

How do Principals Support Implementation of an Inclusive School Reform?

by

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines how principals support the implementation of the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning (Katz, 2012a), a framework for inclusive school reform. The ways that principals can support inclusive practice may include the way they use systems and structures that fall under their control (Katz, 2012a). Instructional leadership also plays a crucial part in implementing inclusive school reform (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five Manitoba principals involved in implementation of the Three-Block Model of UDL. Principals were asked about leadership and how they manage systems and structures under their control. Recommendations for practice are made, including the need for the school to be organized to support inclusive practice, for principals to make developing people a key task, and for principals to be highly involved in classroom instruction within the school.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The concept of inclusive education represents a belief that all students belong and are valued members of their classroom and school communities (Council of Ministers of Education in Canada [CMEC], 2008; Specht & Young, 2010). However as Baker, Wang and Walberg explained (1994):

As schools are challenged to effectively serve an increasingly diverse student population, the concern is not whether to provide inclusive education, but how to implement inclusive education in ways that are both feasible and effective in ensuring schooling success for all children, especially those with special needs (p. 34).

Although implementation of inclusive practices is left to individual teachers within classrooms, the responsibility for making inclusion work is ultimately that of the principal (Young, 2010).

Research investigating the influence principals have on implementing inclusive education points to the understanding that it is their beliefs, values and commitment that provides direction for the creation of inclusive school instruction (Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis, 2008). Studies have shown that the principal of an inclusive school community must understand inclusion in a broad context, have a bold vision of inclusion for the school community s/he leads, and believe in his/her power to make change (Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis, 2008). Leithwood, Harris and Straus (2010) include “instructional capacity to help at-risk students, learn”, “an unshakable belief in the potential of these students” and the “persistence, patience, and optimism to create productive learning experiences for children” as being crucial to the role of principal (p. 156).

Although educational literature shows that the school principal is the central figure in implementing change in schools, literature and research that directly links school principals to the implementation of inclusive instructional practices in the classroom is insufficient (Edmunds & Macmillan, 2010) and few articles reference leadership for inclusion of students with disabilities. One reason for this is that educators “struggle to understand the philosophy of inclusion” (Edmunds & Macmillan, 2010 p. xiv) and as Falvey and Givner (2005) explain “even when operationally defined, it tends to remain an elusive term” (p. 10).

It is in this context that Leithwood (2010) describes how the instructional leadership of principals is essential for implementing school reform. Principals who are instructional leaders set the direction for an inclusive school community through their commitment to developing individual people, and facilitating the skill development and support they need. These principals are involved in restructuring school organizations so that collaborative cultures are created. Leithwood also describes how principals as instructional leaders are involved in managing the instructional program within schools by providing direct instructional support to teachers and monitoring the effectiveness of classroom practices.

Schlechty (2000) also described crucial steps that need to be undertaken in an overall school restructuring process. The attitude and thinking Schlechty cites as being crucial for school reform align well with beliefs about inclusive school communities. For example, the belief that all students must be academically engaged, that high standards should be maintained for all students and that teachers are responsible for teaching and assessment of every learner in the classroom are common to both the field of inclusion (Katz, 2012a) and school reform (Schlechty, 2000). In this study two conceptual frameworks are used to examine how a principal supports an inclusive school reform. The first framework, that of

Universal Design for Learning (UDL), discusses the systems and structures under the control of a principal that can affect inclusive practice. The second conceptual framework is that of instructional leadership, and in particular, the ways in which principals can support and monitor inclusive school reforms.

Manitoba's department of education, Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, has promoted movement in the direction of having classrooms and curricula accessible to the widest possible range of abilities through universal design for learning. Manitoba's *Standards for Student Services* call for the concept to be applied to schools, classrooms, curricula and materials (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006). At the same time, Manitoba embedded regulations in its *Public Schools Act* that place the direct responsibility for the delivery of appropriate educational programming on the principal of each school (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006) solidifying their crucial role in ensuring inclusive reforms are carried out in practice.

In this chapter I describe how this study is necessitated by important milestones towards inclusive instructional practices in Manitoba. I outline the origins behind the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) that provides the common language and understanding of inclusive instructional practice for the study. I introduce the role of the school principal in creating systematic and philosophical change in schools and describe how this research uncovered the practices being used by Manitoba school principals to lead a change towards a fully inclusive instructional program in schools based on the Three-Block Model of UDL.

Purpose

There is a need to understand the practices that will work to achieve increased inclusion in

kindergarten to grade 12 schools in Manitoba. The research I conducted was designed to investigate how principals support implementation of an inclusive instructional program intended to make classroom instruction increasingly responsive to the learning needs of all students.

To narrow this qualitative study I specifically investigated how principals support implementation of the Three-Block Model of UDL in the schools in which they work through a naturalistic inquiry. Changes related to systems and structures that a principal can affect, such as timetabling, providing access to professional development and school staffing decisions was paired with inquiry about the ways in which instructional leadership practices can facilitate the design of UDL environments. Through the study I hoped to understand the discourse about inclusion in the school, the supporting systems and structures put in place, and any competing pressures that threatened the implementation of this inclusive model of practice within the school. Ultimately the purpose was to uncover the processes that five school principals followed in their efforts to implement the Three-Block Model, to discover what they identified as the barriers and facilitators of the process (e.g. attitudes, resources, training, personal experiences, etc) and to make recommendations for future practice and research based on these findings.

Inclusion in Manitoba

Up to the mid 1960s exclusionary laws that prohibited children with disabilities from attending school prevailed in Manitoba. Generalist teachers were prepared to teach “normal” students. Anyone at that time who did not fit the system was invited to leave it or was already excluded (Blais & Van Camp, 2005). Since the abolishment of exclusionary laws and the creation of special education, Manitoba, like other jurisdictions has entered into 35 years of

discourse about the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Sindelar, Shearer, Yendol-Hoppey & Liebert, 2006). In 1985 an amendment to the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* added mental or physical disability to the list of prohibited basis for discrimination that had included race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, gender, or age.

The mid 1990's saw members of the United Nations, at its World Conference on Special Needs Education, adopt a guiding principle that all children should be accommodated in schools regardless of their diverse physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and linguistic needs (UNESCO, 1994). The resulting *Salamanca Statement* recognized "the necessity and urgency of providing education for children, youth and adults with special educational needs within the regular education system" (UNESCO, 1994, p. viii). At this same time educational reforms began taking place in Canada and the United States that were intended to bring regular education and special education together (Edmunds, Macmillan, Specht, Nowicki & Edmunds, 2009) to form inclusive education systems.

Around the same time that the *Salamanca Statement* was adopted by the UN World Conference on Special Needs Education, reforms to education in Manitoba were occurring that would profoundly impact the education of students with disabilities. *Renewing Education: New Directions* outlined the government's direction for substantial education renewal that would reshape student's school experiences (Manitoba Education and Training, 1994). Focusing on standardized essential learning for students from kindergarten to grade 12, the direction was for students to all be taught from the same curricula rather than being slotted into challenging or less challenging streams. The government of Manitoba mandated that high expectations and standards for learning (Manitoba Education and Training, 1994)

should be maintained for all learners. Only the 1-5% of students with specific cognitive disabilities would be accommodated with modifications to expected learning outcomes.

The direction given was for educators to use their expertise to “enable the vast majority of students to demonstrate the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn” (Manitoba Education and Training, 1995, p. 13). In the wake of the changes, the *Manitoba Special Education Review* (Proactive Information Services, 1998) report described how educators were comfortable accommodating students in high school with cognitive disabilities who were eligible for the new modified or M course designation. However issues were raised about the struggling learners who would not qualify for the designation due to their higher cognitive functioning but who were disadvantaged academically due to other issues (Proactive Information Services, 1998). Concerns about training and resources related to teaching a range of struggling learners remained. Although the Manitoba support document *Success for All Learners: A Handbook for Differentiated Instruction* (Manitoba Education and Training, 1996) continues to be used by educators, the recommendation from the *Manitoba Special Education Review* in 1998 was to find solutions that addressed the educational needs of struggling learners, who did not have cognitive disabilities and for whom modification, and the M course designation, would not be appropriate (Proactive Information Services, 1998).

At the same time, the *Manitoba Special Education Review* committee recommended that a philosophy of inclusion be adopted by educators in the province (Proactive Information Services, 1998). Manitoba’s Philosophy of Inclusion was subsequently included in the *Handbook for Student Services* in 2001 and has remained unchanged. It reads:

Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted,

valued and safe. An inclusive community consciously evolves to meet the changing needs of its members. Through recognition and support, an inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship.

