try to find out some solutions to solve them out together. So, I think it is a good idea of co-teaching together.

Co-teaching in high schools. One participant who had experience in a co-teaching program noted the benefits to students entering high school for the first time, and referred to the program as an excellent way of transitioning students to their new senior years environment.

I was involved with (a co-teaching program) last year and that program with the grade nines, the grade nines are with the same teachers all morning for all subject areas all year. I think that is a really good program and really good in helping with the transition between middle years and high school. I think that definitely is part of the answer in a way of how kids are doing that transition while they are getting used to and building relationships with two teachers for the entire year, they are also being exposed to kind of the function of high school.

A second participant shared the benefits of co-teaching with another teacher when dealing with students who were having difficulties in several classes for a variety of reasons. This teacher noted the advantage of having two teachers share perspectives on several students, identifying similar issues, and then working together with school administration and the students' homes to resolve these issues.

At our school, we have co-teaching as well. Last year there was another teacher who was teaching science and math and I was teaching L.A. and social studies, and so we experienced the same problem, when three kids gave us a hard time. We kept on communicating with each other and we also connected with our administrator, because

we needed that. We also contacted the parents, so now we not only asked the teachers but the administrators, the students and the parents. We all collaborated to help the kids. At the end, I don't know, if we were successful or not, but we did our best to help the kids and hopeful that we tried very hard.

Limited opportunities to collaborate. Still, the majority of participants had not experienced formal co-teaching opportunities, and identified several difficulties in finding ways to connect with others and share information. One teacher stated, "Where the school needs to be more proactive in terms of relaying that information about kids." Another teacher noted, "There was that girl, always wears that toque, and came to the school with just litany of issues, right? Was there adequate information following up to her? That was a situation where the information was relayed way too late." Another teacher described the following pattern as typical in order to illustrate the dire consequences of having limited opportunities for collaboration.

You get a kid that comes into the school, grade 9, they fail all four courses, you put him in summer school and summer school is done and maybe they are successful in that and you need contacts. Then September hits and then stands back and watches this slow decline into the same sad groove that got them into the this same vortex.

In order to be successful and efficient, teachers in the think tank strongly advocated that high schools find more frequent ways to connect teachers to prevent students from falling through the cracks. Although it happens on occasion, one teacher noted that this practice needed to occur at more structured, systemic intervals.

I think that it is that passing on information that continual like we keep on letting them go and then like a student that we have been talking about you and I, has to relate to all of her teachers the same sob story, instead of her teachers actually being able to

communicate adequately with themselves, to say this is this student. Like, why haven't all the teachers gotten together and for that specific student said, "What is our plan? What's our real directed goal, plan. That's caring, and sometimes we do that.

Creative ways to collaborate. Although the think tank did not produce many examples of cross-curricular collaboration, teachers highlighted ways in which this practice did occur in high schools, albeit through informal and spontaneous approaches. Some methods were found to be more effective than others. It seemed that simple face-to-face contact was preferred over email. One participant offered that "A lot of the information is informal information (and at) informal times. Like, I am walking down the hallway and I see (a teacher) and say "Hey, you know what?" Another teacher stated that, "We do connect though in staff room, and we do share ideas in the staff room, but it is never purposely done, right? We don't set up a meeting, it's just sort of incidental, right?" Some methods were found to be more effective than others. It seemed that simple face-to-face contact was the preferred method over email. One participant shared a number of methods used to connect and collaborate with other teachers with the following statement.

A lot of hallway talk, a lot of email talk and our jobs in support is to try and hook up and you know what, it is hard and it isn't always successful because there is so much stuff to relay to teachers. I mean, we really need to come up with something that is more efficient in some ways. I hate to use the word efficient cause it doesn't sound really like personal, but some way of getting information across. We're having a lot of difficulty getting all the information we can to the teachers that need it, right? But how do you find them, when they're in their classroom? Well, I call them up. When I don't have a class, I check out the schedules, I'll meet them at the beginning of the beginning of end of a class, I'll

email. Emails, I find are kind of dead zone, you just never know what has gone on with that, whether they read it or deleted it. So it's a lot of before break and at staff meetings, and all that kind of thing. I think that some teachers even feel comfortable coming into the classroom and I talk to them.

Interestingly, the teachers not only used school clubs, teams, and other after class events to better connect with their students, they also believed that these activities allowed them opportunities to collaborate with other teachers. Although the teachers were unable to establish formal co-teaching relationships with teachers, they often found ways to connect and collaborate with other teachers through a shared involvement in school clubs, teams, and other activities. One teacher stated, "All these extracurricular activities, I maintain that communications with all (other teachers), I think . . . different teachers I wouldn't necessarily talk to with any ideas I might have." On other occasions, the teachers noted that if they thought there was a need to collaborate with another teacher, it was their responsibility to find them and make it happen. One teacher shared the following.

Sometimes it is as simple as going on the computer and just seeing who teaches this student and I have done that before, because sometimes there are teachers on the other side of the building and I may never see them all day, right? I could go a months without seeing them. Another great avenue for me has been the resource teachers because 99% of the time if (student's name) goes off, (the resource teacher) knows him. And even if (the resource teacher) doesn't teach him directly or has anything, (the resource teacher) knows of somebody who does, so I contact (the resource teacher). (The resource teacher) a great resource and because we are kind of friends at school, it's easy. In the hallway, we

talk, informal, (the resource teacher) comes to me sometimes and talks and asks, "Do you know anything about this guy?"

One teacher's word of caution. Although the majority of teachers reacted overwhelmingly positively to the idea of collaborating with other teachers, one participant was cautious towards the idea of discussing specific students as a collective group of teachers, and saw dangers to this practice of sharing information with other teachers. This teacher shared some of these concerns, negatively recalling a past school practice of meeting at the beginning of the school year as small teams of teachers, and discussing lists of certain students and their past behaviours.

At the beginning of the school year, beginning of the term, these teacher groups would go around and there would be a list on paper of students names and we don't do this anymore, but it was one of the things that I was completely and utterly against because it actually disgusted me . . . is we would have class lists of kids names and somebody would sit there and go, "Okay, we need to talk about Billy. Three teachers would put up their hand and talk about Billy. This is what Billy is strong at, you know, that didn't happen very often. It was more like this, "Billy is a pain in the ass, this is why Billy has problems, this is what I am thinking". Before I even met them, right, and learning issues again, and I hated it. I would sit there and I would get so upset, in my head, I'm going I can't believe we do this to kids because we are no better than the kids, when kids do this to themselves. I go the way a kid acts in your class is completely different, could be completely different, than the way he comes into my class. We've seen it happen hundreds of times, a kid comes in and they go, "Oh, you got Billy? If you get him, I taught him history man, he is a pain", and I hate having the preconceived notion of what

the student is like. I really don't like that because once it's in your head, it's in your head. It's like somebody telling you the ending of a movie. What's the point of seeing it then, right? You have no interest in learning about the movie, right? Once you lose that interest then there is no point. If you tell me about him prior, I'm going to have a preconceived notion about him, and I'd rather not have that. I don't think that is a really good thing. It is a terrible thing that we do to kids.

Responses like this relayed a message of proceeding with caution when it came to sharing information about students with colleagues. It appeared from the think tanks that collaborating with others provided the majority of participants with valuable opportunities to share resources and information, if conducted in an appropriate, confidential, and professional manner. The preceding statement also served as another indicator of the self-reliant spirits that many of the participants tended to have.

Despite some claims that high school teachers generally preferred autonomy over collaboration (Elfers, Plecki, & McGowan, 2007; Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007), teachers in the think tank noted examples of formal and informal ways in which they collaborated with others. Many favourably viewed the opportunities they had collaborating with other educators. Still, the majority of participants had not experienced formal co-teaching opportunities, and identified several difficulties in finding ways to connect with others and share information. According to the participants in the study, many of these difficulties were due to the high school structure, and not due to a disparaging personal view of collaboration. In fact, teachers in the think tank strongly advocated that high schools find more frequent ways to connect teachers to prevent students from falling through the cracks.

It appeared from the think tanks that collaborating with others provided the majority of participants with valuable opportunities to share resources and information, if conducted in an appropriate, confidential, and professional manner. While there was evidence that corroborated with the literature review noting tendencies to collaborate with teachers of similar subject areas, teachers in the think tank offered the necessity to do this so that they could better grasp the specific subject areas they were being assigned to teach.

Legislation, Policy, and School Administration

Despite evidence of a self-reliant spirit in each of the participants, all teachers indicated a strong belief in the necessity of systemic policies and procedures, and appreciated the role of school administration. One teacher made the following comment when the subject of systemic guidelines was introduced to the think tank.

Systems work, like systems reduce replication of work, replication . . . like reinventing the wheel. A good system invents the wheel once and everyone shares that wheel. So the question is, I don't know, maybe I am playing the devil's advocate here, but just like, we need a unified view still, but it can still come from the grassroots, but the grassroots even of itself by definition is multiple views, right? We have this diverse population and everyone has these different needs So, I can't dump on systems. At some point in time, there has to be a top-down director.

All the think tank participants appeared to agree that policies and procedures were necessary in schools, providing examples of specific policies within the province, division, or school that they believed improved the conditions in their workplace. Many of the teachers' classroom strategies (finding ways to engage multiple intelligences, creating democratic classrooms, building individual students' skill-sets, etc.), which were highlighted in the earlier

section on, “connecting by helping students with their needs and wants”, were likely the result of legislation and policies instituted by the province of Manitoba, and the support of school administrators. All the think tank participants appeared to agree that policies and procedures were necessary in schools, and provided examples of specific policies within the province, division, or school that they believed improved the conditions in their workplace, and led to better classroom practices.

One area of policy that was continuously highlighted and discussed by think tank participants were the policies on inclusion and inclusive education. In the literature review, several perspectives concerning educational systems and structures were highlighted. Critics like Bourdieu (1998) noted that the current education system increases the gap between the middle and upper class families and the working class families. In attempting to address this imbalance, one of the most recent and promising educational responses in recent history is the global promotion of more inclusive educational systems.

The global promotion of more inclusive educational systems was initiated not from politicians or lawmakers, but by a mounting groundswell of “grassroots” support. The literature review highlighted that the inclusive education movement seemed to most quickly take root in elementary schools. However, it appears that inclusive education did not fit so neatly within the high school model as it did within the elementary one.

Inclusive education and the high school classroom. In the think tank sessions, it was apparent that inclusion was by no means a foreign concept to high schools. One teacher provided a broad definition of the provincial and divisional policies on inclusive education, saying that it promoted, “appreciating the differences and (making all students) feel welcome and generally give them a feeling of belongingness and respecting their diversities and values. Inclusion is a

broader term, very wide and comprehensive.” Another teacher shared that, although inclusive education was highlighted in provincial legislation and school division policy, its success was also due to the fact that teachers already believed that it was the right thing to do. This participant noted, “When I think of inclusion, for example, inclusion in our school, I think the real reason that it’s worked to the extent that it’s worked is because it’s grassroots. People buy into it and they want to do it.”

One teacher offered an example of how the policy covered many aspects of school culture, such as using respectful language in the larger school community, noting, “(In our division), we say no hateful language like using the word ‘Gay’... no, racism is not tolerated and so we have this context of what is an inclusive accepting community, and then we try to operate within that community.” One teacher then offered how this global understanding of inclusive education readily translated into specific actions and procedures in the school concerning socioeconomic disparities, stating, “I was just thinking about some of the policies we have has stuff, like in our inclusion policy; we can’t have fees in your class. Like, OK we want to go on a field trip and its 5 bucks but we can’t charge the kids to go. So no one has to ever say in the class, ‘Yes, I have 5 bucks’ or ‘No, I don’t’.” One participant believed that policies like the one promoting inclusive education would ultimately translate into improved graduation rates.

I think (inclusive education policies) will help increase the graduation rate, because we are trying to promote everybody and I think that, it is a hard thing to understand coming from a different perspective but, I think that there are advantages of doing that, in terms of the rate of graduates, the rate of high school graduates.

Although inclusive education legislation and policies had been in place for some time, the participants acknowledged that it was still a work in progress.

The whole idea of inclusion is already the path to take, I mean I think we are still working on how that is going to look, as we discussed before. But the whole streaming thing I don't think was necessarily the best, obviously not the best thing. When I started out, the special needs kids were in a separate room, I don't think no one knew who they were, now they are in the classroom.

Are we including everyone? One concern that I expressed earlier in the literature review was whether Manitoba's idea of inclusion placed the same attention on students of high school age who may or may not have documented special needs, as it did on students with diagnosed special needs. The teachers agreed that inclusive education legislation and policies translated into more equitable educational opportunities for students with diagnosed special needs.

I don't think we fully use our inclusion policy across the board, like it's not on a consistent basis. But I mean, they have done some good stuff with special needs I believe, inclusive education, they've got all the special needs included, as many kids as possible to those regular classes, which they never used to have, right?

Several teachers expressed that the policy came with its own challenges for high school classroom teachers. One teacher said, "If there are kids with physical disabilities or other matter disabilities or learning disabilities and then it is very challenging for the teacher to make a different assignment for each and every one according to their abilities, right?"

Additionally, several participants thought that the policies did not adequately translate into providing the best learning environments for English Language (E.L.) learners and students with no formally diagnosed needs. These observations led to other teachers expressing concerns for the students in their classrooms who were not identified as having formally diagnosed special needs. One teacher provided the following narrative to indicate concerns for E.L. learners.

There are two E.L. learners in my class, they are from other countries, they are immigrants. They cannot even write a single sentence in English properly. They are in grade nine, and now most of the kids are those whose levels are above average and these two kids are below average, like very, very below average. And now we are making assignments which try and include them on something, the projects and the presentations. It is so hard for them to do those presentations, to present something when they don't know English and they can't even speak and they can't even write a single sentence. But, we did include them. It's hard for the teacher to put forth the challenges. It is challenging.

Several teachers expressed concerns for the students in their classrooms who were not identified as having formal special needs. Specifically, some participants worried that many students were not receiving formal provincial supports due to the lack of any formal diagnosis. One teacher stated the following comment.