In Manitoba, we embrace inclusion as a means of enhancing the well-being of every member of the community. By working together, we strengthen our capacity to provide the foundation for a richer future for all of us. (Manitoba Education, 2001, introduction p. 3)

Rather than identifying one group to which the philosophy applies, Manitoba's philosophy of inclusion applies equally to every individual, whether or not students are traditionally labelled regular education or special education.

In 2005 Manitoba amended its *Public Schools Act* regulations and guiding document, *Appropriate Educational Programming: Standards for Student Services* (2006) to define appropriate educational programming for all students. Standards mandated certain inclusive practices take place in school divisions and addressed specific areas including: policy; access; early identification; assessment; planning in education, including student-specific planning (IEPs); student discipline, including considerations for students with exceptional learning needs; dispute resolution; coordinated services; and professional services. While the regulations in the amended *Public School Act* support a philosophy of inclusion in the province, the *Standards for Student Services* (2006) do not prohibit segregated classroom settings for students so long as the catchment area school with peers is considered first.

Across Canada the tenet that education systems must not attempt to restrict a child with a disability's access to public education is well established. Henteleff (2010) however described how questions about the type of education that must be provided were examined by

human rights commissions and courts in Canada around cases, such as *Eaton v. Brandt Board of Education* (1997) and *Moore v. British Columbia* (2012). What has been established is that decisions about access to education must be made in the best interests of the child knowing the child has the right to receive basic supports in order to be accommodated in his/her home school. Henteleff (2010) explains that “provinces must offer gradients of accommodation in order to meet the needs of all disabled children in the province, not just some” (p. 16).

In 1998 Manitoba teachers identified that a lack of support for students with emotional/behavioural issues and struggling learners was an ongoing issue (Proactive Information Services Inc, 1998). In 2010 in light of the Appropriate Educational Programming amendment to the *Public Schools Act*, the Manitoba Teacher’s Society (MTS) found that addressing this same diversity of need in the classroom remained a concern for teachers (MTS, 2010). Overworked resource and classroom teachers identified students with special needs and their need for differentiated instruction, adaptations and modifications as a primary contributor to their increasing workload (MTS, 2010, p. 18). Manitoba teachers reported the pressure of planning distinct programming for students with diverse needs and that the task of “trying to meet curriculum outcomes for all students” (MTS, 2010, p. 20) contributed to increased stress, anxiety and preparation time for teachers. Principals in the same report indicated that they often lacked specific knowledge about providing special education and delegated these responsibilities to a resource teacher. The findings of this report revealed that overall, Manitoba teachers and principals lack a framework that explains how to instruct students with diverse needs together in inclusive classrooms. In 2001, 31.1% of Manitoba’s students with disabilities remained in low-inclusion settings such as a regular

school setting but in special education classes and/or where their participation in the extracurricular life within the school was restricted (Timmons & Wagner, 2008, p. 26).

Educational Research Supports Inclusion

Despite potential barriers to inclusion (such as teacher workload issues, a shortage of adequate supports, incomplete training for teachers and principals or legal questions) inclusive classroom communities have been shown to benefit all students both socially and academically (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Cole, Waldron, & Majd, 2004; Crisman, 2008; Katz & Mirenda, 2002). Global research shows that inclusion is increasingly proving a positive experience for all students (Bru, 2009; Curcic, 2009; Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson, & Kaplan, 2007). Timmons and Wagner (2008) found that children who are educated in inclusive settings are healthier, perform better in school, enjoy going there more, and interact more positively with peers compared to students taught in less inclusive settings.

Inclusive instruction provides the opportunity for all students to be part of school communities to learn and grow alongside their peers, and should encompass both the academic and the social life within a school. Academic inclusion necessitates that access to learning in the classroom, delivered by the classroom teacher, is maximized. Academic inclusion may include universal design principles that allow for all students, regardless of their learning needs, to participate in the curriculum (Katz, 2012b; Manitoba Education, 2001). Social inclusion recognizes the need for belonging, acceptance and recognition for all people, and requires the opportunity for full and equal participation (Katz, 2012b; Koster, Nakken, Pijl, & van Houten, 2009).

It is in this context that teachers, and principals as teacher leaders, are in need of an approach to teaching that promises to address not just the range of diversity among learners

but creates academic and social learning environments that meet the ideal of being “accessible to all students as a place to learn, grow, and be accepted” (Manitoba Education, 2001, introduction p. 3). To that end, Katz (2012a) has developed the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning to help support teachers and principals in their efforts to create inclusive classroom learning environments.

Universal Design for Learning

Exclusionary education laws were not the only barrier for people with exceptionalities. Bingler (1997) explains how for most of the 20th century the very design and building of schools was exclusionary. Architecture gave no consideration to the input of the community that would be served by the building, including teachers, students and parents. Rather than embracing inclusion and integration, the school design process throughout this time favored a “forceful tendency towards disintegration and diffusion” (Bingler, 1997, p. 5). The term universal design (UD) was coined by American architect Ron Mace when he described a “process of creating systems, environments, materials and devices that are directly and repeatedly usable by people with the widest range of abilities operating within the largest variety of situations” (cited by Manitoba Education, 2006, p. 4). The essence of universal design in architecture focused on accessibility for all, improving on architecture’s historically exclusionary process for designing buildings by adopting a highly consultative process.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) followed UD as a framework that provides the means for creating accessibility to the social and academic life of the regular classroom for all students (Katz, 2012c). Originally grounded in educational technology, UDL evolved to support the understanding that flexible learning environments intended to accommodate individual learning differences should be developed (CAST, 2011; Rose & Meyer, 2002).

In Manitoba, the Department of Education initiated a shift in educational practice when UDL was referenced in the 2006 *Standards for Student Services*. It was explained that,

Applied to the field of education, the concept of universal design means that school communities, including teachers, develop plans for the full diversity of their student population. In education, universally designed schools, classrooms, curricula and materials provide all students with access to the resources they require, regardless of their diverse learning needs. (Manitoba Education, 2006, p. 4)

In spite of this explanation what was still missing was a practical framework for an inclusive instructional program based in universal design for learning.

A Conceptual Framework for Inclusive School Reform

The Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning (Katz, 2012a) expands the original, narrow technological focus of UDL to include a broader foundation for inclusive education. The model synthesizes decades of research investigating the most important elements of inclusion and provides accessibility to the curriculum, learning activities, and social life of the classroom for all students (Katz, 2012a). The framework (Figure 1) for the model includes three concepts/goals called blocks: developing community / social and emotional well-being; inclusive instructional practice, and; systematic strategies and structures (Katz, 2012a, c). The Three-Block Model draws from various inclusive instructional practices to describe a practical, classroom based structure for creating an instructional program that values diversity, promotes cooperation amongst students and provides multiple means of learning.

The goal of UDL is to bring evidence based instructional practices and service delivery models together in a holistic, practical manner that works in all grades, and a variety of

settings (King-Sears, 2009). To reveal students' true potential as learners, they need to be at the center of the instructional process. Ideally the teaching and learning environment is suited to their individual needs, interests and aptitudes (Hopkins, 2011). Katz's Three-Block Model of UDL is intended to put this goal into practice.

The Three-Block Model of UDL can be used to significantly improve the learning environment for both students and teachers. Students' sense of belonging and willingness to include others has been shown to improve when the model is implemented (Katz, Porath, Bendu, & Epp, 2012). Implementing the model has shown to increase student engagement and positive peer to peer and student-teacher interactions in the classroom (Katz, 2012c). Classroom teachers implementing the Three-Block Model also see a reduction in disruptive behaviour (Katz & Porath, 2011). However in order to sustain the changes resulting from the Three-Block Model of UDL in individual teacher's classrooms, the systems and structures to support implementation of the model at the school level must be established as outlined in Block 3 of the model.

As Leithwood, Harris and Strauss (2010) contend, school division leaders must recruit and assign both teachers and principals who have the ability and disposition to further the efforts to improve the instructional program. Research has suggested that to implement inclusive education, changes need to be made in the ways in which staff are assigned and utilized (Giangreco, 2010), the roles and qualifications for principals (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010), the ways school personnel purchase resources, and in the training that is provided to staff (Loreman, 2010; Philpott, Furey, & Penney, 2010).