Yeah, the ones who are technically special needs kids, right, they've got the funding, they've got the IEPs (individual education plans), they've got all that stuff behind them, right. Some are adapted and they are identified, they've got the paperwork, they are supported, right? How do you include the other kids who don't have that but who have family issues, who have attendance issues, how do you deal with that?

Another teacher shared similar concerns, and worried that students were still not getting the supports necessary for them to succeed.

I find that some of the inclusion policy sort of negates some of the needs of the children that are not designated and I think those are the ones that are falling through the cracks, right. The ones that haven't been identified as special needs yet, they do have needs and there are not getting the supports that they need. I think that's a problem.

Despite some of the aforementioned challenges, every high school teacher in the think tank thought that the benefits of legislation and policies like the ones promoting inclusive education far outweighed the challenges that they still faced. While acknowledging that improvements were still required, these systemic initiatives helped guide their classroom practices in the right direction.

Manitoba's inclusive education characteristics and think tank responses. Based on the literature review, the analysis of Manitoba's interpretation of inclusion noted the following characteristics.

1. Inclusive education is meant to benefit all children and youth.
2. Diversity among learners is a positive phenomenon that should be honoured.
3. Inclusion and equity are invariably linked.
4. All students should learn in their neighbourhood schools.
5. Appropriate educational programming for all students is emphasized, with the ideal (but not compulsory) choice being that students learn in the same classroom as their same-aged peers.

To some degree, teachers in the think tank seemed to touch upon most of Manitoba's aforementioned characteristics of inclusive education. Some of these links could be found when teachers shared their own interpretation of inclusive education in the think tank sessions. One teacher interpreted of the provincial and divisional policies on inclusive education, saying that it promoted, "appreciating the differences and (making all students) feel welcome and generally give them a feeling of belongingness and respecting their diversities and values. Inclusion is a broader term, very wide and comprehensive." Responses like this one seemed to align with the

first two characteristics that, “inclusive education is meant to benefit all children and youth”, and that “diversity among learners is a positive phenomenon that should be honoured”.

Comments made by teachers also indicated an awareness of Manitoba's third characteristic of inclusive education that, “inclusion and equity are invariably linked”. While the teachers agreed that inclusive education legislation and policies translated into more equitable educational opportunities for students with diagnosed special needs, they also shared examples of how inclusive education translated into more equitable environments for of all their students. Promotion of equity was an underlying theme of many of the teachers' comments when inclusion was discussed.

It should be noted that Manitoba's fourth characteristic of inclusive education, which stated that “all students should learn in their neighbourhood schools”, never came up in any of the think tank discussions. While it may be that some participants were secretly in favour of segregated schools but thought against publicly stating it, my impression was that the lack of any attention or debate given to this characteristic indicated a universally agreed upon consensus that all students, particularly those with special needs, should learn in their neighbourhood schools.

The teachers did, however, take time to discuss Manitoba's fifth characteristic, which stated that, “Appropriate educational programming for all students is emphasized, with the ideal (but not compulsory) choice being that students learn in the same classroom as their same-aged peers”. Some teachers questioned whether every student learning in the same classroom as his or her same aged peers was the most appropriate programming for some students, as their needs could be so profound.

Although inclusive education legislation and policies had been in place for some time, the participants acknowledged that it was still a work in progress. Despite some of the

aforementioned challenges, every high school teacher in the think tank thought that the benefits of legislation and policies like the ones promoting inclusive education far outweighed the challenges that they still faced. While acknowledging that improvements were still required, these systemic initiatives helped guide their classroom practices in the right direction. Teachers indicated that their role was to find ways to bridge the gap between policy and practice.

Participants' thoughts on school administration. The participants all seemed to respect, appreciate, and support their school administrations. When discussing the role of school administration, one teacher spoke about the authoritative power of the principal. This participant noted that one important quality of an effective teacher was, "Recognizing the role and authority of the principal, who absolutely had a right to over-ride us (the teachers). There was sort of an understanding, recognize (the principal's) power and authority and accept it quite willingly."

Although the participants seemed to respect the role and authority of school administration, it was evident that the teachers also greatly appreciated administrative support regarding the opportunity to be independently creative and to assist students in ways they believed were appropriate. One teacher stated, "Good leadership is so important because (my principal) sees the intent of what we are doing. Thank God (my principal) looks around to find ways to make it possible. I think (my principal) recognizes that at least what I am trying is from my heart." Another teacher shared the following observation.

I think we are lucky in (our division). I think we are kind of encouraged to do that. I mean, I think we are allowed to do this, and I know in speaking to administrators we've always had, I've never been told "oh, everybody is to be treated the same". I mean, they are treated the same in terms of respect and all that, but we also take into account in our

school division I think that the differences that people bring and we are encouraged to help people, and we have become creative in our ways.

In my literature review, I noted that the global promotion of more inclusive educational systems was initiated not from politicians or lawmakers, but by a mounting groundswell of “grassroots” support. I noted that parents and advocates for students with disabilities strongly lobbied to have their children in a less segregated and isolated education, marking the beginning of the inclusive education movement (O’Dell & Schaefer, 2005), and that governments and educators around the world were forced to respond to their demands. This symbiotic relationship between caregivers and government was crucial in making inclusive education policy a reality. The ability to have a role in translating inclusive education legislation and policy into school practice seemed important to the teachers. One teacher shared that, although inclusive education was highlighted in provincial legislation and school division policy, its success was also due to the fact that teachers already believed that it was the right thing to do. In this regard, the teachers indicated a similar hope that their school administrations would collaborate with them and help make all school policies transcend into day-to-day practices.

Having a shared voice. Teachers in the think tank noted appreciation for having the opportunities to share their voices in school policy development. For example, several teachers discussed the process in their school for refining the attendance policy. One teacher stated an appreciation for being asked by administration to assist in reviewing the current school policy.

Our school was looking at the policy (recently). Originally the policy was after five, ten, fifteen absences. So now it’s after three absences a letter of concern home, oh, sorry a phone call. Then after six it’s a letter, and then after nine, it’s administration with the parents and classroom teacher or could be what was previously known as credit

suspension, but now its credit consultation. That's actually an issue that has come up quite a bit recently, that admin and teachers are working to try to resolve.

One participant took time to highlight how teachers had recently collaborated with administration in their school with the goal of developing better alternatives to out-of-school suspensions. The participant shared the entire process, from collectively recognizing a problem to collaboratively creating and implementing a new solution.

I think that, just with suspensions, I know that recently there is a group of students who I have in both of my classes, who have been on and off with getting suspended. I feel as though, they get into a habit and start getting their work done and they are exhibiting some positive behaviors and then they decide to not going to class, or something happens and they end up getting suspended, and so then, they are gone for a period of time and then they are very disengaged all over again and I just find that these continuous suspensions whether at home are being detrimental to their learning. With this particular group of kids, every time something happens, they're off. It seems like, as soon as they are back on track, and they're working and they are coming to class and then something happens at lunch, or something happens after school, or in the hallway and then they are suspended again. Then their suspension is over and they don't come to class for a couple of days and they come back and there is a conversation, and they get back on track and then they get suspended again. So, it's a vicious circle.

The participant expressed pride that, after numerous discussions and meetings, administration and teachers came together, identified shared concerns, and ultimately decided to implement a collective solution involving the students, school, parents, and external agencies.

We now have alternatives to suspension. We get to choose in regards to the kid. (An outside community club) runs an organization in terms of suspension. When the kids get suspended, instead of them sitting at home doing nothing or playing videos. Well, a suspension for some kids isn't even a punishment really. It's what they want, right? The work gets gathered from teachers and that work gets sent to this place where they are usually working one on one with these kids. Usually a volunteer, they have some paid employees and they assess these kids and you know, connect with them and try and get some stuff done. And then they come back three or four, five days later with hopefully something done.

The teacher recognized that this new option required some additional time and effort from all stakeholders, but it appeared that they felt it was a better option than the traditional practice, and were therefore prepared to accept it. The participant admitted that challenges to the new policy had already surfaced. For example, the participant noted some initial difficulties in timely connecting with all parties, stating, "It works great, except it's getting that work together. It's connecting. It's keeping everybody connected. Getting the teachers, getting the work, making sure it gets done in a timely fashion." Still, this participant seemed resolved to make a meaningful attempt at this new intervention.

To summarize the second theme of this study, the participants in the think tank were proud to share stories about ways in which they relied on their own innovation, their own creativity, and their own independence when approaching issues within the classroom or within the school. Whether it was searching for the most effective classroom strategies, finding money for a field trip or an after school club, feeding students at lunch, these tended to place great value on their own professional self-reliance. Still, they found ways to collaborate with teaching

colleagues. Several participants had been involved in formalized co-teaching programs, and others noted a desire to have more regular opportunities to meet with other colleagues. Still, the teachers in the think tank shared a variety of resourceful and informal ways to connect and work together with other teachers. Although they noted some challenges, the participants understood the need for provincial legislation and divisional policies like those concerning inclusive education. Finally, the participants seemed to respect the role and authority of school administration, and appreciated being sought out by them for their opinions on issues pertaining to the school.

Theme 3

The participants took time to examine current educational practices and continuously searched for innovative ways to improve (a) their classrooms, (b) their schools, and (c) the system-at-large. The teachers in the think tank seemed to enjoy the opportunity to think “outside of the box”, and freely shared their thoughts aloud in the sessions. For the most part, they did not seem overly concerned if their ideas were met with some initial skepticism or even disagreement. Rather, they appeared to enjoy the discussion and, to some extent, debate with one another. One teacher stated that the think tank, “allow[ed] me the chance to express an opinion. It's very rare that we get heard in such a way.” Another teacher provided the following perspective about the think tank.

My fear is that we agree with each other because of our mutual understanding and respect for each other, and so is my fear in a group like this, but at the same time I think it has managed to give us the chance to like speak from a different perspective which we wouldn't have done. I appreciate the chance.

At this point another participant offered, "You know, if I didn't agree with you, I'd tell you." It was not surprising that teachers shared a favourable perspective of participating in the think tank, because it offered an opportunity to discuss their current successful educational practices with other teachers. These participants provided many examples of how they took the time, while teaching, to examine current educational practices, enabling them to continuously search for innovative ways to improve schools at all levels.

The third theme found in my study was that the participants took time to examine current educational practices and continuously searched for innovative ways to improve (a) their classrooms, (b) their schools, and (c) the system-at-large. In my literature review, I concluded that the voices of high school teachers offered valuable information about increasing graduation rates in Manitoba. The purpose of my study was to seek out Manitoba high school classroom teachers, invite them to participate in a special type of focus group, and capture and honour their voices in order to better understand what makes them successful at helping adolescents stay in school and graduate. This proved to be a worthwhile endeavour, as the teachers in the think tank offered many useful insights and strategies into how they assisted students who were otherwise at risk of dropping out of high school.

Improving Their Classroom Practice

The literature review I provided in the previous two themes provided several examples of participants sharing ways in which they examined and refined their own current classroom practices, as they deemed necessary. They discussed effective strategies to connect with students, and allow all their students access to subject curriculum. They noted ways to turn inclusive education policy into classroom practice. They also shared ways to find funds for field trips and clubs, feed students, and collaborate with parents. They also highlighted formal and informal

ways to collaborate with teaching colleagues. Along with these aforementioned examples, teachers provided several other indicators of identifying present needs of their students, and accordingly adjust their practices to meet these needs. One teacher offered the following comment related to this practice.

I had students in the class that probably would never be able to comprehend some of what was asked for in the curriculum and a bunch of people in the middle and a whole variety of personalities. I began within a month of my first year of teaching to devise an individualized kind of math program, so that the kids who were keen and got it could move forward.

The teachers shared that being personally viewed as authentic was not enough for the students, and discussed the need for authenticity to be incorporated into the daily classroom work, as well. One teacher stated, "So, trying to have authentic ways of having what the kids were doing in school, being purposeful and meaningful to them was a primary goal. So, I was exploring. I could say a lot more about that, but it gives you a picture."

Eclectic styles of teaching. The participants did not tend to latch on to one particular teaching method, but seemed more focused on finding the most natural approach for themselves and the most effective one for the students they were currently teaching. As one person commented, "I completely support all teaching styles, other than abusing styles. I always say, find and work to find who you are and create who you are." One teacher was sceptical of those who proposed "one size fits all" educational approaches, saying, "I do not like when I hear people telling me that it works for everybody, because it doesn't. I do not like that word that 'this will be fantastic for everybody'." Other teachers noted the importance of continuously assessing their own knowledge of the subjects they were teaching, with the purpose of mastering the

subject matter. As one teacher explained, high school teachers needed to work hard to become experts at their curriculum if they wanted to differentiate the instructional methods they used in their classes.

Because I was learning it as those kids were learning it and I wasn't as knowledgeable as I would have liked to have been. I'm sure the kids got what they needed (the first time I taught the course), but it was very book oriented at first and then, you know, as I even towards the year, I started to get more comfortable. I started adding more projects, here and there and now there lots of diversity.

The teachers thought that being confident in the subject matter made them better prepared to explore different teaching methods and strategies. One teacher shared that the combination of increasing his subject knowledge base combined with an expanding awareness of the construct of multiple intelligences seemed to collectively improve student achievement, stating, "I mean, we have a lot of keen but diverse bunch of kids and we are trying to reach them in any way possible, right? The humanities are really good for multiple intelligences." Another teacher stated he was recently attempting to incorporate, "more physical engagement. Getting them to do more stuff, whether that is field trips, experiments, hands-on activities, like actual physical engagements." One participant offered that his recent shift towards more project-based learning yielded some promising results.

I have a few tests but the main projects are the main tests. I guess you can call that or assessments are projects, individual projects. Standing up in class and presenting it and given a written assignment as well. I find that kids learn more and they work harder than if I actually gave them the test, but they love them, but as opposed to, they hate tests. But they love these projects. It gives them the ability to be creative, every project is different,

in a way it is very unique to the student. Yet, they are learning more and they don't even feel like they are learning.

The role and potential of technology and innovation. The participants also shared that they were constantly pursuing and testing ways in which technology could assist in reaching students. One teacher offered the potential of combining on-line instructional opportunities for students who were, for a variety of reasons, unable to attend class on a regular basis.