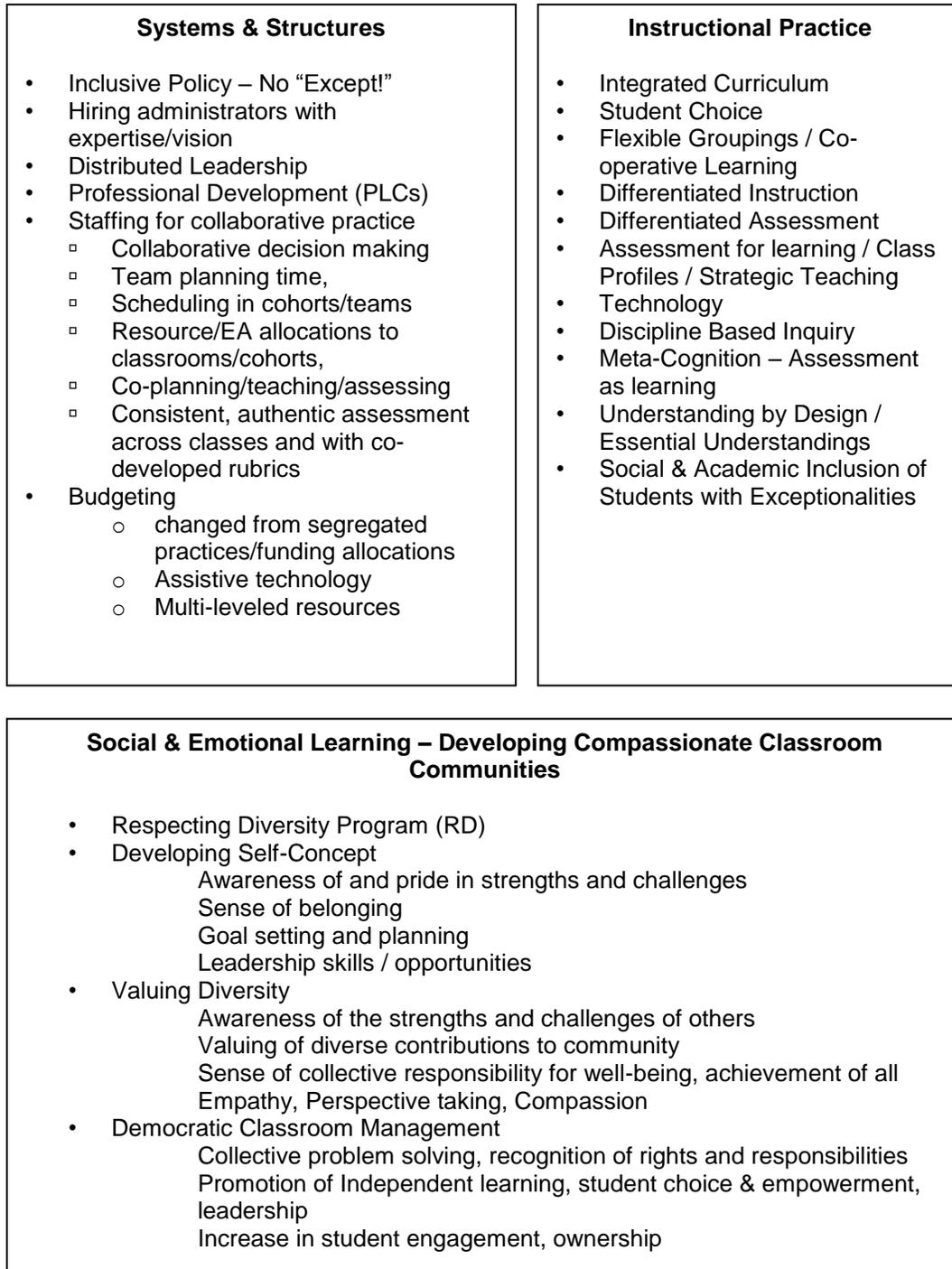


Figure 1. The Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning (Katz, 2012a)

The Role of Principals in Inclusive Schools

Common core practices of principals in inclusive school communities have been identified in the literature (Figure 2). Retaining skilled staff, monitoring student progress, shielding teachers from distractions to their work with students, and providing teachers with the material and professional development to succeed at their work contributes greatly to efforts to improve a school staff’s instructional program. Other factors that must be addressed related to “systems and structures” include the necessary policy, resources, staffing, and delivery systems as outlined in Block 3 of the Three-Block Model.

	Waldron, McLeskey & Redd	Irvine, Lupart, Loreman, & McGhie-Richmond	Leithwood & Riehl	Leithwood	Villa et al.	Scanlan	Ryan	Angelides, Antoniou & Charlambous
Identify and initiate sustained discussion of issues, provide new vision, set direction and motivate	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Redesign the organization and/or foster a collaborative school workplace culture	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Manage the delivery of a high quality education with necessary individualized supports	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Value and encourage parent and caregiver involvement		✓	✓			✓		✓
Involve and value all students		✓	✓					✓
Prepare teachers with adequate professional development				✓	✓	✓		

Figure 2. Core Practices of Principals Leading Inclusive Schools

Several core practices of principals' leadership for inclusive practice have been identified:

1. The need to redesign the organization and then foster a collaborative workplace culture within it (Angelides, Antoniou, & Charalambous, 2010; Irvine, Lupart, Loreman, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010; Leithwood, 2010; Leithwood, & Riehl, 2005; Ryan, 2010; Scanlan, 2009; Villa et al., 2005; Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd, 2011).
2. Identifying issues and then providing a new vision and direction for the school, along with the need to continually motivate school staff (Irvine, Lupart, Loreman, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010; Leithwood, 2010; Ryan, 2010; Villa et al., 2005; Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd, 2011).
3. The need for principals to manage the delivery of a high quality education while providing necessary individual supports to students (Irvine, Lupart, Loreman, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010; Leithwood, 2010; Leithwood, & Riehl, 2005; Ryan, 2010; Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd, 2011).
4. Involving and valuing all students as well as their parents and caregivers (Angelides, Antoniou, & Charalambous, 2010; Irvine, Lupart, Loreman, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010; Leithwood, & Riehl, 2005; Scanlan, 2009). And finally,
5. The need to prepare teachers with adequate professional development (Leithwood, 2010; Scanlan, 2009; Villa et al., 2005).

As Leithwood et al (2010) advocate, these “close-to-the- classroom” leadership practices are essential when principals have the task of improving the teachers’ instructional programs and in turn the implementation of increasingly inclusive practices in the classroom and the school.

Statement of the Problem

Leithwood and Riehl (2005) argue that leadership for diverse populations needs to be practiced differently. In relation to this study, their statement raised the question as to whether principals could identify what systems and structures need to be in place to facilitate implementation of the Three-Block Model of UDL. As well, in order to determine readiness for implementation, there was a need to know which of these supports were in place for the implementation of this inclusive school reform, and which were not. Procedurally, as large-scale roll out of this model was new, it was also important to hear principals identify what barriers they encountered when implementing this specific model of inclusive practice in schools so that these barriers can be avoided, or at least anticipated and prepared for, when the model is implemented in other school divisions. Knowing what principals believe would facilitate the implementation of the Three-Block Model can help to ensure that these facilitators are in place in the future.

Block two of the Three-Block Model of UDL is based on rigorous instructional practices that are intended to be implemented by classroom teachers in diverse classrooms. However, many of these practices must be supported with structures and processes that are enabled by the principal. Therefore, this study also needed to look at the instructional leadership practices of principals. Leithwood's model of instructional leadership (2010, p. 33) includes four core practices that serve as a guide to leading an inclusive instructional program in schools. They consist of:

1. Setting Direction (building a shared vision, fostering acceptance of group goals, high performance expectations)

2. Developing People (providing individualized support/consideration, intellectual stimulation, providing an appropriate model)
3. Redesigning the Organization (building collaborative cultures e.g.. common planning times), restructuring (including distributing leadership), building productive relationships with families and communities, (connecting the school community to its wider environment)
4. Managing the Instructional Program (staffing the program, providing instructional support, monitoring school based activities, buffering staff from distractions to their work)

By combining the Three-Block Model of UDL with the inquiry about instructional leadership practices of principals as conceptual frameworks, this study was intended to create a better understating of the role of principals in bringing fully inclusive practices to every student's classroom.

Research Questions

Semi-structured interviews (initial and follow-up) with five Manitoba principals from three school divisions where the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning is being implemented were conducted. These interviews produced data related to the required systems and structures, the instructional leadership practices, and potential facilitators and barriers to the implementation of the inclusive school reform exemplified by the Three-Block Model of UDL. The broad research questions included:

- What Systems and Structures identified by Katz (2012a) do principals indicate are in place (or not) to support implementation of inclusive practices as defined by the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning?