I remembered when I did some of our university courses, you just went on the online education. (One student that I teach), it's so terribly difficult for her to take two buses home to take to her class, right? That would be a great solution for her. I think we have a better chance of her turning on the computer and just being present in that way, right from home, right. So there is an idea right there.

Another teacher offered that the recent explosion in multimedia and technological advances meant that students were accustomed to receiving a bombardment of information all at once. This participant wondered aloud how these advances could be effectively utilized in the classroom.

I showed a You Tube clip that had to do with a news report from CNN or FOX or whatever, and in clip, the news report and all this stuff was happening. There was stuff going across the bottom. There was stuff pounding you with this information and fast information, and the kids picked up on this stuff at the bottom of the screen, incredibly well. We were trying to do what we were doing and we were watching the CNN guy or whatever, they were commenting on the things that were going across at the bottom of the screen. I thought that was really telling sort of moment, for not only their ability to focus on something, but also their ability to multitask and it's flying by. That information

is flying by. Fast, quick snippets of information, they have been sort of really guided toward that.

One participant discussed how a recent shift in his own philosophy permitted him to release some of the direct teacher control in the classroom, and “put the learning in the kids’ hands”. Although he was initially reluctant to do this, this teacher indicated great satisfaction in pursuing this tactic. He shared the following incident.

There are lots of avenues, I’m sure people have taken, but I found if you put the learning in the kids hands, I have been very surprised and pleased at how well they have done. I need to give them more credit and not be in so control of my own stuff here. Putting learning into the kids’ hands. Being in university recently like they really stressed to get away from the direct teaching method and have them inquire more into their learning. And so that is what I tried to do and it actually does make a difference. It feels scary when you let it go of the control.

The teacher further offered that his discovery was exciting to him, and that he felt compelled and obligated to share it with other teachers in his department. He was not surprised that he was initially met with some resistance.

I think a lot of seasoned teachers they have their way of doing it, and they have established their stuff, and it’s very much a control thing, and I know what I am doing, this is what I do next, I have my assignments all in order, and if I experiment and lean away from that. What’s going to happen, it’s very scary. Are they going to get it? Are they not going to get it? What if they do if they don’t?

The participant offered that when faced with such resistance, he decided that the best approach to take was not to present an overly idealistic front, and therefore be labeled as naïve.

Rather, he decided that the most effective approach was to show the department evidence supporting this method of teaching.

I think a lot of people look at me with why am I wide-eyed and bushy tailed, an idealist, and they kind of roll their eyes or scoff at what I am saying. And I say, "You know what, it speaks for myself, I think, I had a grade 12 (course) and my class had the best result in the provincial exam". There's lots of variables, some teachers had a higher concentration of weaker student and some had a concentration of stronger students. There is definitely value to it.

All of the participants in the think tank provided examples of taking time to reflect on their current classroom practices, and shared numerous stories of how they were always seeking to better their craft. Some of the ideas, like teaching to multiple intelligences and adapting their instruction, seemed to be ideas that many other teachers already were incorporating into their practice. Some ideas, such as using computers and Internet technology to reach non-attending students at home, were less widely adopted. Some ideas, such as using multimedia to emit a wealth of curricular information at once, were still in their infancy stage. Finally, some ideas, like the emphasis on putting more of the learning in the hands of the students, initially were met with resistance and skepticism by colleagues. Regardless of the idea, it seemed that all teachers in the think tank took time to find and think about new and better approaches in the classroom, and test them out.

Improving Their Schools

In conclusion, with respect to my review of the second theme, the participants in the think tank shared several examples that indicated their respect for the role and authority of school administration, but that they appreciated being sought out by them for their opinions on

issues pertaining to the school. Two examples that were highlighted involved two participants sharing their gratitude at being meaningfully involved in reviews of their schools' attendance policy and out-of-school suspension policy. These reviews ultimately resulted in amended policies that the teachers felt invested in, especially as a means of better serving students who were at-risk. Even with new school approach in place, it should be noted that the teachers were still contemplating better, "next step" models. These contemplations contributed to the third theme of the study.

The aforementioned examples were just two of many where the participants demonstrated taking the time to think about their schools, and how they might be adjusted to better meet the needs of their students. One teacher lightheartedly offered, "If I had my choice of doing anything, I'd like to have my own school." While this comment caused others in the session to chuckle, it also supported the notion that high school teachers did take time to imagine ways to improve the schools where they taught. One teacher shared her thoughts about a recent study she read that focused on shortening the length of time it takes for students to complete courses, and wondered if more compressed options might be better for students repeating subjects in her school.

So because the question is not about she cannot do it, but the question is that she can do it, but there are other factors that affect her attendance, like maybe boredom because she's already older and she already knows the stuff and why does she have to keep on learning that, and we also have non semestered courses like English and Math are taken for a full year long, and I just heard from a colleague that there was a study made about aboriginal kids which their enthusiasm to learn will be there for a certain period of time, say 2 months, but after that it would die down. I was told from that study that if the kid

would see the end then right away then that kid might exert more effort to get to that end to get the credit at the end of the term. But if that kid were still needs to wait till June to earn that credit than that kid might be a long waiting time, but that's a study that I thought it was something to inform those policy makers as well.

Related to the amount of time students spent in class, one teacher shared thoughts about whether the class length that the school chose was the most effective for every student's learning, given the variety of attention spans teachers encounter.

Sitting in a classroom for one hour and twenty minutes is very long already. I think that's the difference too, right. The attention span of the kids from elementary, it's very short and the middle years kind of, and more in high school. You are hoping that they have that more of that attention span and yet you think that perhaps that's too long of sitting. Even adults, if they are sitting there for a long time you feel like I am so tired and I need to get up, move a little bit, and I think that is a factor to consider.

Another participant enthusiastically shared a new appreciation for incorporating place-based learning opportunities into the classroom. This teacher believed that to be successful, place-based learning required school wide support because it crossed over into different subject and department areas. The teacher offered the following statement to describe this approach.

I think we need more place-based philosophies in education (in our school). I am a firm believer in place-based education. I think the answer is a place-based approach. So, you begin by literally the individual within their context of their immediate surroundings, and by doing that and by taking curriculum points, educational opportunities from that first and immediate sense of place. You make it a lot more engaging and a lot more relevant to the student.

One participant thought that the school needed to reevaluate their overemphasis on post-secondary options, believing that it could send the wrong message to students already overwhelmed by the system. The teacher stated, "I think a lot of the problems with school are that we gear towards this higher education. I love the fact that we give them that option, but I don't think every kid can aspire to that or wants to, and we don't give them the options of something else." Another participant shared her involvement in a joint venture between herself and school administrators to investigate different out of division programs as a means of exploring alternative methods of instruction.

I know that (outside school division) has a program that is kind of similar to (ours), so I was just talking to admins who were going to go visit their program to see how it works. I guess it is more, not so much as a drop-in centre, but it's a math and a science and English and the history are all in one room. So they are working on different things and there are a couple of teachers in the room and it's kind of modular and it's kind of . . . and we are going to look at that, to see if they are a little more successful, in the program that they are doing. Because, I know with the program that I am doing right now, while it works for some, it doesn't work for all of them.

Improving the System-At-Large

Within the first two themes, some of the participants shared examples of their thoughts on larger divisional and provincial legislation and policies aimed at increasing graduation rates, such as increasing the compulsory age of schooling from 16 to 18, promoting inclusive education, encouraging better student attendance, and seeking out alternatives to out-of-school suspensions. Many pointed out that they were primarily satisfied to work within the system they were in, but still explored ways to improve upon it. One teacher noted, "I am extremely happy in

(my school) division. I mean there are lots of things that go on that are not necessarily to my liking but all in all, great division and great support.”

Still, some participants in this think tank boldly shared other examples of ways they might affect change on a larger scale. One teacher in the think tank questioned whether or not the system emphasized reliance on course curriculums too rigidly, stating that, “It’s a guide”. One participant offered the following somewhat audacious attempt to improve the system by proposing a collaborative model of teacher training at the university level.

I just called, cold call, the dean at the Faculty of Ed. “Hello, my name is, this is what we are doing.” I called and had a meeting with (people at the University of Manitoba Faculty of Education). We had between 10 and 12 high schools involved, where we had cohorts of student teachers. We had a student teacher portfolio model, and we had school-based courses, or course just a half credit. I would find Master Teachers or people in the community and we would do these courses. I was highly involved in that and a lot of really exciting things came from that. Most of the money went to paying for substitutes for teachers to work on developing their own innovations within their teaching practice and to go to some conferences and do some school visitations.

The role of the think tank model in extracting meaningful and valuable information from classroom teachers. The think tank model I used for this study seemed to provide a safe forum for teachers to share their thoughts and ideas on a wide variety of topics. One of the more interesting exchanges of opinions occurred when a teacher in one of the think tank break-out sessions shared an opinion that seemed to question my study’s focus on increasing graduation rates, and asked if the priority of preparing students for the “real world” would be a more significant objective. One teacher expressed the following viewpoint.

Statistically 20% of all kids that graduate high school are the ones that end up going to university, that's in the first year. What happens to the other 80%, what are we doing for those people? We're sending them out to the job force; they're becoming labourers, they going into the service industry. How did we prepare them for this? We didn't, and again, and for the 20% that go onto university the first year, how many stick it out after the first year? How many more drop out then and then go get some other type of job. So, what's the purpose of school, that's the big question? What is the purpose of school? To hand kids have a piece of paper when they are 17 or 18 years old going, "Look I got this, big deal. How does that help me?"

In another think tank session, a participant also wondered about my 'big' question, expressing frustrations at graduating students who did not seem to realize that regular attendance and personal accountability were critical qualities that employers valued, and wondered how this message could better be related to our students. At another participant's request, he elaborated upon his reservations.

I don't know of any job where you could miss twelve absences without really reporting to your boss why. And I think that there is a disconnect there and I think is a real problem that we need to address. I had my brother-in-law once ask me, because he had younger students coming out of grade twelve and going to work for him in construction, and to them it was no problem to show up late to work and he would say, "The first twenty minutes are important because that is where I give out the job and tell them what I need them to do and then I talk to them about paying, so they have an issue with that too. Not that you don't understand, that sometimes you miss a class or sometimes you can't make a class, but 20 absences, that's pretty high, right?"

Following these expressions of frustration came a brainstorm of ideas attempting to resolve these issues. That is, the think tank participants began to focus their discussion towards possible alternatives to the traditional high school model, and how it could better promote personal accountability. One teacher offered the following suggestion.

I think what should be done, is kept it at 16 and maybe have an option of kids going to a trade school for a couple of years after that to prepare them for, you know. A lot of these kids, they've figured it out, this is not my specialty, I need to do this, I need to, you know, I want to go to work. I want to do that. So instead of sending them to the workforce at 16, let them learn a trade and to me that just makes sense.

Another participant offered that the system needed to provide more exposure to the world after high school, and expand upon already existing programs.

I'm just thinking about a program called, "taking your kids to work day". Where in one day, they get to work and then they get to know what kind of program. So, I'm just thinking it is something similar to that, where they feel the real world is here and I need to really do something, in order to really fit into the real world.

One participant offered that he was attempting to do this informally in his classes already, and briefly described his programming method.

Afternoons is going out to whatever they're interested in. So, if they are interested in pharmacy, they might be able to go to a pharmacy or pharmaceuticals or if engineering, might be to an engineering firm and in the office in the afternoon. So a lot of their spent time is spent outside of the class in workplaces.

Another teacher later offered that there might be other ways to better promote personal accountability that build upon the current system of granting credits, and perhaps it could be accomplished even prior to entering high school.

I think, just speaking from personal experience. I started high school in grade 9 and then in grade 10, I switched schools to go to be in another program and that high school didn't start until grade 10. And so, the grade tens, I was already use to the credit system, because I had been through a year of it. But then, the grade tens at that school, were experiencing the exact same thing that the grade nines were experiencing at the other school. I personally wonder whether starting the system a little bit earlier, may be more beneficial. Not forcing it into them, but an almost eased in process. I think the more accountability at a younger age doesn't necessarily mean a credit system. So, getting them to be more accountable doesn't necessarily mean that they have to pass or fail courses. Just the concept of accountability.

In each of the think tank sessions, the high school teachers shared many of the frustrations and challenges they faced. They addressed sociological and socioeconomic issues. They talked about issues around the mental and emotional health of their students. They shared examples of inadequate funding and insufficient space. They discussed problems they encountered in trying to meet the needs of a wide diversity of learners and skill-sets within the same classroom. They shared concerns about the size of classrooms, the lengths of courses, and the lengths of classes. They spoke about a variety of disconnects with students, their parents, their social workers, and even the difficulties they encountered trying to connect with colleagues on a regular basis. They spoke about the struggles they had putting provincial legislation and policies into classroom practice. They noted that standardized testing, provincial examinations,

and preparing students for life outside of public education were all daunting and formidable challenges. One teacher made the following observation at the conclusion of a think tank session.

We dump money into a lot of things and it never worked, right? I think doing what we just did here, giving meaning to learning and understanding and being able to talk and to come together as people and even with our differences still find commonality and learn from that. (Saying) "I really like what you said", (or) "I did not think of the situation that way until you said it", you know, so it's good to have outside perspective. But it is gratuitous for a conversation that we can all, all the mutual or prior knowledge that we can draw upon.

After each one of these challenges was presented, however, something very interesting happened. Teachers with similar experiences readily affirmed that they too struggled with many of these issues, and acknowledged that many of the problems were complex. Next, they began to share different perspectives, offer suggestions, propose ideas, and collectively devise strategies in order to resolve these dilemmas.

A reduction in biases? In my literature review, I was concerned that those who were willing to take part in my study may taint their responses in order to provide me with answers they thought I was seeking. While I did not believe that my study was fraught with political pressures, I noted concerns that the subject matter might be politically sensitive. It was therefore important to my study that I find a research method that reduced the risks of these biases entering this study. To reduce this risk, I searched for a qualitative method where a shift in power took place so that the participants (i.e. high school classroom teachers) viewed themselves as authoritative experts on the subjects we discussed, while my role was to learn from them.

Therefore, instead of surrounding myself with sycophants, I hoped to find what Caliva and Scheier (1992) referred to as “responsible iconoclasts”.

The literature review uncovered numerous benefits to gathering teachers together into a group think tank (Jewitt, 1885; Surowiecki, 2004; Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and Switzler, 2002). As a means to gather teachers together, the mechanism that I chose to reduce some of the aforementioned biases and obtaining the best insights was a "think tank" model (Weaver, 1989). The purpose of the think tank was not the same as a professional learning community (PLC), but rather as a “Professional Thinking Community” (PTC).

I hoped that teachers can share some of new initiatives, as one never knows the large effects that “tiny” ideas and insights can create when developed by those working within the system, itself. Relating to the story of Abby Conant (Gladwell, 2005) that I earlier shared, I concluded the literature review by stating that my hope was to identify some of the “screens” that high school classroom teachers have discovered, which can help us solve the larger, overwhelming sociological problem of kids dropping out of school. The teachers in the think tank seemed to enjoy the opportunity to think “outside of the box”, and freely share their thoughts aloud in the sessions. My impression was that they viewed this exercise, to think about areas that could be improved upon in their own practices, schools, division, and the system-at-large, as an essential component of being conscientious educators. In short, they couldn't seem to help themselves.

These participants provided many examples of how they took the time, while teaching, to examine current educational practices, enabling them to continuously search for innovative ways to improve schools at all levels. The teachers did not tend to latch on to one particular teaching method, but seemed more focused on finding what was the most natural for them and what was

most effective for the students they were currently teaching. One teacher was sceptical of those who proposed “one size fits all” educational approaches. Other teachers noted the importance of continuously assessing their own knowledge of the subjects they were teaching, with the purpose of better mastering the subject matter. The teachers thought that being confident in their subject matter made them better prepared to explore different teaching methods and strategies.

The participants also shared that they were constantly pursuing and testing ways in which they could better engage students. When they discovered a new approach that appeared promising, they wanted to share it with their colleagues, and show evidence supporting their discovery's potential.

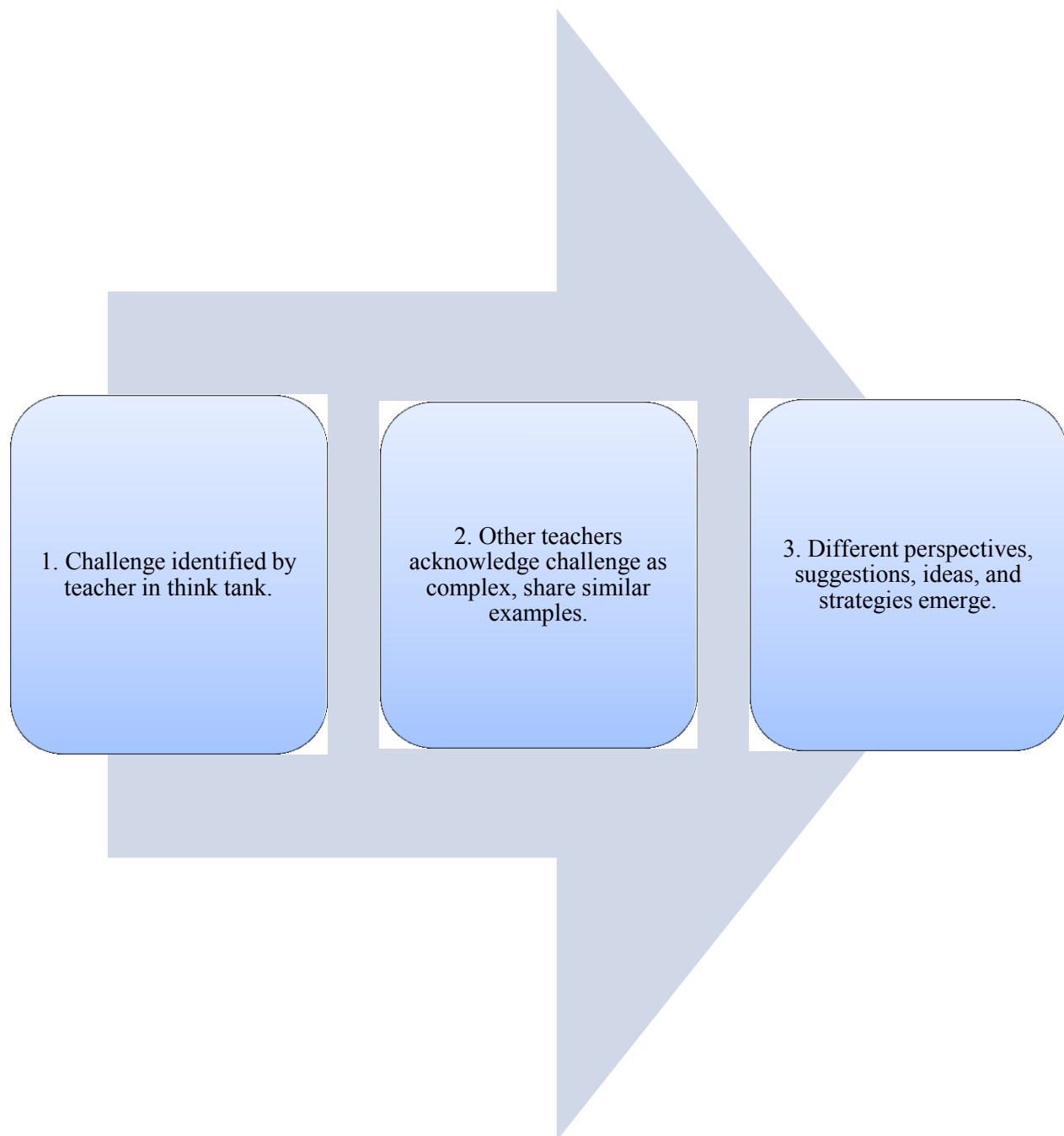
All of the participants in the think tank provided examples of taking time to reflect on their current classroom practices, and shared numerous stories of how they were always seeking to better their craft. Regardless of the idea, it seemed that all teachers in the think tank took time to find and think about new and better approaches in the classroom, and test them out.

While participants in the think tank also shared several examples that indicated their respect for the role and authority of school administration, they appreciated being sought out by them for their opinions on issues pertaining to the school. When they had significant involvement in policy review, the teachers asserted that they felt invested in attempting to better serve students who were at-risk. Even with new school approaches in place, it should be noted that one teacher was still contemplating better, “next step” models.

Limitations, Contributions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study is to seek out Manitoba high school classroom teachers, invite them to participate in a think tank, and capture their voices in order to better understand what they do to help adolescents stay in school and graduate. For data triangulation purposes

Figure 4.4. Think tank pattern of contending with each challenge.



(Hales, 2010), I first highlight some of the limitations of this study. Second, I highlight some of the key findings in this study, and how this thesis may contribute to both the gaps in the literature and to answering my central concern of reducing the risk of students dropping out of school. As I hope that others can use the knowledge offered through this thesis in both practice and policy, I then provide recommendations for pre-service teachers, schools and school divisions, and the province of Manitoba. Fourth, I recommend several potential areas for future research.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations to my study that need to be identified. First, I might have chosen to explore within my literature review and with the teacher participants many more underlying factors as to why youths often do not succeed in high schools. Although I provided a general sociological perspective about why some do not succeed in Manitoba schools, and reviewed some general literature concerning social determinism, the different forms of capital, and the influence of speech codes, I did not delve more deeply into these important factors within my literature review. Participants in the think tank sessions touched upon many reasons why some youths struggle in high school, the conversations could have explored in greater depths the causes of these struggles. Perhaps the combination of a more substantial review of the literature concerning these topics and a more concerted effort on my part to direct questions on these topics to the think tank might have shed more light on these areas.

I would have preferred including some high school classroom teachers who had been recognized by their colleagues as highly effective and influential. In the school division that I first approached, I was told that I had to incorporate a process into my study that would only allow participants to volunteer of their own accord. While I was greatly impressed by the input of each of the volunteers, I would have found it interesting and informative to have had some

teachers that had been recognized by their peers as effective teachers. Although not ideal, this division request fit within the parameters of my study's initial and larger intent of assembling high school teachers into a think tank, and so I agreed to continue with my study in this division. It should be noted that I reviewed this matter with my advisor, who recommended that I continue with the study. If the situation arose where I found myself short of participants from this school division, then we agreed that I would pursue another school division with the intent of seeking out teachers nominated by their peers. This step was not necessary, as nine teachers volunteered from the initial division that I approached.

I think the study might have benefited from having teachers from several school divisions participate, rather than teachers from only one division. University of Manitoba's ENREB committee stated (see Appendix L) that I was only permitted to contact one school division at a time, and could only contact an additional one if I did not acquire the required number of participants. Their rationale was that I should not be unnecessarily requesting permission to conduct research in more divisions than I required. As I achieved my required range ($n=9$) from the first school division contacted, I did not approach any other school divisions. While I think that the participants in the study were able to provide me with an incredible abundance of data, linking together teachers from different divisions might have attained different perspectives.

Due to circumstances beyond my control, only six of 9 participants were able to attend the first large group think tank. As a result, I was unable to gather all of the participants into one large group and develop a larger collective of ideas at once. I was grateful that I could eventually gather a sample size of nine teachers together into smaller break-out groups, and indebted to them for seeing the study to its conclusion. I made sure that I introduced myself and the process to each think tank in a similar manner, stating the purpose, process, and guidelines at the

commencement of each think tank (so all members were certain to receive similar information), but ideally I think it might have been best if all nine participants could have gathered together for at least one – if not all – of the think tank sessions.

Given each participants time constraints, I was unable to gather the participants into a more intimate weekend session. I think the structure of meeting on a Friday evening, followed by an all day Saturday, and the morning of a Sunday might have yielded a more cohesive group, and allowed conversations to have moved forward at a more efficient pace. Still, this ideal format was not possible, as many of the participants indicated in feedback to me.

It might have been better to have had a research assistant attend the think tank sessions (rather than just review the written transcripts after the sessions had completed), but I was unable to secure a qualified person in time. I was thankful that I found a volunteer assistant to help me later in the study and help me with identifying themes, but to have had a research assistant physically attend the sessions would have made it easier for me to conduct the sessions. Also, an attending research assistant would have been able to bring forward independent notes and observations from the sessions that a written transcript would have never been able to provide.

Although I made attempts to reduce bias from entering my study, I must acknowledge that power issues may have unfortunately affected some of the responses from the participants in this study. Although I am not employed in the same school division as the participants, I am still a vice principal in a high school, and I have taken leadership roles in inclusive education in Manitoba. Additionally, I provided the participants with power point slides highlighting many aspects of my study prior to meeting as a think tank, along with numerous questions for them to consider. In this regard, I believe that I was unsuccessful at remove all biases from infiltrating

my study, and must acknowledge that power imbalances (whether real or perceived) may have influenced how some of the participants responded to issues discussed in the think tank sessions.

Finally, I think it would have been beneficial to have gathered all of the participants together, in person, one last time to discuss the themes that emerged from the study. As I promised the group that their participation was only required for the think tank sessions, I did not feel comfortable asking the participants to meet again after the transcripts were completed. Additionally, the majority of participants expressed to me how especially busy they were at the time of the study, which occurred just prior to the winter break. In the high schools of this division, this break was followed by classroom exam preparation and writing. Given the full schedules of the participants, I thought that the most reasonable option was to email everyone separately and ask for their insights and reactions to the themes. Although this process still provided very valuable feedback, physically meeting as a group one last time might have been a superior option.

Seeking Out the Teachers' Voice: This Study's Contributions to the Literature and Increasing Graduation Rates

Although my review of the literature found many articles and studies concerning high school graduation rates, sociology and education, and the unique nature of high schools, its students, and its teachers, I never came across any studies that asked classroom teachers their opinions on these subjects using a think tank approach. While it was not difficult to search on the Internet and find think tanks that focused on educational policies, they primarily tended to serve as lobbying agents for national (and primarily American) issues in federal government policy development. I believe that this study is innovative because it seemed to provide an effective method of obtaining valuable information on educational issues at a much smaller and local

level. While others may have already utilized a similar format to mine in educational research, I was unable to find one.

What's in a name? I believe that referring to my teacher focus group as a *think tank* subtly yet substantially changed the power dynamics of the group. It allowed for the participants – and not the researcher - to play the role of “expert”. In this regard, I believe that my think tank model was innovative because it empowered the teachers to speak freely and confidently on the issue of helping kids graduate. Using the think tank model, I hoped to encapsulate some of the concepts, methods, and practices these teachers successfully incorporate into their classrooms. Additionally, I wanted these teachers to share their thoughts on Manitoba's relevant laws, regulations, and policy documents towards inclusive education; provide insight into the curious and complex relationship between the promotion of inclusive education and the current high school system; discuss the potential impact of raising the compulsory school age; review the current high school credit system; and deliberate on the conflicting relationship between differentiation and standardization. I hoped that the classroom teachers participating in the study would view themselves as sources of ideas and expertise, evaluators of policies and programs, and authoritative sources of information and opinion, as these are critical components of a think tank (Weaver, 1989). I also wanted members to feel autonomous when they participate, as this is necessary for a think tank to be effective (Pautz, 2011). However, the primary purpose of the group and these questions was to gain insight into what classroom teachers do in their classrooms that reduces the risk of students dropping out, and increases the probability that students will graduate.

In review, the three themes in this study that emerged from the think tank sessions were as follows.

1. The participants strived to connect with students by finding similarities and shared interests, helping them with their needs and wants, and being viewed as authentic.
2. The participants individually and collaboratively worked with colleagues to make classrooms and schools more conducive for struggling students, and acknowledged the need for legislation, policies, and administration.
3. The participants took time to examine current educational practices and continuously searched for innovative ways to improve their classrooms, their schools, and the system-at-large.

In regard to my primary purpose, I believe that using a think tank model allowed me to be successful in gaining an incredible amount of insight from teachers concerning their approaches to reduce student dropout rates and increase graduation rates. The biggest contribution from me was to gather the teachers together, ask them the question of what they do to increase graduation rates and decrease dropout rates, and then force myself to be as quiet as possible. As a result, the teachers seemed to feel emancipated to speak honestly about their own frustrations and challenges, share similar experiences, and seek out ways to collectively resolve them. While the teachers tended to follow these steps each time a particular problem was noted (see figure 4.4), this pattern was also evident as a means of producing the three primary themes of the study (see Figure 4.5).