- What are the instructional leadership practices principals identify as being crucial for the implementation of this inclusive practice?
- To what extent do these practices align with the need to manage the instructional program as identified by Leithwood (2010)?
- What are the facilitators or barriers the principals see in implementation of the model?

Rationale/Significance of the Study

Blackmore (2006) explains that diversity among learners, whether it is linguistic, cultural or disability, is “construed to be a positive force in educational work” (p. 183). However in spite of mounting research attesting to the positive effects of inclusion, a large percentage of students with exceptionalities continued to be excluded from the regular classroom (Canadian Council on Learning [CCL], 2007). While the move to inclusive education in Canada has improved health and academic outcomes for some students with exceptionalities (CCL, 2007), a large percentage of students with exceptionalities continue to be at risk for exclusion from the regular classroom (CCL, 2007; CMEC, 2008).

Promoting a deeper understanding of how to increase and further inclusive practices in Manitoba is an important area for current research. Teachers, principals, school division leadership and provincial leadership in the area of education have all been given a legal and ethical responsibility to develop fully inclusive practices in schools. It is understood that inclusive education is promoted not only for the benefit of students with specific disabilities, but for their families, their siblings, same-age peers, other students and for all of society to benefit as a whole.

One of the intents of this research is to provide educational leaders at all levels with more

practical information on how to meet their legal and professional responsibility to all Manitoba students. Models and methods for implementation of inclusive instruction continue to be needed. Therefore in the Manitoba context, in which a great amount of responsibility is placed on the individual principal, it is important to investigate and understand how a principal creates the conditions for a profound philosophical and practical change such as a shift towards inclusive systems, structures and instructional practices.

It was anticipated that this qualitative study would make a contribution to the field in terms of understanding the role of principals in implementing a change towards fully inclusive instructional program as exemplified by the Three-Block Model of UDL. Knowing how closely principals' descriptions of practice align with the literature on instructional leadership and leading school staff through change may help future researchers explore the connection between school leadership and implementation of an inclusive instructional program.

Delimitations

Some delimitations effected the execution of this research:

1. Only three school divisions in which the process of implementing the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning was occurring were selected to participate in this research.
2. Participation was voluntary; therefore it's possible that principals who participated were more likely to have a greater than average interest and commitment to the topic.
3. The study is small and data about the participants' experiences were collected over only a five month span of time.

4. The study involved five early and middle years principals in three school divisions who may all have common experiences, somewhat limiting variability in responses.

Limitations

The nature of this study is qualitative, and relies on self-reporting by participants, limiting the generalizability of the study. The interview guide and the semi-structured interview format were used to solicit as much relevant information as possible from principals about the systems and structures in the schools that would support implementation of the Three-Block Model of UDL. Interview questions were also intended to have principals describe and elaborate upon their own instructional leadership practices. It is possible however, that because participants were not asked to prepare for these interviews, that their answers could have been incomplete or not entirely accurate. Probing questions, such as asking for specific examples or encouraging participants to reflect further on answers and clarify responses were used to mediate this limitation.

Another limitation lies in the nature of the implementation of the Three-Block Model of UDL as a school division wide initiative. Within the small pool of participants, there were limits to an assurance of anonymity considering that participants may know each other and may discuss their participation in divisional initiatives, including research being conducted with others.

A final limitation is explained by Creswell (2007) who explains that because of the impact of the research, participants may “hide their true feelings and perspectives” (p. 179).

However it did seem to me that the conversations were candid, and the participants, while clearly thoughtful and reflective, did make careful but critical points with regards to implementation of an inclusive school reform within the participating schools and school

divisions. Participants also willingly revealed some of the tensions, ironies and complexities they have encountered in implementing an inclusive school reform.

Organization of the Thesis

This work expands on research and understanding related to the implementation of the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning done at the classroom level that primarily focussed on Blocks 1 and 2 (Katz, 2013; Katz & Porath, 2011). This research focussing on Block 3 - Systems and Structures seeks to understand the role principals have in implementing this model of inclusive practice.

Chapter Two is a review of research literature related to inclusive practices within schools and the evidence supporting the need for both social and academic inclusion, especially for those students with intellectual developmental disabilities. The chapter explains the existing challenges of implementing inclusive practices identified in literature about inclusion. Next a framework for inclusive practices in schools, the Three-Block Model of UDL developed by Katz, is examined and explained. Finally the chapter examines the principal's role in fostering inclusive instruction within schools. The literature on improving collaborative culture, instructional leadership and structural change in schools and how it aligns with the implementation of an inclusive school reform such as the Three-Block Model of UDL is explored.

Chapter Three describes how I conducted a naturalistic inquiry as described by Guba and Lincoln (1985) to inquire about and interpret how principals in the field support the reform of inclusive instructional practice in schools through implementation of the UDL framework for inclusive practice described by Katz (2012a).

Chapter Four condenses and summarizes the in-depth responses to the semi-structured interview questions provided by the study's five participants. The six themes that emerged from the data are highlighted, including Inclusive Policy and Practice, Setting Direction, Developing People, Redesigning the Organization, Managing the Instructional Program and Allocation of Resources.

In Chapter Five I embed the findings in the research literature to draw conclusions on the extent to which the findings reflect what is found in the inclusion and the school leadership literature. To conclude the study, recommendations for practice and for future research into the links between inclusion and educational leadership are made.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

There is abundant research showing positive outcomes of inclusive classrooms for students with disabilities (Curcic, 2009; Edmunds & Macmillan, 2010). There is also promising interest in implementing universal design for learning (UDL) approaches that bring together research on inclusive practices, classroom teaching and the systematic and structural changes required to teach the widest possible range of students and improve teaching and learning in the inclusive classroom (Canadian Research Centre for Inclusive Education, 2012; Katz, 2012c). However classroom practices that promote inclusion of students with disabilities, and the leadership of principals represent distinct topics in educational literature. It seems reasonable then to bring these topics together and inquire about the extent to which principals understand how creating fully inclusive school communities aligns with their work leading schools (Swedeen, 2009).

In this literature review I define inclusion and highlight the literature that shows the benefits of inclusion for students both with and without disabilities. I then review some of the sources of lingering resistance to inclusive practices, and explain how the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning described by Katz (2012a) provides a common understanding for educators and addresses persistent barriers to inclusive practices.

Next the literature on the leadership role of principals in educational reform, school improvement and systems change is reviewed as it relates to shifting school culture and improving instructional practices. Although the literature specifically linking inclusive practices and role of the principal is relatively limited, there is a body of research on educational leadership for change that sheds light on the role of the principal related to addressing gender, linguistic and cultural diversity/inclusion.

In this review I examine what scholars have said about the principal's role in creating a school environment and program that responds to diversity in all its various forms. I link what has been learned about creating schools whose staff and programs responded to various diverse groups to a definition of inclusion that addresses the widest range of student diversity in a school, including students with a range of disabilities.

Inclusive Schools

Today diversity, including race, ethnicity, disability, linguistic, socio-economic and gender, is commonly understood to be a positive influence in education (Blackmore, 2006). Inclusive school communities welcome and celebrate diversity, find ways to accommodate uniqueness and individuality, and will go so far as to use diversity as an opportunity to learn rather than seeing it as a problem (Angelides, Antoniou, & Charalambous, 2010; Blackmore, 2006; Ryan, 2003). In Canada, attending class with same age peers is now the norm for a majority of students with mild-moderate disabilities with nearly 80% of these students in middle-high inclusive settings (Timmons & Wagner, 2008). Crawford (cited in Timmons & Wagner, 2008) defined robust/high inclusive settings as placements where students are:

- welcome and included, in all their diversity and exceptionalities, in the regular classroom in the neighbourhood school with their age peers;
- able to participate and develop to the fullest of their potential; and
- involved in socially valued relationships with diverse peers and adults (p. 17)

While children with severe-profound disabilities were less likely to be in inclusive settings, Timmons and Wagner (2008) found that in Canada, just over half of these students do attend regular school in middle-high inclusive settings where they participate in the extra-curricular life and receive some needed supports. However, the school program may fall

short on some measures of inclusion. Parents for instance may have reported that they “don’t know” if their child plays with others at recess, reported that their child attends some special education classes (as opposed to only regular education classes), or experiences some restrictions when taking part in school outings such as field trips. While the trend does show that inclusion is steadily becoming the expected norm in Canadian schools, nearly half of students with severe-profound disabilities still experience segregated school settings. There is a clear need to keep working to create socially and academically inclusive school settings, especially for those students who have severe-profound disabilities.