Still, I also noted caution not to overestimate my expectations from the group. Caliva and Scheier (1992) warned that, "Unrealistic expectations can poison any process, especially think tanks." While the think tanks spent time focusing on the need for large, systemic improvements, the majority of time was examined the small, personal, and daily ideas, routines and strategies that the participants utilized in order to provide the students assigned to their classrooms an

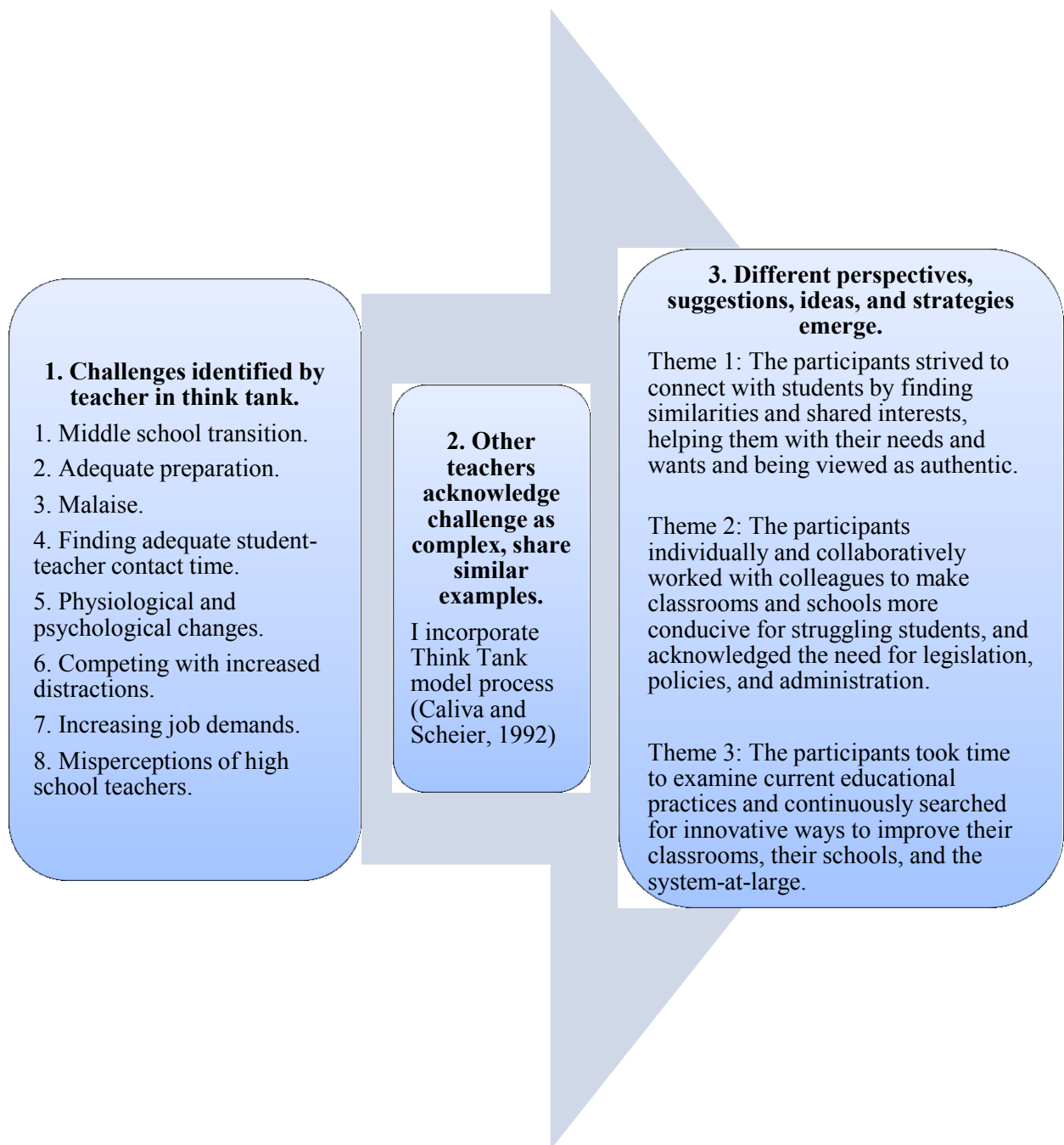
opportunity to succeed. Many of these suggestions were not something that could necessarily be translated into great systemic change. In fact, the teachers' actions in the classrooms could most accurately be described as filling the vast number of seemingly small and large gaps between policy and practice, diversity and standardization, or marginalization and inclusion. Please note, many of these "small" suggestions that teachers shared in the think tank are later highlighted in the *Recommendations* section of this chapter.

In my literature review, Dr. Rick Freeze (2013a, 2013b) touched upon two key points that seemed to surface within the think tank sessions. Freeze (2013b) commented that because a problem or condition might be best described through one discipline, the solution to the problem may be found in another discipline. The idea is that solutions to problems do not necessarily need to be directly linked to the cause of the problem. At the conclusion of this study, I am confident that high school classroom teachers are not cause of students dropping out of high schools, but they may hold key evidence of what can be done to reduce the rate of dropouts

One teacher helping one student one issue at a time. Second, Freeze (2013a) noted, "It is almost always better to do an exceptional job solving a small number of problems or initiating a small number of new initiatives, than to run from crisis to crisis resolving none" (p.15).

Throughout each of the think tank sessions, high school classroom teachers provided a multitude of small, individual examples of how they connected with students, identified those who may be at-risk, and exceptionally initiated personalized responses in order to connect and engage them in their classrooms. Although some teachers shared stories where they were collaboratively involved in larger school endeavours, for the most part their stories shared the more common theme describing how one teacher helped one student one time after another. Their stories contributed greatly to one of my study's conclusions that the best way to increase overall student

Figure 4.5. Think tank pattern for theme and sub-theme emergence



graduation rates is probably for one teacher to help one student and one issue at a time.

In this regard, my study contributes to the literature because it refutes the critics who believe that high school teachers (a) have it too easy (Leithwood, 2008), (b) are cold and impersonal (Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007), and (c) prefer autonomy over collaboration (Elfers, Plecki, & McGowan, 2007; Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007). The teachers in this study shared frequent stories of how they assisted students that would have consumed countless extra hours of time and effort. The teachers also offered many examples in which their responses to student needs were filled with warmth and personalization. While teachers identified the need to be professional independent at times, they seemed eager to collaborate with other educators, and sought out many different ways to make this happen. Their actions most often did not result in wide school or systemic transformation, but it did make a difference to the students assigned to their classrooms.

Finding the time to connect. As reducing dropout rates and increasing graduation was the central purpose of this study, teachers in this study overwhelmingly indicated that connecting with students was crucial to student success, especially for students who were at risk of dropping out. It appeared that the teachers in this study were also incredibly economical and efficient with the time and resources they had available to them in order to make those connections. At the conclusion of the think tank sessions, I took a few moments to calculate the amount of time that a high school teacher was theoretically assigned to each student. In Manitoba, most teachers are contractually obligated to be present at work for 6.5 hours per day, which includes a 55 minute lunch period. If we subtract the 55 minutes of lunch time from the 6.5 hours (or 390 minutes), provide teachers with 40 minutes per day in prep time, and allow students 5 minutes per day to move from one classroom to the next, we would be left with 300 minutes of teacher time

remaining in the contractual school day for classroom interaction and instruction. Although the Government of Alberta (2013) noted that high school classroom teachers in larger schools see up to 150 students or more a day, I will be conservative and assume that the teacher teaches four classes a day with 25 students per class (or 100 students in total). If we take the 300 minutes and divide that by 100 students, then high school classroom teacher contact time computes to only 3 minutes a day per student.

In such a short period of time, it is quite remarkable that teachers in the think tank shared so many examples of how they took or made time to connect with students and reach out to them. Their responses appeared to be one part economical, and one part authentic. They cannot possibly resolve the massive issues of socioeconomic inequality, disproportionate allocation of capital, or uneven student proficiencies, but they do respond to them as best they can. In short, they cannot cure all the ills of society and heal all of its wounds, but they do try and sensitively tend to, clean and dress each wound as they arise, and keep moving forward. This is easier said than done, as many of these wounds occurred long before students entered high school, run deep, or are beginning to scar over.

In his book, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, Gladwell (2002) speaks about the importance of small, “Band-Aid” type solutions like the ones that these teachers performed on a daily basis. Although some questioned whether or not these small acts were noteworthy from a “big picture” point of view, he offered a unique perspective about their accumulative effects.

A critic looking at tightly focused, targeted interventions might dismiss them as Band-Aid solutions. But that phrase should not be considered a term of disparagement. The Band-Aid is an inexpensive, convenient, and remarkably versatile solution to an

astounding array of problems. In their history, Band-Aids have probably allowed millions of people to keep working or playing tennis or cooking or walking when they would otherwise have had to stop. The Band-Aid solution is actually the best kind of solution because it involves solving a problem with the minimum amount of effort and time and cost. We have, of course, an instinctive disdain for this kind of solution because there is something in all of us that feels that true answers to problems have to be comprehensive, that there is virtue in the dogged and indiscriminate application of effort, that slow and steady should win the race. The problem, of course, is that indiscriminate application of effort is something that is not always possible" (p. 256-257).

Teachers act as "Band Aids". Based on my 21 years working in high schools, my university coursework, and this study, I think that high school classroom teachers are not always given the credit they deserve for the many creative and compassionate ways they find (often heuristically) to keep struggling students in Manitoba high schools. As Gladwell (2002) speaks of the disparaging manner in which "Band Aid" solutions are referred to, I have also heard disparaging comments from educators in meetings, lectures, workshops, and in-services about high school classroom teachers and their practices. Over the years, I have heard some of these comments from professors, school administrators, provincial officials, clinicians, consultants, elementary/middle school teachers, and even other high school teachers. I have seen disparaging comments about high school teachers accompanied by eye-rolling and head nodding by the speaker and the audience, alike. These remarks imply that most high school teachers have not embraced inclusion like elementary teachers have, or they do not take the time to differentiate instruction, or get to know their students, or that they focus too much on subject areas and curriculum, and not enough on the students' needs.

I do not dispute that some high school teachers have much room for improvement in all of these areas. However, for high school classroom teachers like the ones who volunteered to participate in this study, and do their best to apply “Band-Aids” in all of their various forms, these comments are grossly inaccurate, naïve, and hurtful. To be honest, these types of comments provided much of the impetus for me to conduct this study in the first place. Although my support for high school classroom teachers and the work they do may be viewed as a subjective bias towards high school classroom teachers, and therefore provide a further limitation to my study, it is only fair to the reader of this study that I make this statement.

I originally stated that I wanted to *capture* high school teachers' voices in order to better understand what makes them successful at helping adolescents stay in school and graduate. At the conclusion of this study, I hope that I did not just *capture* their voices, as that seems insufficient. Rather, I hope that I *honoured* their voices. Based on the treasure trove of information that these teachers provided, I think that such an approach in the school system will ultimately lead to an increase graduation rates in Manitoba. In this regard, I believe that this conclusion is my study's most significant contribution to the already existing field of research that has sought out ways to reduce dropout rates and increase graduation rates.

Recommendations and Implications for Future Research

This study provided a small glimpse into what high school classroom teachers do to decrease the rate of student dropouts and increase the rate of graduation. After completing this study, a number of recommendations emerged for pre-service teacher education, schools and the school system, and future research.

Recommendations for Pre-Service Teacher Education

As I highlighted earlier in the literature review of this study, there are similarities and differences in teacher training depending upon whether pre-service teachers study in elementary/middle years or senior years streams. Regardless of the stream pre-service teachers find themselves in, I recommend that universities place more time and emphasis on teaching them trust building and connection skills in student-teacher relationships. At each of the think tank sessions, participants stressed the importance of connecting with students by finding similarities and shared interests, helping them with their needs and wants, and being viewed as authentic. As this theme repeatedly presented itself into the study, it seems reasonable to offer this recommendation, and insert this theme early and often into future teacher training.

The teachers in this study often highlighted that many students entered high school with insufficient academic skills. I recommend that pre-service teacher training in Manitoba increase their emphasis on student skill set promotion. While the participants in this study appreciated the idea of allowing students to demonstrate their learning through the use of one of several multiple intelligences, they seemed concerned about the lack of basic academic skills as students entered high school. I have concerns that some teachers may be erroneously permitting students to place too much emphasis on the type of learner they are, and then choose the types of assignments they do in the name of their preferred learning style. Consequently, those students run the risk of over-representing much of their learning through the use of only one or two of these intelligence types, and subsequently do not build a balanced and diverse set of skill sets. I am worried that pre-service teachers may fall into this trap before they enter the teaching profession. An increased emphasis on student skill development might better prepare students for their senior high years. In my literature review I briefly highlighted concerns with deficiencies in acquiring

elaborative speech codes. Teachers in the think tanks seemed particularly concerned about math, as high schools seemed to be where the transition occurred between learning basic arithmetic skills to relying on these skills as they progress towards more complex mathematics.

Furthermore, secondary pre-service teachers might benefit from increased training in skill set promotion for students behind entering high school. Despite the best efforts of elementary schools, there will always be some students who enter high school lagging behind, and it is crucial for pre-service teachers to have some training as to how to best work with these students before they enter the teaching profession. Teachers in the think tank valued classroom strategies that promoted teaching to all multiple intelligences. However, their concerns over written provincial exams were important reminders that verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences were especially vital for success in their compulsory grade 12 Math and English courses.

Recommendations for Schools and the School System

Regarding teacher in-service professional development, I recommend that schools and school divisions also place more time and emphasis on teaching them trust building and connection skills in student-teacher relationships. I believe that the participants in this study provided many excellent examples of how to connect with students, and provided evidence of its effectiveness as a strategy to engage students who were otherwise at-risk of dropping out of school. Their colleagues in the schools might benefit greatly from hearing these ideas, and collectively learning new ways to achieve successful and meaningful connections.

I recommend that teachers be trained in a variety of teaching methods, including multiple intelligences, universal design, and the blending of technology and learning. I particularly recommend that schools and school divisions increase their emphasis on training their teachers

about student skill set promotion. In particular, secondary teachers might benefit from increased training in skill set promotion for students academically behind as they enter high school. Again, there will always be some students who enter high school who have fallen behind, and high school teachers would only benefit from further training on how best to teach essential skills to these students.

High schools might benefit from building in more creative and useful ways to connect teachers with students. The teachers in the think tank seemed proud of the ways they independently created opportunities to connect with their students, despite limitations of time and resources. While I acknowledge that teachers did what they could in the classrooms, and extended these connections through involvement in extra-curricular activities, perhaps time could be set aside within the structure of the timetable to introduce small teacher-student tutoring programs. It appears that even one or two hours a week might assist all teachers in better connecting with students, particularly those deemed at-risk.

I recommend that schools and school divisions seek intentional ways to more consistently allow teachers to meet in small and large groups and share information about students, successful teaching strategies, and concerns. These methods would look at connecting colleagues teaching similar grades, age groups, or subjects, or involve opportunities for more intense co-teaching partnerships. Provided the teachers in the meetings understood that they needed to be sensitive about the type of information they were sharing, this could prove to be a very useful practice. School divisions might do well to set up structures that allow for student information sharing from elementary/ middle school years to high schools. High school teachers might find it useful to understand some of the social and academic needs of their students prior to teaching them.

As the think tank highlighted several specific groups of students, I recommend that

greater emphasis be placed on enhancing academic supports in high schools. Students often arrive deficient in basic skill sets. Better supports for students lacking pre-requisite skills might assist them in experiencing more success in the high school classroom. Additionally, I recommend that supports for English as an Additional Language students be emphasized.

Although teachers did what they could to include all students in the mainstream classrooms, it appears that there is still a need for alternative options for some students. I recommend that continued efforts be made in schools to seek out different course options for students. In particular, programs that teach students skills that allow them to enter the work force immediately after high school, and cooperative education programs with businesses should continue to be explored. Students might benefit from more flexible options and courses in order to achieve the 30 credits required to graduate with a Manitoba high school diploma.

The teachers also spoke about alternatives to “go and stay home” suspensions, and were optimistic about several initiatives within their schools and divisions that supported other options to this form of consequence. I recommend that Manitoba schools and divisions continue to explore creative options to traditional suspensions that reduce or minimize the need for academic disruption while still addressing the need for behavioural interventions.

I recommend that a mechanism be put in place that allows students in middle years to earn high school credits. The think tank noted, on several occasions, the difficulties that some students had in adjusting to the high school credit system. Perhaps if students had opportunities to earn some credits before they entered high school, they could enter grade 9 with a better understanding of this structure, and also begin their high school life with a head start on the credit count.

School divisions might also benefit by supporting more teacher cohorts in post-baccalaureate training in areas such as inclusive special education. I am aware of a number of school divisions who have found creative ways to connect teachers (on Saturdays, weekday evenings) from the same school division and collectively progress through similar studies. As support for more inclusive educational challenges appears to only be growing, secondary teachers could only benefit from working in school divisions that promote and support further training.

Additionally, a system should be put in place at every school to allow administrators to regularly receive feedback from their teachers as a means of honouring the voices of classroom teachers and ultimately finding ways to improve their schools. I also recommend that schools and school divisions investigate the possibility of providing teachers with small expense accounts for little things to help students, as they deem appropriate. Many of the participants in this study shared examples of spending their own money to assist them in connecting with students, and perhaps some divisional support in this regard might help to offset some of these expenses.

Finally, I recommend that the Province of Manitoba consider reviewing their interpretation of inclusion, and seek out a more broad definition of the term. Teachers in the think tank emphasized equity and fairness for every student on numerous occasions. Currently, the definition of inclusion focuses predominantly on students with disabilities. The Manitoba government should be applauded for their efforts in this regard. Still, the phrase "all students" was also repeatedly highlighted in my literature review as an essential component of inclusion. This point needs to be more closely examined and addressed. The teachers primarily highlighted high school students with no formal diagnosis of disability, but were considered to have

overwhelming struggles at home, identity issues, and/or were low academic achievers. The definition of inclusion needs to include the diverse set of students, and respond appropriately to their needs.

Further to this point, I recommend that the Province of Manitoba investigate the establishment of broader funding criteria for low achievers and non-attenders that go beyond disability, especially as students reach high school age. As I stated earlier, I believe that Manitoba Education has taken great strides in recognizing, promoting, and funding equitable education as an essential human right for those with special, diagnosed needs; but I questioned whether similar efforts were being made to assist those youth who end up dropping out of school. The participants in this study seemed to echo these concerns. Many students seem to enter high school without any formalized diagnosis, but still require more profound assistance than a little extra time to complete their assignments, or a little more attention and patience on their classroom teachers' part. High school is a time when credit completion is essential in order to move forward, and specialized, substantial supports that go beyond the tweaking of classroom teacher practices may be necessary in order to help these kids find success in their schools.

Implications for Future Research

At the conclusion of this study, a number of areas for future research emerged. Some of these topics were born out of the limitations to my study that I referred to earlier in this chapter. For example, I was unable to incorporate a process into my study that would have allowed high school teachers to nominate other teachers who they deemed to be highly effective in their schools, and have them participate in a think tank. A further study that would allow for this process to occur seems to be an interesting place to start.

Further research could be conducted that would have teachers from several school divisions participate, rather than teachers from only one division. It would be interesting to compare and contrast the perspectives of teachers from different divisions.

My think tank met as a larger group, and then broke out into smaller groups over the course of one week. It might be interesting to conduct a study where all participants gathered together for an entire weekend. This process of eating meals together and even staying overnight might create a more intimate setting, which would allow for even more honest sharing and deeper insights from the participants.

Further studies could gather high school teachers together in a variety of different groupings and as incorporate a think tank model. For example, a similar format could gather teachers from similar subject areas, individual schools, or comparable grade levels together. Additionally, it might be interesting to gather together a collection of elementary, middle years, and high school teachers, and ask them the same question as I did. Policymakers, Superintendents, school administrators, and teachers could also gather together into think tanks. Parents and social agencies could also be added to these groupings. And of course, a think tank of students, or students and teachers, might provide some incredible insights. The combinations of connecting all of the stakeholders together are seemingly endless.

Finally, it might be interesting to conduct a think tank of high school teachers, and observe them in their classroom in order to compare and contrast their claims with their practices.

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Appendix A
Letter to Superintendent of School Division A



Name withheld
Superintendent of Schools
School Division
Winnipeg, MB

Date

Dear:

I am a PhD candidate at the University of Manitoba in the Faculty of Education (Inclusive Special Education). I am very interested in exploring the perceptions of classroom teachers in high schools. Using qualitative research methods, the study will specifically seek out Manitoba high school classroom teachers who have been recognized as highly effective and influential, invite them to participate in a think tank, and capture their voices in order to better understand what makes them successful at helping adolescents stay in school and graduate. Many high school classroom teachers have successfully incorporated inclusive practices by creatively connecting with youth who had been disengaged before they entered high school. High school classroom teachers hold the unique position of being more intimately familiar with the nuances and intricacies of the high school system, and they are the only educators that have daily interactions with the youth that tend to vanish from Manitoba's high schools. Perhaps those high school classroom teachers who have successfully kept many of these at-risk youths in schools hold vital information about what causes them to stay, or even reappear. If my research results in a better and more honest understanding of the complexities of inclusion in Manitoba high schools, it can hopefully translate into increased graduation rates. For this study, I propose to capture these voices using qualitative methods.

I am writing to you at this time to request your help in my study. With your permission, I hope to contact the principal of several high schools in your division by letter, telephone, or email. I ask that am allowed to invite teachers from the school's staff to participate in my study. I have enclosed a cover script that may assist in introducing the study. I can present the script, if this is suitable to you. I ask that the principal distribute the email and attached letter outlining the nature of the study to all teaching staff. I ask that teachers then be instructed to return by email any self-nomination forms in a confidential manner to me.

Teachers will be given a list of questions that I may ask. Participation in the study is optional, and this will be made clear to all teaching personnel. Teachers are asked to volunteer for the

study, themselves. All teachers will be required to give written consent prior to the commencement of the study. I anticipate that the time required from you to distribute these invitations by email will take approximately 15 minutes of your time I anticipate that I will require approximately 15 minutes of your teacher's time to review the email and attached letters, and 8 to 12 hours of time (all after school day hours) for any teacher consenting to participate in the study.

Please note, the procedure for distributing and collecting all letters and consent forms so that teachers can volunteer and/or nominate their colleagues is as follows:

1. The Principal of school, a designate, or myself introduces study to teachers.
2. Principal distributes an email from me regarding the study.
3. Teachers voluntarily fill out the attached email form, or email me directly, if they agree to participate in the study.
4. I, the researcher, review. Please note, I will be the only person reviewing these forms.
5. I will notify and invite each person who volunteered to participate in the study by email, which will contain an accompanying consent form to sign, and information sheet to fill out.
6. Once I receive permission from these teachers, they will all be invited to assemble together in order to form a "think tank". I hope to get 8 to 12 volunteers, as this has been described as the ideal number for a volunteer think tank or group. If more than 12 teachers volunteer to be part of the study, I will send letters to teachers if their participation is not required.

The think tank model that I have chosen to follow for my study is Caliva and Sheier's (1992) "Center for Creative Community" model, as it provides logical, sequential steps to organizing think tanks, and is especially sensitive to working with volunteer participants.

After the teachers are selected and written consent is provided, I will send all participants who have agreed to take part in my study an email outlining possible dates and locations for four focus group meetings. I will ask that they reply to my email with their preferred choices. Additionally, I will attach to this email a short information sheet to fill out and return, regarding factors such as number of years they taught, post-secondary education they have completed, and awards and other recognition they have received related to teaching.

After receiving responses from all teachers involved in the study concerning meeting times, I will email them all again with a schedule of meeting dates and locations, and "topics for discussion". I am hoping to conduct this think tank over a three day period, preferably over the course of a weekend. This pattern allows for the basic elements to take place and is functionally compatible with most people's work week or can be conducted over a weekend. Recognizing that the "ideal" might be a Friday to Sunday weekend assembly, this may not match participants' personal or professional obligations, I understand that I will need to provide several options to volunteers.

Also attached to the email will be power points that I have created in order to highlight each meeting's "topics for discussion". If the think tank decides to meet all at once for one weekend

(i.e. Friday evening, all day Saturday, and Sunday morning) then participants may face time constraints and have to review all applicable power points prior to the first meeting. I anticipate that this review of power point slides will take each participant approximately one hour of time. All participation is voluntary, and participants may opt out at any time. Everyone volunteering in the study has the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. If administrators or teachers wish to withdraw from the study, they can inform me by email or in person. Please note, should teachers wish to withdraw from the study after the completion of the think tank, their information sheet will be destroyed, but it will be impossible to remove their data from the think tank audiotapes and transcripts.

Think tank interviews with the teachers will occur at a convenient time and location for them and they will be free to disregard any questions or withdraw from the interviews at any time. Although the identities of the participants will be known to me at the time of the think tank interviews, this information will be kept strictly confidential in any information that is disseminated. The think tank interviews will be audio taped, and detailed written notes will be kept to record their ideas and responses. The think tank interviews will not be videotaped. I will have access to these documents. My research assistant and Dr. Rick Freeze may also have access to the data from this study. All audio recordings and notes will be destroyed (shredded) at the conclusion of the study. Any written notes will not include the participants' names or identifying information about the school. Additionally, all conversations and responses will be collected in aggregate, so that no one participant will be singled out by the researcher when the data is shared in the study's final results portion of the dissertation. Please note that this research is primarily for my dissertation, but may be used later should I choose to write further publications on this topic for future journal article submissions.

Again, participation in this study is completely voluntary. If any participant would like to withdraw, they can contact me or my thesis advisor. This should give you the basic idea of what the study entails. If you would like more information or clarification of any of these points please contact me.

All participants in this study can receive a summary of its findings from the researcher, if they would like, by emailing me. This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Ken Reimer

University of Manitoba PhD Candidate

Appendix B
Letter to High School Principal



**Research Project Title: Potential Solutions to Manitoba's Dropout Crisis:
Insights of High School Classroom Teachers**

Dear Principal;

I am a PhD candidate at the University of Manitoba in the Faculty of Education (Inclusive Special Education). I am very interested in exploring the perceptions of classroom teachers in high schools. Using qualitative research methods, the study will specifically seek out Manitoba high school classroom teachers and invite them to participate in a think tank, and capture their voices in order to better understand what makes them successful at helping adolescents stay in school and graduate. Many high school classroom teachers have successfully incorporated inclusive practices by creatively connecting with youth who had been disengaged before they entered high school. High school classroom teachers hold the unique position of being more intimately familiar with the nuances and intricacies of the high school system, and they are the only educators that have daily interactions with the youth that tend to vanish from Manitoba's high schools. Perhaps those high school classroom teachers who have successfully kept many of these at-risk youths in schools hold vital information about what causes them to stay, or even reappear. If my research results in a better and more honest understanding of some of the complexities in Manitoba high schools, it can hopefully translate into increased graduation rates. Please note, Chief Superintendent (name withheld) has given permission for this study.

I am writing to you at this time to request your help in my study. With your permission, I ask that am allowed to invite teachers from the school's staff to participate in my study. I have enclosed a cover script that may assist in introducing the study. I can present the script, if this is suitable to you. I ask that you distribute the email and attached letter outlining the nature of the study to all teaching staff. I ask that teachers then be instructed to return by email any self-nomination forms in a confidential manner to me.

Teachers will be given a list of questions that I may ask. Participation in the study is optional, and this will be made clear to all teaching personnel. Teachers are asked to volunteer for the study, themselves. All teachers will be required to give written consent prior to the commencement of the study. I anticipate that the time required from you to distribute these invitations by email will take approximately 15 minutes of your time I anticipate that I will require approximately 15 minutes of your teacher's time to review the email and attached letters, and 8 to 12 hours of time (all after school day hours) for any teacher consenting to participate in the study.