Educators are integrating their special education services into the general teaching and learning environment, understanding that this practice is in the best interests of all students (Scanlan, 2009). Nearly two decades ago Hebert (1997) described this ideal integration of regular education and special education into an inclusive school community when she wrote that “inclusion can refer to extending our thinking so that each child and adult experiences inclusion not because they are members of an included subgroup within the school but because fundamentally there are no subgroups – there is only a school” (p. 2). Within such a school inclusion is considered “the new normal” (Irvine, Lupart, Loreman, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010, p. 79). School programs are clearly moving towards inclusion, however Ainscow contends that “it is unlikely that complete inclusion will ever be achieved” (cited in Ryan 2010, p. 21). The Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning was developed to defy Ainscow such that educators are able to implement inclusive practices for all.

Benefits of Inclusion for Students with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities

Many researchers have found that students with intellectual disabilities do as well or better across domains in inclusive classroom communities compared to students placed in

segregated settings (Buckley, Bird, Sacks & Archer, 2006; Hardiman, Guerin & Fitzsimons, 2009; Vianello & Lanfranchi, 2011). In fact, the outcomes of segregated special education for students with intellectual disabilities is disappointing (Buckley, Bird, Sacks, & Archer, 2006) and challenges the assumption that students with unique individual needs learn best in these segregated special education settings (Fisher & Meyer, 2002).

In comparing social competence of students in inclusive versus self-contained classrooms, Fisher and Meyer (2002) found that it was the students in the inclusive placement who made significant gains in the area of social competence, including the areas of initiating social contact and in coping with negative situations. In another study, Buckley et al. (2006) compared the outcomes for teenage students with Down syndrome in full time special education settings and a comparable group in more inclusive mainstream settings. The results for students in the areas of daily living, play, leisure skills, manners, and understanding of social rules in segregated settings were no better than their counterparts in more inclusive classrooms. The assertion that students with disabilities benefit greatly in the area of life skills in segregated settings appears not to have been supported in this study. Buckley et al's study found that there is no net benefit to students being in segregated settings and questions any claim that segregated settings are necessary for life skills and social learning domains, especially at the expense of exposure to curricula.

Students in segregated special education settings fall far behind their mainstream counterparts in the development of language comprehension, expressive language and memory development (Fisher & Meyer, 2002). In Buckley's study, the group in segregated settings made little progress from year to year. The researchers noted that "only 42% had speech that was intelligible to those meeting them for the first time" (Buckley et al., 2006, p.

54). The research tells us not to trust that segregated settings will serve students with disabilities well academically, as evidence from research on educational settings for students with disabilities has established that it is inclusive classrooms that benefit these students the most both academically and socially (CCL, 2009; Cole, Waldron, & Majd, 2004; Crisman, 2008; Katz & Mirenda, 2002).

The one area where segregated special education performed better than inclusive classrooms is in the area of fostering friendships. Buckley et al. (2006) found that students in the segregated special education setting were more likely than their counterparts in mainstream classrooms to identify as having a boyfriend/girlfriend and belong to clubs with others who have similar interests. It was noted that students attending the mainstream school settings were supported by an EA (educational assistant) for the majority of the day. In traditional mainstream school settings an adult is often the default support given to students with special learning needs. However Katz, Porath, Bendu and Epp (2012) explained that assigning an educational assistant to a student can interfere with social inclusion, rather than facilitate it, and this has also been noted by the work of Michael Giangreco (Giangreco, 2010; Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010).

Katz proposes in the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning that educational assistants have a role in fostering independence; their role is to spend time working with all students, consciously ensuring that they facilitate peer interactions, not replace or inhibit them (Hall & McGregor, 2000; Katz, 2012a). Freeman and Alkin (2000, cited in Vianello & Lanfranchi, 2011) found that social acceptance of a student with a disability by his/her able peers goes up when the student with a disability spends more time with non disabled peers. Inclusive school programs may then provide the best opportunity for

students with disabilities to make friends with their non-disabled peers but must consciously provide the means for all students to meet and have positive reciprocal relationships with peers who have similar interests, especially as they reach upper elementary grades (Hall & McGregor, 2000).

Benefits of Inclusion for Students Without Disabilities

Today's inclusive educational practices stand in contrast to the segregated special education models grounded in the past that not only alienated students but fostered a very unrealistic sense of isolation from persons who were different than one's self. The experience of students without disabilities was one that placed little value on "diversity, cooperation, and respect for others who are different" (Karagiannis, Stainback, & Stainback, 1996, p. 6).

The value of social inclusion. Educational success cannot be found by focusing solely on a competitive approach to academic achievement. In fact, it seems that writers on educational leadership almost always identify a higher purpose to public education and recognize indicators of success as holistic and pro-social. For example, as Villa et al (2005) explain, the learning of academics, while being important, serves as a means to enable children to learn to be "good communicators, reasoning problem solvers, responsible citizens in a global society, and nurturers of themselves and others" (p. 176). Irvine et al, (2010) also found principals often connect virtues and values education for all students with their support of inclusive practices. Hopkins (2011) connects school inclusion to societal goals when he says that "for a country to succeed it needs both a competitive economy and an inclusive society" (p. 86). Having all students experience interconnectedness and being a part of the larger diverse society are hallmarks of social inclusion (Katz et al, 2012).

In 2004, Peck, Staub, Gallucci and Schwartz investigated parent perceptions of the impacts of inclusion on their non-disabled child and found that a majority of respondents believed that their non-disabled child benefited from the experience of participation in a classroom where a child with severe disabilities was enrolled. Parents in the study generally indicated that the inclusive classroom contributed to their child's increased appreciation of the needs of other children. Half of the parents indicated that they believed the emotional climate of the classroom had improved after including children with severe disabilities. Seventy-eight percent of parents with non-disabled children also believed that their child's academic progress had not been affected by their being in a class with a child who had a severe disability. A small percentage believed their child had done better academically in the inclusive classroom.

U.S. journalist Paul Tough writes about how education reform has had a narrow focus on the standardized test scores of children and on teacher quality as defined by their student's success on these same tests. Tough (2012) describes how school leaders set aside teaching traits such as persistence, grit, curiosity and contentiousness in favour of a narrow definition of academic rigour. But for all the efforts made to improve scores on standardized tests this has not determined success later in life and specifically the completion of college for children who attended schools that have improved test scores (Bethune, 2012). If completing college is used as a measure of success and preparedness for citizenship, then what Tough discovered when visiting Riverdale School, a private school that has produced generations of college level graduates, is revealing. Rather than a focus on tenacity and hard work, teachers at Riverdale described the importance of values related to honesty and fairness. These socio-economically advantaged and academically successful students were "focused on values

related to inclusion and tolerance” (Bethune, 2012, p. 65). When reflecting on what was considered important at the school Tough (2012) wrote:

One eighth-grade girl I asked about character said that for her and her friends, the biggest was inclusion—who was invited to whose bat mitzvah; who was being shunned on Facebook. Character, as far as I could tell, was being defined at Riverdale mostly in terms of helping other people – or at least not hurting their feelings. (p. 80)

So it seems that the inopportune truth for those that promote reform based on standardized testing is that successful societies are not measured by test scores but by inclusiveness and moral character (Tough, 2012).

A principal may be concerned with improving individual academic scores but she or he must be aware that improving inclusivity is correlated with increased academic engagement (Katz, 2013). Social inclusion is a critical component of improving student outcomes, because social and emotional well-being is directly related to resiliency, citizenship, and mental health (Wotherspoon, 2002; Zins & Elias, 2006). This in turn increases academic motivation, aspirations, and achievement (Brock, Nishida, Chiong, Grimm, & Rimm-Kaufmann, 2008; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004). The connection between social inclusion, that is, student self-concept, autonomy, sense of belonging, opportunity to interact with others, and positive classroom climates and academic performance should therefore not be overlooked by principals wanting to improve academic results of their students.

The value of academic inclusion. Academic inclusion is not restricted to meeting the needs of students with exceptional learning needs but speaks to the need for schools to be a

welcoming, engaging and safe learning environment for all students. In this environment some, but not all students, will receive additional supports in order to address more complex learning needs (Katz et al, 2012; Swedeen, 2009). As a principal in Waldron and McLeskey's (2011) study noted, inclusion "became part of the whole school's plan for improving achievement for all students. It's not about students with disabilities or gifted students – it's about how can we make every child successful" (p. 55).