Please note, the procedure for distributing and collecting all letters and consent forms so that teachers can volunteer and/or nominate their colleagues is as follows:

1. The Principal of school, a designate, or myself introduces study to teachers.
2. Principal distributes an email from me regarding the study.
3. Teachers voluntarily fill out the attached email form, or email me directly, if they agree to participate in the study.
4. I, the researcher, review. Please note, I will be the only person reviewing these forms.
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After the teachers are selected and written consent is provided, I will send all participants who have agreed to take part in my study an email outlining possible dates and locations for four focus group meetings. I will ask that they reply to my email with their preferred choices. Additionally, I will attach to this email a short information sheet to fill out and return, regarding factors such as number of years they taught, post-secondary education they have completed, and awards and other recognition they have received related to teaching.

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Also attached to the email will be power points that I have created in order to highlight each meeting's "topics for discussion". If the think tank decides to meet all at once for one weekend (i.e. Friday evening, all day Saturday, and Sunday morning) then participants may face time constraints and have to review all applicable power points prior to the first meeting. I anticipate that this review of power point slides will take each participant approximately one hour of time. All participation is voluntary, and participants may opt out at any time. Everyone volunteering in the study has the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. If administrators or teachers wish to withdraw from the study, they can inform me by my email or phone or in person. Please note, should teachers wish to withdraw from the study after the completion of the think tank, their information sheet will be destroyed, but it will be impossible to remove their data from the think tank audiotapes and transcripts.

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Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Ken Reimer

University of Manitoba PhD Candidate

Appendix C
Consent form for Principal



**Research Project Title: Potential Solutions to Manitoba's Dropout Crisis:
Insights of High School Classroom Teachers**

Dear Principal;

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After receiving responses from all teachers involved in the study concerning meeting times, I will email them all again with a schedule of meeting dates and locations, and "topics for discussion". I am hoping to conduct this think tank over a three day period, preferably over the course of a weekend. This pattern allows for the basic elements to take place and is functionally compatible with most people's work week or can be conducted over a weekend. Recognizing that the "ideal" might be a Friday to Sunday weekend assembly, this may not match participants' personal or professional obligations, I understand that I will need to provide several options to volunteers.

Also attached to the email will be power points that I have created in order to highlight each meeting's "topics for discussion". If the think tank decides to meet all at once for one weekend (i.e. Friday evening, all day Saturday, and Sunday morning) then participants may face time constraints and have to review all applicable power points prior to the first meeting. I anticipate that this review of power point slides will take each participant approximately one hour of time. All participation is voluntary, and participants may opt out at any time. Everyone volunteering in the study has the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. If administrators or teachers wish to withdraw from the study, they can inform me by my email or in person. Please note, should teachers wish to withdraw from the study after the completion of the think tank, their information sheet will be destroyed, but it will be impossible to remove their data from the think tank audiotapes and transcripts.

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Again, participation in this study is completely voluntary. If any participant would like to withdraw, they can contact me or my thesis advisor, Dr. Richard Freeze. This should give you the basic idea of what the study entails. If you would like more information or clarification of any of these points please contact me, or my thesis advisor, Dr. Richard Freeze.

All participants in this study can receive a summary of its findings from the researcher, if they would like, by emailing me or phoning me. This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,
 Ken Reimer
 University of Manitoba PhD Candidate

**I, Principal _____ of
 _____ School, give permission for this study.**

Participant’s Signature **Date**

Researcher’s Signature **Date**

Appendix D
Principal's Script for Teachers Introducing the Study
(Please note that I am happy to read a version of this script, if you so choose)

**Research Project Title: Potential Solutions to Manitoba's Dropout Crisis:
Insights of High School Classroom Teachers**

A PhD candidate at the University of Manitoba in the Faculty of Education is interested in exploring the perceptions of classroom teachers in high schools. Using qualitative research methods, the study will specifically seek out Manitoba high school classroom teachers and invite them to participate in a think tank, and capture their voices in order to better understand what makes them successful at helping adolescents stay in school and graduate. Many high school classroom teachers have successfully incorporated inclusive practices by creatively connecting with youth who had been disengaged before they entered high school. High school classroom teachers hold the unique position of being more intimately familiar with the nuances and intricacies of the high school system, and they are the only educators that have daily interactions with the youth that tend to vanish from Manitoba's high schools. Perhaps those high school classroom teachers who have successfully kept many of these at-risk youths in schools hold vital information about what causes them to stay, or even reappear.

The researcher has asked that I invite classroom teachers from the school's staff to participate in his study. Specifically, he has asked that I allow him to email all teachers outlining the nature of the study. Teachers are invited to reply by email if they wish to volunteer.

All teachers can choose to volunteer for the study, themselves. All teachers who volunteer will be required to give written consent prior to the commencement of the study. I anticipate that the time required from you to distribute these invitations will take approximately one hour of your time (please note, I will make all necessary copies of the letters for all teachers on staff and deliver to you). I have been told by the researcher that the think tank will require approximately 8 to 12 hours of time - all after school day hours - for any teacher consenting to participate in the study. Additionally, I (the Principal) will not be informed as to who participates in the study, as this will remain confidential.

Again, participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please review the email that the researcher provides, and participate by nominating yourself if you wish.

Thank you.

Appendix E
Information Letter for Teacher Participants



**Research Project Title: Potential Solutions to Manitoba's Dropout Crisis:
Insights of High School Classroom Teachers**

Dear High School Classroom Teacher;

I am a PhD candidate at the University of Manitoba in the Faculty of Education (Inclusive Special Education). I am very interested in exploring the perceptions of classroom teachers in high schools. Using qualitative research methods, the study will specifically seek out Manitoba high school classroom teachers and invite them to participate in a think tank, and capture their voices in order to better understand what makes them successful at helping adolescents stay in school and graduate. Many high school classroom teachers have successfully incorporated inclusive practices by creatively connecting with youth who had been disengaged before they entered high school. High school classroom teachers hold the unique position of being more intimately familiar with the nuances and intricacies of the high school system, and they are the only educators that have daily interactions with the youth that tend to vanish from Manitoba's high schools. Perhaps those high school classroom teachers who have successfully kept many of these at-risk youths in schools hold vital information about what causes them to stay, or even reappear. If my research results in a better and more honest understanding of some of the complexities in Manitoba high schools, it can hopefully translate into increased graduation rates. Please note, Chief Superintendent (name withheld), has given permission for this study.

I am writing to you at this time to request your help in my study. Essentially, I hope to create a teacher think tank of 8 to 12 high school classroom teachers to discuss issues concerning high school graduation. I ask that you consider participating in my study. I ask that teachers who are interested return by email any self-nomination forms in a confidential manner to me.

Participation in the study is optional, and this will be made clear to all teaching personnel. Teachers are asked to volunteer for the study, themselves. All teachers will be required to give written consent prior to the commencement of the study. I anticipate that I will require approximately 15 minutes of your time to review this email and attached letters, and 8 to 12 hours of time (all after school day hours) for any teacher consenting to participate in the study.

Please note, the procedure for distributing and collecting all consent forms so that teachers can volunteer is as follows:

1. The Principal of school, a designate, or myself introduces study to teachers.
2. Principal distributes an email from me regarding the study.
3. Teachers voluntarily fill out the attached email form, or email me directly, if they agree to participate in the study.

4. I, the researcher, review. Please note, I will be the only person reviewing these forms.
5. I will notify and invite each person who volunteered to participate in the study by email, which will contain an accompanying consent form to sign, and information sheet to fill out.
6. Once I receive permission from these teachers, they will all be invited to assemble together in order to form a "think tank". I hope to get 8 to 12 volunteers, as this has been described as the ideal number for a volunteer think tank or group. If more than 12 teachers volunteer to be part of the study, I will send letters to teachers if their participation is not required.

The think tank model that I have chosen to follow for my study is Caliva and Sheier's (1992) "Center for Creative Community" model, as it provides logical, sequential steps to organizing think tanks, and is especially sensitive to working with volunteer participants.

After the teachers are selected and written consent is provided, I will send all participants who have agreed to take part in my study an email outlining possible dates and locations for four focus group meetings. I will ask that they reply to my email with their preferred choices. Additionally, I will attach to this email a short information sheet to fill out and return, regarding factors such as number of years they taught, post-secondary education they have completed, and awards and other recognition they have received related to teaching.

After receiving responses from all teachers involved in the study concerning meeting times, I will email them all again with a schedule of meeting dates and locations, and "topics for discussion". I am hoping to conduct this think tank over a three day period, preferably over the course of a weekend. This pattern allows for the basic elements to take place and is functionally compatible with most people's work week or can be conducted over a weekend. Recognizing that the "ideal" might be a Friday to Sunday weekend assembly, this may not match participants' personal or professional obligations, I understand that I will need to provide several options to volunteers.

Also attached to the email will be power points that I have created in order to highlight each meeting's "topics for discussion". If the think tank decides to meet all at once for one weekend (i.e. Friday evening, all day Saturday, and Sunday morning) then participants may face time constraints and have to review all applicable power points prior to the first meeting. I anticipate that this review of power point slides will take each participant approximately one hour of time. All participation is voluntary, and participants may opt out at any time. Everyone volunteering in the study has the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. If administrators or teachers wish to withdraw from the study, they can inform me by my email or in person. Please note, should teachers wish to withdraw from the study after the completion of the think tank, their information sheet will be destroyed, but it will be impossible to remove their data from the think tank audiotapes and transcripts.

Think tank interviews with the teachers will occur at a convenient time and location for them and they will be free to disregard any questions or withdraw from the interviews at any time. Although the identities of the participants will be known to me at the time of the think tank interviews, this information will be kept strictly confidential in any information that is

disseminated. The think tank interviews will be audio taped, and detailed written notes will be kept to record their ideas and responses. The think tank interviews will not be videotaped. I will have access to these documents. My research assistant and Dr. Rick Freeze may also have access to the data from this study. All audio recordings and notes will be destroyed (shredded) at the conclusion of the study. Any written notes will not include the participants' names or identifying information about the school. Additionally, all conversations and responses will be collected in aggregate, so that no one participant will be singled out by the researcher when the data is shared in the study's final results portion of the dissertation. Please note that this research is primarily for my dissertation, but may be used later should I choose to write further publications on this topic for future journal article submissions.

Again, participation in this study is completely voluntary. If any participant would like to withdraw, they can contact me or my thesis advisor, Dr. Richard Freeze. This should give you the basic idea of what the study entails. If you would like more information or clarification of any of these points please contact me or my thesis advisor, Dr. Richard Freeze.

All participants in this study can receive a summary of its findings from the researcher, if they would like, by emailing me or phoning. This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,
Ken Reimer
University of Manitoba PhD Candidate

**Appendix E (continued)
Volunteer Form for Teachers**



**Research Project Title: Potential Solutions to Manitoba's Dropout Crisis:
Insights of High School Classroom Teachers**

Name: _____

School: _____

I volunteer to participate in the Think Tank: (check here) _____

Date: _____

The following times work best for my schedule (please check one):

a) 2 weeks (4 meetings): Monday and Thursday 4:30-6:30 pm (dinner provided)

b) One weekend (4 meetings):

Friday 4:30-6:30, Saturday 10:00-3:00, Sunday 10:00-12:00 (meals provided)

Please complete this form and return to me.

Appendix F
Consent Form for Teacher Participants



**Research Project Title: Potential Solutions to Manitoba's Dropout Crisis:
Insights of High School Classroom Teachers**

Researcher: Ken Reimer

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information. The University of Manitoba may look at the research records for this study to make sure research is being done in a safe and proper way.

Dear High School Classroom Teacher;

I am a PhD candidate at the University of Manitoba in the Faculty of Education (Inclusive Special Education). I am very interested in exploring the perceptions of classroom teachers in high schools. Using qualitative research methods, the study will specifically seek out Manitoba high school classroom teachers and invite them to participate in a think tank, and capture their voices in order to better understand what makes them successful at helping adolescents stay in school and graduate. Many high school classroom teachers have successfully incorporated inclusive practices by creatively connecting with youth who had been disengaged before they entered high school. High school classroom teachers hold the unique position of being more intimately familiar with the nuances and intricacies of the high school system, and they are the only educators that have daily interactions with the youth that tend to vanish from Manitoba's high schools. Perhaps those high school classroom teachers who have successfully kept many of these at-risk youths in schools hold vital information about what causes them to stay, or even reappear. If my research results in a better and more honest understanding of some of the complexities in Manitoba high schools, it can hopefully translate into increased graduation rates. Please note, Chief Superintendent (name withheld) has given permission for this study.

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Also attached to the email will be power points that I have created in order to highlight each meeting's "topics for discussion". If the think tank decides to meet all at once for one weekend (i.e. Friday evening, all day Saturday, and Sunday morning) then participants may face time

constraints and have to review all applicable power points prior to the first meeting. I anticipate that this review of power point slides will take each participant approximately one hour of time. All participation is voluntary, and participants may opt out at any time. Everyone volunteering in the study has the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. If administrators or teachers wish to withdraw from the study, they can inform me by email or in person. Please note, should teachers wish to withdraw from the study after the completion of the think tank, their information sheet will be destroyed, but it will be impossible to remove their data from the think tank audiotapes and transcripts.

Think tank interviews with the teachers will occur at a convenient time and location for them and they will be free to disregard any questions or withdraw from the interviews at any time. Although the identities of the participants will be known to me at the time of the think tank interviews, this information will be kept strictly confidential in any information that is disseminated. The think tank interviews will be audio taped, and detailed written notes will be kept to record their ideas and responses. The think tank interviews will not be videotaped. I will have access to these documents. My research assistant and Dr. Rick Freeze may also have access to the data from this study. All audio recordings and notes will be destroyed (shredded) at the conclusion of the study. Any written notes will not include the participants' names or identifying information about the school. Additionally, all conversations and responses will be collected in aggregate, so that no one participant will be singled out by the researcher when the data is shared in the study's final results portion of the dissertation. Please note that this research is primarily for my dissertation, but may be used later should I choose to write further publications on this topic for future journal article submissions.

Again, participation in this study is completely voluntary. If any participant would like to withdraw, they can contact me or my thesis advisor, Dr. Richard Freeze. This should give you the basic idea of what the study entails. If you would like more information or clarification of any of these points please contact me or my thesis advisor, Dr. Richard Freeze.