The findings of these studies suggest that government leaders, school leaders, parents and members of society in general are increasingly understanding of the fact that inclusive school communities are a benefit to all learners and that this benefit goes beyond moral and legal considerations. The evidence in favor of inclusive practices has mounted, and principals have ample evidence that inclusion should be part of a school wide plan to help all students succeed. However principals must be committed to supporting inclusive practices and be prepared to defend the benefits of inclusion because the culture of a separate, special education that has been long-established and will likely take time to change.

Challenges of Implementing Inclusion

Interestingly much of the initial struggle against inclusion and even some of the residual resistance and attitudes that work against inclusive practices come from within the field of special education itself (Fraser & Shields, 2010; Herbert, 1997). In its early days special education was viewed as something more than a profession. Practitioners of special education were viewed, and viewed themselves, as a cultural group with all the characteristics that can define culture (Herbert, 1997). They were members of a group with its own laws, language, and values. Herbert (1997) sheds light on how inclusion was viewed by this cultural group when she explains how "one of the ambiguities of all cultures is the

simultaneous desire to be a part of the larger society while maintaining their cultural uniqueness” (p. 1). Inclusion appeared to threaten to change or eliminate the culture of special education, raising the alarm of those who may have had good intentions but also held a vested interest in maintaining an out-of-date system (Winzer & Mazurek, 2011).

Rogers (2005) describes how in the 1990’s debates about inclusion were still centered upon whether or not inclusion was good, effective and appropriate, and then matured into a more practical debate in which, “increasingly the scholarship has shifted from whether or not to do inclusion to how to do inclusion” (p. 5). Today in Canada inclusive practices are grounded in legal requirements of human rights legislation and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* but also well established through research and experience. Edmunds and Macmillan (2010) suggest that today there is “near universal agreement that including children with exceptionalities in regular classrooms is laudable and should be the ideal that all schools and educators strive towards” (p. xiv). Often, it is the large urban school communities that continue to discuss the merits and methods of inclusion, because in most remote rural communities, regular classroom placement is the only option available as rural schools lack specialized classroom programs that cluster students with disabilities (Irvine et al., 2010). In a study by Irvine et al. (2010), principals described this rural reality in a positive light (p. 79), emphasizing the strength of having a student population reflective of the entire community.

The consensus is that students with exceptional needs should be educated together with their non-disabled peers within the schools they would otherwise be attending. It is widely understood and accepted that inclusive philosophy is not just about children with special learning needs, rather that inclusion is “about every child’s right to participate and the

school's duty to accept and serve every child" (Katz et al, 2012, p. 3). Today it seems that Baker, Wang and Walberg (1994-95) were prophetic when they wrote about the need for educators already serving diverse populations to focus on how to implement practicable and effective inclusive education, rather than on whether or not to provide an education for all children.

The evidence is compelling that tells us that access and inclusion are deeply important to students both with and without disabilities for their social and academic gains (Theoharis, 2010). With research that spans three decades showing that all students should be educated together within inclusive classrooms the challenge that remains is how. What must principals do to effectively support inclusive education? Research into inclusive practices provides some of the answers but a framework is required in order to effectively bring these best practices together.

Not proposing to be a silver bullet or "perfect panacea" (Katz, 2012, p. 11) the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning (Three-Block Model) provides a framework that draws from research on a range of inclusive educational practices to create a learning environment where diversity is valued, collaboration amongst students is promoted and various means of learning are provided. The next section will explain the components of the Three-Block Model and how it was designed to bring research together and serve as a common paradigm for inclusive practices.

The Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning

Joyce, Calhoun and Hopkins (2009, cited in Hopkins, 2011) argue that, "it is not simply the teacher's task to teach, but to create powerful contexts for learning" (p. 93). They further explain that:

Learning experiences are composed of content, process and social climate; as teachers we create for and with our children opportunities to explore and build important areas of knowledge, develop powerful tools for learning, and live in humanizing social conditions. (p. 93)

These writers corroborate Katz's (2012a) finding that the social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum. Inclusion, with the aim to educate all students in the full sense of the word, has been shown to promote social, emotional, communicative, and behavioral development, in addition to the academic achievement of all students. The Three-Block Model is designed to connect instructional practice and the overall social emotional climate within the school. With roots in the field of brain research (Rose & Meyer, 2002), early work towards providing access to learning emphasized the use of assistive technology to meet the varied needs of students with exceptional needs, especially those who required accommodations for traditional textbook learning (Rose & Meyer, 2002, p. 7). Inspired by universal design in architecture and product design, the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), the U.S. non-profit group that advocates for technology to be used to expand the opportunities for people with disabilities, began to articulate how Universal Design for Learning would go beyond physical access to the classroom to include "access to all aspects of learning" (CAST, 2011, p. 3).

Expanding on the ways to accommodate students with disabilities, Burgstahler (2009) described eight important factors that educators should consider when planning instruction and activities for their students and especially those with disabilities. Katz's research (2012, p. 15) supports these factors, and she adopted these eight areas in her own work, describing them in the following way:

1. Class climate: Adopt practices that reflect high values with respect to both diversity and inclusiveness.
2. Interaction: Encourage regular and effective interactions among students, and between students and the instructor. Ensure that communication methods are accessible to all participants.
3. Physical environments and products: Ensure that facilities, activities, materials, and equipment are physically accessible to and usable by all students, and that all potential student characteristics are addressed in the safety considerations.
4. Instructional standards: Maintain high expectations for all learners, and provide supports to help them reach these standards.
5. Delivery methods: use multiple instructional methods that are accessible to all learners.
6. Information resources and technology: Ensure that course materials, notes, and other information resources are engaging, flexible, and accessible for all students.
7. Feedback: Provide specific feedback on a regular basis.
8. Assessment: Assess student progress regularly, using multiple accessible methods and tools, and adjust instruction accordingly.

The foundational Block One of the Three-Block Model makes the connection between the social emotional climate created in the classroom and the provision of accessible instructional practices. The context for learning in the classroom is based on not only accommodation of diverse ways of learning through technology or accessible materials but through teachers creating a social climate in the classroom where unique ways of student learning are valued equally by the teacher and peers alike.

Multiple Intelligences - The Foundation of the Three-Block Model

Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences asserts that there are many valued ways in which the brain processes information to solve problems and demonstrate understanding (Gardner, 2004). Labeling these processes "intelligences", he divides them into eight domains; linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, naturalistic, existential and the personal intelligences (Moran, Kornhaber & Gardner, 2006). We can think of the value brought to our own lives by artists and architects with spatial intelligences, athletes and trades workers with bodily-kinesthetic intelligence and musicians with musical-rhythmic intelligence. Gardner explains how we also value the skill of people in the helping professions to read the intentions and needs of others and we see highly developed forms of this interpersonal intelligence in our political and religious leaders.

In traditional classrooms, the students who demonstrate verbal-linguistic abilities have always been successful because traditional teaching has used methods and materials focused on this area of strength (Katz, 2012a). Within our schools teachers would "invariably teach in one way, usually their own preferred way of learning" (Manitoba Education and Training, 1996, p. 4.7). As Gardner (2004) explains about our post-industrial society, we tend to value linguistic, logical-mathematical, and interpersonal forms of intelligence. Gardner explains that even interpersonal intelligence, the ability to get along with others, reading their signals and responding appropriately, had become diminished for some time in schools in favor of an emphasis on logical-mathematical ability and linguistic intelligence. Gardner (2004) saw all other domains of skill and competency "for the most part, consigned to after-school or recreational activities, if they are taken notice of at all" (p. 353).

Accommodating student's diverse ways of processing and demonstrating information is

necessary especially when students have strengths outside the verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical domain. By respecting these multiple intelligences a teacher gives all students, including culturally diverse students (Chita-Tegmark, Gravel, Serpa, Domings & Rose, 2012), the opportunity to learn and to demonstrate their learning in a variety of valued ways.

In the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning, blocks one and two include the elements recommended by Burgstahler (2009) and incorporate the multiple intelligences described by Gardner (2007). Block one sets the foundation that respects learner diversity and encourages interaction through democratic classroom management and the Respecting Diversity (RD) program developed by Katz (2012a). While the RD program has students recognize their intelligences, students are not permitted to work only within these strengths. The guidelines for UDL set out by CAST (2011) support the idea that learners must develop their skills using a variety of medium and explain that they may need supported opportunities to develop competency and independence in demonstrating their learning using areas of less skill.

Differentiated instruction designed to encourage the learning of all students through providing multiple avenues to learning (Tomlinson, 2001) is crucial to the delivery of instruction described in block two of the Three-Block Model. By differentiating instruction for learning and in turn assessment of learning, a teacher can target what students learn, how they learn it and how they demonstrate what they've learned. Block two also includes teaching practices that allow for student choice so that students are able to freely access activities and materials that are most usable to them. CAST's guidelines support the understanding that students require options for expression and communication of their own individual learning. The guidelines make clear that multiple media should be offered so that

individual learners can express their ideas and new knowledge without undue difficulty.

Integrated curriculum, democratic classrooms, the use of technology and differentiated instruction work together in the classroom and ensure that students are engaged and able to access information resources. Katz (2012a) describes how the classroom teacher implementing the Three-Block Model would spend much of his or her time circulating, observing and conducting formative assessment, asking themselves who understands the concept, who is struggling and who needs enrichment.

Further Components of the Three-Block Model

Katz (2013) recognized seven practices or “ramps” that facilitate learning for all students in the inclusive UDL classroom. They are:

Technology. When used to access flexible digital media computer technology can be used to meet the needs of diverse in individual needs and provide access to learning (Rose & Meyer, 2002). As long as it doesn’t impede classroom inclusion by requiring that a student be sent to a secluded computer lab, technology can provide an important tool allowing for multiple means of processing and demonstrating knowledge.

Gradual release. Duke and Pearson (2002, cited in Fisher & Frey, 2003) described moving from the teacher assuming “all the responsibility for performing a task...to a situation in which students assume all the responsibility” (p. 397). Based on student needs, some students may receive more support while others work independently.

Flexible groupings. Creating groupings that provide for peer to peer support, student-led small groups, teacher-led small groups, independent study, and whole-class meetings are an effective way to meet the instructional needs of a diverse group of students and may be set up to take advantage of different strengths and needs within a classroom (Hoffman, 2002).

Flexible groupings allow students to contribute to the task using their unique strengths.

Integrated curricula. Integrating curriculum connects prior knowledge and emotional interests as well as making connections across subjects. Grouws et al. (2013) explained how ideas are better retained, applied and used when learned with meaning and found this effect to be substantial in their study of integrated organization of mathematics content.

Choice, risk-taking, and safety. A social emotional climate should be created in the classroom that encourages risk taking and controls for boredom and anxiety through offering students choices. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) explain that “providing opportunities for choice, control, and collaboration are potent strategies for increasing academic achievement” (p. 30).

Authentic assessment. Teachers should focus assessment on skills that are relevant and meaningful for students. Performance based assessment such as, projects, writings, demonstrations, debates, simulations, presentations, and other open ended assignments engage students in real world tasks (Moon, Brighton, Callahan, & Robinson, 2005).

Differentiated instruction. Intended to encourage the learning of all students through providing multiple avenues to learning, a teacher may differentiate what students learn, how they learn it and how they demonstrate what they’ve learned (Tomlinson, 2001).

The outcome of combining these practices together in one comprehensive model is beginning to be understood. In the last four years, research in classrooms implementing the approach has shown that implementing the Three-Block Model of UDL has had significant, positive impacts on students’ self-concept, respect for diverse others, classroom climate, and social and academic engagement (Katz, 2012c; Katz, 2013). At the same time using the model has been shown to reduce social and academic exclusion, and aggressive behaviour

(Katz & Porath, 2011). Overall classroom climates have improved with increased pro-social behaviour and a reduction in disruptive behaviour (Katz & Porath, 2011). There also appears to be no significant difference in the effectiveness of the model based on gender, the first language of students, urban or rural settings or the teacher's years of experience (Katz, 2012c).

The Three-Block model has become widely recognized as an effective model for inclusive education. The Canadian Centre for Research on Inclusive Education has adopted the framework proposed by Katz to guide its research. The Centre's research into instructional techniques to promote accessibility for all and into the impact of instructional, digital, and/or assistive technologies on students' engagement, independence, achievement, and sense of belonging will build on the work of Katz (Canadian Centre for Research on Inclusive Education, University of Western Ontario, 2012).

The Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre also promotes the Three-Block Model in First Nations school communities that it serves (Katz, 2012a). The model is recognized as being able to address the needs of the group alongside students with disabilities the Council of Ministers of Education identifies as being "most at risk for exclusion" (as cited in Katz, 2012a, p. 183), that being First Nations, Metis and Inuit students. The model has been shared with educators across Canada who teach in K-12 schools through professional development workshops, university courses and summer institutes, publications, and conference presentations. The evidence is showing that the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning can be effective for all (Katz, 2013) and thus can be used as a common framework of belief and practice regarding inclusion for research that examines the role of principals in supporting inclusive school practices.

Ainscow (2005) citing Fullan explains that it is well established that, “educational reform is particularly difficult in contexts where there is a lack of common understanding amongst stakeholders” (p. 118). Within school divisions implementing the Three-Block Model of UDL there will be a common language and collective understanding of inclusion amongst participants. In this proposed research study, the question asked is how principals support implementation of an inclusive school reform exemplified and commonly defined by the Three-Block Model of UDL.

The Principal’s Role in Inclusive Schools

Irvine et al. (2010) lament that “striving for authentic inclusion amidst the day-to-day tensions principals face is not an easy task. Principals, in particular, need to address multiple responsibilities within their school settings” (p. 71). For example, if a principal is tasked with the goal of school improvement, as measured by student achievement on standardized test scores, the demands of inclusion may seem to be competing. Pressure is placed on educators to be both equitable and excellent, improving academic scores and simultaneously meeting the needs of all students (Waldron et al; 2011). However, research documents the ability of an approach such as UDL to achieve both of these goals simultaneously (Friesen, 2010; Katz, 2013; Meo, 2012).

If inclusion is to be the primary focus, Irvine et al. (2010) explain that “the school principal’s support appears to be a significant determining factor in creating effective inclusive settings” (p. 72) yet they indicate that there is an insufficient amount of empirical research highlighting the practices of principals in facilitating inclusive education. The literature on educational leadership is primarily devoted to distributed leadership, instructional leadership, school improvement, and school turnaround. Diversity is often

defined as ethno-cultural, linguistic or socio-economic diversity, and only marginally connects research to inclusion of students with disability. With few researchers connecting educational leadership and inclusion (Edmunds & Macmillan, 2010) there is little understanding of the importance of the principal in the education of students with diverse needs that result from disability. This includes potential effects of instructional leadership on student inclusion and the ways in which the systems and structures, created for schools, impact upon the inclusion of students with disabilities in the academic and social life within the school.

This being said, the research literature into the various specific domains in school leadership for improvement and reform does reveal common ground between the goals of leading schools to improve academic outcomes and the goal of creating increasingly inclusive instruction within schools. As I have found in reviewing the literature in both domains, the means and the ends are generally complementary. Only the initial purpose and perspective may at first seem distinct. This study reveals the link between instructional leadership practices of principals, how they manage systems and structures under their control, and the implementation of a reform towards inclusive practices as exemplified by the Three-Block Model of UDL.

Schlechty (2000) outlined the crucial steps to be undertaken in an overall school reform process. What is striking when reviewing literature on school reform with an inclusive education lens is that the attitude and thinking Schlechty cites as crucial for school reform parallels beliefs about inclusion. School reform, recognition of diversity and inclusive practices are surprisingly well aligned. For instance, The Three-Block Model of UDL is based on a belief that all students can be academically engaged, that high standards should be

maintained for all students and that teachers are responsible for teaching and assessment of every learner in the inclusive classroom (Katz, 2012a). Schlechty (2000, p. 185-186) describes the following belief statements for leading change that align well with this and other beliefs inherent in the Three-Block Model:

- That every student can learn, and every student will learn if presented with opportunities to do so. It is the job of the school to create learning opportunities for each student each day.
- It is the responsibility of teachers and principals to ensure that students are provided with learning opportunities at which they experience success and from which they can gain knowledge of value to them, to the community, and to the society at large.
- All school activities should focus on tasks and opportunities to learn where students gain valued knowledge, achieve success and develop understanding that will equip them to participate fully in an information-based, knowledge-work society.
- Students are the primary recipients of the knowledge related work that the school has to offer. Students are central to the operation of schools and hands on engagement with knowledge and knowledge related products should be the goal.
- Under the leadership of principals and teachers guided by curriculum, all parts of the school system should be organized to ensure that students will be successful.