All participants in this study can receive a summary of its findings from the researcher, if they would like, by emailing me. This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,
Ken Reimer
University of Manitoba PhD Candidate

Appendix F (continued)

**Research Project Title: Potential Solutions to Manitoba's Dropout Crisis:
Insights of High School Classroom Teachers**

I, _____ of _____ School, agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature **Date**

Researcher's Signature **Date**

Male: _____ **Female:** _____

Age: 20-29 _____
30-39 _____
40-49 _____
50+ _____

1. In total, how many years have you been teaching? Please list the classes/programs you have instructed.

2. Have you been asked to lead professional development workshops for your school/divisional staff, or other group of adult learners related to teaching?

3. Please list all post-secondary education that you have received (i.e. Degrees, diplomas, special education or other certificates).

4. Please list any recognition and awards you may have received during your teaching profession.

Appendix G
Letter to Teacher(s) Not Required For Study



Date

**Research Project Title: Potential Solutions to Manitoba's High School Dropout Crisis:
Insights of High School Classroom Teachers**

Researcher: Ken Reimer

Dear (insert teacher's name),

I would like to thank you so much for generously volunteering to be a part of my study. Many teachers have volunteered and it is not possible for me to conduct more than one think tank. However, if you are interested in receiving a summary of my findings please contact me.

I would like to thank you so much for considering my request, and I hope that these events have not caused any inconvenience to you.

Sincerely,

Ken Reimer

Appendix H
Think Tank Meeting Topics and Questions

**Research Project Title: Potential Solutions to Manitoba's Dropout Crisis:
Insights of High School Classroom Teachers**

- i. Topics for discussion:*
 - a) Personal sharing
 - b) Sociology and education
 - c) Compulsory school age
- ii. Questions*

The "Big" Question

What is it that you do in your classroom that you think reduces the risk of students dropping out, and increases the probability that students will graduate? (to which all questions will connect)

Question 2

Do you think that Manitoba's raising the compulsory school age from 16 to 18 will assist in graduating more students?

Probes

1. How might you respond to the challenge of balancing the beneficial sociological function of schools to pass on knowledge, skills, and capital to youth, while reducing the inequitable conflicting consequences of excessive individualism and credentialism?
2. How do you attempt to reduce the inequity of sociological factors outside of the school system?
3. What do you see as the benefits and challenges of raising the compulsory age of schooling?
4. How do the above questions relate and connect to reducing dropout rates and increasing graduation rates?

Think Tank Meeting Topics and Questions

i. Topics for discussion:

- a) Manitoba's legislation, policies, and initiatives towards inclusive education
- b) High schools and popular social learning theories
- c) Defining inclusion and inclusive education
- d) MANITOBA EDUCATION interpretation of inclusion, inclusive education

ii. Questions:

The "Big" Question

What is it that you do in your classroom that you think reduces the risk of students dropping out, and increases the probability that students will graduate? (to which all questions will connect)

Question 3

What are your thoughts on Manitoba's recent promotion of inclusive education as a means of increasing graduation rates?

Probes

1. What are your thoughts concerning Manitoba's recent legislation, policies, and initiatives concerning inclusive education?
2. How do recent developments promoting inclusive education affect your current approaches and practices in the classroom?
3. How do social theories like universal design, differentiated instruction, and multiple intelligences relate and apply to teaching and learning in a high school classroom?
4. Does inclusion mean the same thing to everybody? What does it mean to you?
5. What do you think of Manitoba Education, Citizenship, and Youth's (MANITOBA EDUCATION) definition of inclusion and inclusive education?
6. Does Manitoba government's interpretation of inclusion oblige educators to do more to include them?
7. How do the above questions relate and connect to reducing dropout rates and increasing graduation rates?

Think Tank Meeting Topics and Questions

i. Topics for discussion:

- a) MANITOBA EDUCATION interpretation of inclusion, inclusive education
- b) Inclusion and integration
- c) Recommendations to MANITOBA EDUCATION from the high school perspective

ii. Questions:

The “Big” Question

What is it that you do in your classroom that you think reduces the risk of students dropping out, and increases the probability that students will graduate? (to which all questions will connect)

Question 4

Does inclusion mean full integration?

Probes

1. Should inclusion always mean full integration in the regular classroom?
2. Do you find that Manitoba's operational definition is easily applicable to what you need to accomplish in the classroom?
3. Is the interpretation too vague and open-ended, thereby leading to confusion?
4. Is it too narrow and restricting in scope, setting up for certain failure?
5. Is there room within the definition allowing for professional latitude?
6. Is the interpretation “user-friendly” for the high school classroom?
7. Have you needed to make major adjustments to their practices over time in order to accomplish what is now asked of you?

8. Are there any recommendations that you might make to MANITOBA EDUCATION in order to better and more accurately define the terms “inclusion” and “inclusive education” in the immediate future?

9. How do the above questions relate and connect to reducing dropout rates and increasing graduation rates?

Think Tank Meeting Topics and Questions

Research Project Title: Potential Solutions to Manitoba's Dropout Crisis: Insights of High School Classroom Teachers

i. Topics for discussion:

- a) Compare and contrast elementary, middle school years, and high schools
- b) Challenges in transition to high school
- c) Perceptions and misperceptions about high school students and teachers
- d) Responses to adolescent antisocial behaviour
- e) Dealing with collaboration, standardization, differentiation, and stress

ii. Questions:

The "Big" Question

What is it that you do in your classroom that you think reduces the risk of students dropping out, and increases the probability that students will graduate? (to which all questions will connect)

Question 5

What are some similarities and differences between elementary, middle-years, and high schools?

Probes

1. What are the key similarities and differences between elementary, middle-years, and secondary schools?
2. What do you see as significant challenges for students as they transition from an elementary model of schooling to a high school model?
3. How do high school classroom teachers take care of students who are delayed academically, suffer from educational malaise, or struggle with self-identity?
4. What are teachers' thoughts on their role in preparing youth for the "real world"?
5. How do high school classroom teachers respond to antisocial behaviour?

6. What are your perspectives on such topics as teacher training, collaboration, standardized testing, and the stresses of working with diverse learners in their classrooms?
7. What are the most common perceptions and/or misperceptions about high school teachers that you hear about?
8. How do the above questions relate and connect to reducing dropout rates and increasing graduation rates?
9. Final thoughts?

Appendix I “About the Researcher”

Research Project Title: Potential Solutions to Manitoba's Dropout Crisis: Insights of High School Classroom Teachers

This appendix will accompany the letters to the Superintendent(s), Principals, and Teachers

My name is Ken Reimer and I am currently enrolled as a PhD student in an Inclusive Special Education cohort at the University of Manitoba. As I will be conducting qualitative research as a part of this study, it is important to outline my values and beliefs as a researcher. Therefore, I will briefly describe the past personal and professional experiences that have led me to this study.

I was born in Winnipeg, Canada. It is the capital city in the province of Manitoba. I was raised in a Mennonite, Christian home, and my first language was English (although my parents also spoke to me in German until I entered the provincial school system). Both my parents were immigrants from Paraguay, and received their high school education in Winnipeg. I always liked school, and was encouraged at home to do well in academics.

I was always educated in the public school system, and my father taught and was a school administrator in Winnipeg. In high school, I was educated in a streamed system, and I enrolled in the academic stream that enabled me to enroll in university. I received my Bachelor of Education from the University of Winnipeg in 1992.

I was trained as a secondary school teacher, and have worked in four different high schools in two different Manitoba school divisions since 1992. After several years of teaching in mainstream classrooms, I took a position teaching in a segregated low enrollment class for students diagnosed with severe behavioural and emotional disturbances. As it guaranteed me a permanent contract in the division, I accepted the position.

After five years of teaching in this program, I moved on to another alternative, segregated program for high school students who, for a variety of reasons, were thought to be unable to achieve in the regular classroom. While working in this program, I grew more curious at the increasing number of students that required specialized classes. Therefore, I decided to return to university and take some courses in guidance and special education. I first became intrigued with the concept of inclusive education in one of these courses, received a Masters in Inclusive Special Education, and am now working towards my PhD in Inclusive Special Education.

Whenever I attended inclusive education classes and workshops, or heard dynamic speakers talk about the merits of inclusive education, it felt easy to join in with the other attendees. While most of me believes that inclusive education is the best way for all students, I still face issues with the concept as I go through my current life as a Vice Principal in a large high school in Winnipeg.

I want to see inclusive education succeed. I try to be a responsible skeptic and I think there is cause for me to struggle with the wide disparity of interpretations for the word “inclusion”. This

struggle is only magnified when the interpretation greatly affects other operational definitions for terms like “appropriate programming”, “least restrictive environment”, and “integration”. This struggle is additionally amplified when one considers that, by the time students enter high school, the range of academic, cognitive, behavioural, and socioeconomic diversity of students can appear immense and overwhelming.

Still, I see many brilliant, hardworking, dedicated high school classroom teachers who somehow creatively and collectively find solutions for such monumental challenges. As my job now allows me to observe how others teach, and I have the opportunity to talk with many teachers about teaching and learning, my admiration and respect for high school classroom teachers has only grown. When we just employ models requiring attendance at professional development sessions, or pressure resource consultation upon them, that risks making high school classroom teachers feel defensive and filled with shortcomings, I believe that they should be sought out and asked for their acumen. They are the only educators who have intense, daily contact with many students at once. They are the ones who have an intimate understanding of the high school system. They are the ones who convert inclusive policy, philosophy and pedagogy into practice. They are the ones who are obliged to listen to policy makers, school administrators, parents, resource teachers, university professors, and learning experts, and the students they teach. I think that it is crucial that their voices be heard.

Appendix J
Think Tank Members Pledge of Confidentiality

**Research Project Title: Potential Solutions to Manitoba's Dropout Crisis:
Insights of High School Classroom Teachers**

Please note, the think tank interviews will be audio taped by the researcher, and detailed written notes will be kept to record their ideas and responses. All conversations and responses will be collected in aggregate, so that no one participant will be singled out by the researcher when the data is shared in the study's final results portion of the dissertation.

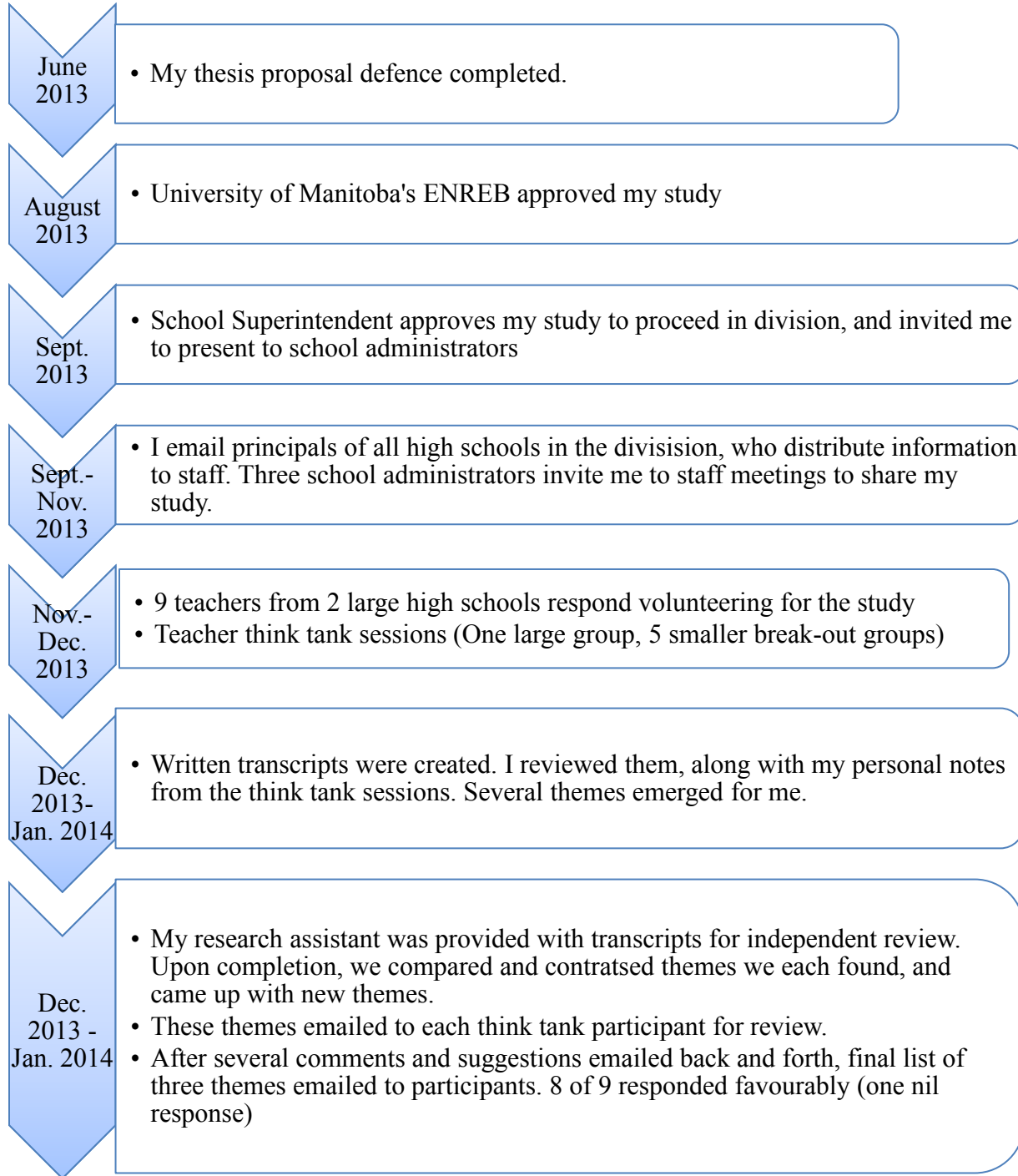
It is imperative that each participant also maintain confidence of what is said in the think tank. Although you may know the identities of the participants in this think tank, please pledge that you will keep this information, as well as anything that is said by yourself or others, strictly confidential.

Please sign below if you agree to these conditions, and return to the researcher:

*I, _____ pledge to maintain confidence of what is
said in this think tank.*

Signature: _____ Date: _____

**Appendix K
Timeline of Study**



Appendix L
Think Tank Meeting Schedule