The Three-Block Model shows teachers how to provide opportunities for all students without exception to access learning based on the provincial curriculum (Katz, 2012a). The expectation that all students can experience success in their learning is paramount. Teachers who have access to professional development, the support of their principal and other professionals are equipped for the responsibility of teaching all students in the UDL

classroom.

Collins and White (2001, cited in Schmidt & Venet, 2012) identify the important role of principals in “molding the attitudes and behaviour of not only staff members, but also students, parents and most of the community towards inclusion” (p. 221). A principal must be seen as being a staunch supporter of inclusive practices and must defend this mission even in a culture of dissenting voices.

Creating Collaborative Cultures

The development of a collaborative school workplace culture is the most common core practice for leading inclusive schools found in the reviewed literature (Angelides, Antoniou, & Charalambous, 2010; Irvine, Lupart, Loreman, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010; Leithwood, 2010; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Ryan, 2010; Scanlan, 2009; Vila et al., 2005; Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd, 2011). Ambitious mandates for inclusion can be resisted by teachers who are not collaborators in change and these mandates may even incite resentment, especially within a skeptical, wary and reluctant group (van der Bogert, 1997, Winzer & Mazurek, 2011). This resistance to top-down approaches is predictable because it is understood that “neither top-down nor bottom-up” changes work in isolation (Hopkins, 2011, p. 86).

Leithwood, Harris and Strauss (2010) heard this same message from a teacher when conducting their Ontario turnaround study when she said, “We all had a negative attitude that this isn’t going to work. We were being imposed on and we thought we were great teachers” (p. 43). Fullan (2000) had recognized this challenge when he explained that as principals move ahead with necessary change, they also need to respect dissenting voices. He turns this dissent into an opportunity for principals by explaining that resistance can be highly

informative in that it can bring to light challenges teachers are encountering when dealing with complex problems. Schlechty's (2000) advice for leading school staff through change is similar. He describes the leader's job during the first year of implementing a plan to ensure teachers are "primarily concerned with teaching, listening, reacting, developing and learning" (p. 189).

If principals are to focus their attention to shifting school cultures and controlling anxiety during the change process (Fullan, 2000; Leithwood, Harris & Strauss, 2010) what about changing the entrenched culture of special education described by Hebert (1997) earlier? Fullan (2000) describes re-culturing as "changing the norms, values, incentives, skills and relationships in the organization that will make a direct difference in teaching and learning" (p. 161). Re-culturing requires a strong emotional commitment from principals and teachers, which will ultimately work to raise expectations. Principals have the ability to address the challenges educators face in inclusive environments. Ryan (2004, cited in Edmunds et al., 2009) says it is principals who "are unilaterally able to mobilize support for inclusion, implement inclusive practices and monitor teachers' efforts towards inclusive implementation" (p. 1) and he too identifies core practices for leading inclusion including the need to foster a collaborative workplace culture in the school, to provide a new vision and to motivate staff. Schlechty (2000) adds that "during the initial period of a change everything must be done with sufficient drama and flair that people believe things are going to change" (p. 188).

Fullan (2000) describes the growing complexity and demands faced by principals who are striving to make a difference in a twenty-first century context. He describes how principals must choose the right people, promote a strong work ethic amongst the staff, and confront

sometimes brutal realities. As Schlechty (2000) explains, if a change is to be maintained, strong principals will need to “build cultures that outlive them” (p. 183) creating a shift that is not owned, valued and promoted by one person alone, but has become deep-rooted within the whole school community. Collaboration across school boundaries is another important feature of reform for inclusive education. It’s been explained that principals should be collaborating with other school leaders to share innovative practices within and across schools (Fullan, 2003; Scanlan, 2009).

Distributed Leadership

One specific leadership practice Katz (2012a) includes in Block 3 systems and structures (Figure 3) is distributed leadership. Distributed leadership includes practices of sharing leadership that involve the restructuring, realigning and redesigning of organizations in recognition of the limitations of existing structural arrangements (Harris, 2009).

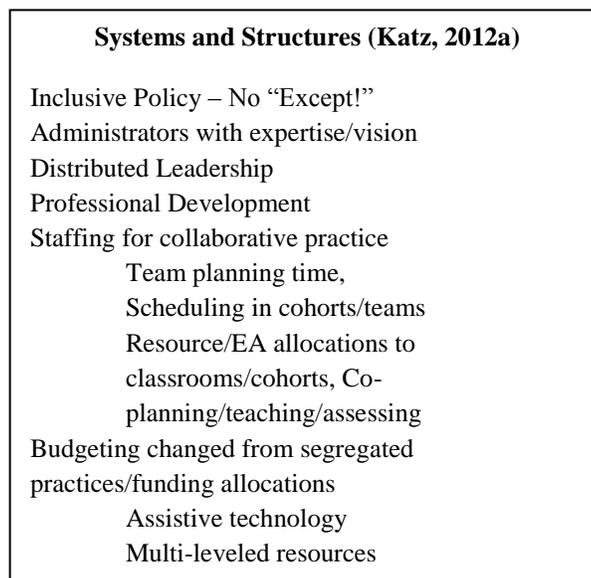


Figure 3 – Block Three of the Three-Block Model of UDL

In his book, *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership*, Fullan (2003) explains that teachers in publicly funded schools are there to serve the cognitive and social needs of every child

“with an emphasis on including those who may not have been well served in the past” (p. 3). He suggests that in moving forward, school leadership cannot require superheroes or moral martyrs (2003, p. xv); rather he explains how the work of principals requires a much more attainable, and exciting approach grounded in shared leadership. Distributed leadership, or other such forms of shared leadership may therefore need to be used by principals to remove organizational barriers to full and unconditional inclusion of all students.

Schlechty (2000) describes how in following this approach the principal invites school colleagues and others to share authority and “expects those who accept the invitation to share the responsibility as well” (p. 185). The Three-Block Model of Universal Design includes distributed leadership practices that can empower teachers to be educational leaders in the classroom. The model also recognizes how the ability, vision, direct involvement and instructional leadership of principals contributes to inclusion within the classroom and school (Katz, 2012a).

Restructuring schools for diversity. Ryan (2003) acknowledges the challenges that teachers and principals face adjusting to ever increasing levels of student diversity within schools (such as an increased need to plan, shifting of resources, changing current practices) but rightly argues in favour of the effort by pointing out that these challenges pale in comparison to the everyday challenges that are faced by diverse students and their parents. When addressing such challenges Fullan (2000), an international authority on educational reform, argues that one of the first things that a principal must reconcile is the fact that there is generally no definite answer to how to lead. Principals and others must give up the search for a silver bullet. Fullan (2000) warns that principals can get “ideas, directions, and insights” but ultimately the steps towards inclusive instruction in schools will be exceedingly complex

and the search for a single answer ineffective. Although the Three-Block Model of UDL provides a framework for working towards inclusion, it is not advocated for as a single bullet approach, as it draws from research on many inclusive educational practices for addressing the complex task of valuing diversity, promoting cooperation amongst students and providing multiple means of learning.

It could be expected that substantial restructuring, realigning and redesigning will need to occur in order to see inclusive teaching and learning practices within general education classrooms. Leithwood, Patten and Jantzi (2010) tested how school leadership influences student learning and found that the traditional organizational work done by principals, including the structures, policies and operating procedures sometimes referred to as the Organizational Path actually had very little influence on student learning. The study indicated that principals who want to be involved in improving outcomes for students would be better off focusing attention on more than purely organizational change. Prestine and Nelson (2005) understood that, “simple tinkering with the structures of schooling rarely brings about desired changes in teaching and learning practices” (p. 58).

Instructional Leadership

Stein and Spillane (2005) recommended that investigations need to be done into how principals help support their teachers’ development. They recommend doing this by shifting the focus of research from the organizational conditions to the instructional leadership of principals. They identify a gap in educational research in terms of how principals think about what teachers need to know and do in order to teach in more inclusive ways. They argue that the “study of administrators knowledge of the content of the reforms they are being asked to lead (and be accountable for) constitute a useful addition to the research on educational

leaders' thinking" (2005, p. 44).

One characteristic of a functional leader in an inclusive school community is the willingness to take responsibility "for collaborating with and supporting colleagues in instructional and classroom management" (Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004, p. 133). Pristine and Nelson (2005) also reported that few studies have examined principals' influence over the practices of teachers. They do however cite McLaughlin and Mitra who state that co-participation in professional development activities is essential so that principals can "symbolically communicate the importance and value the leader attaches to the work of teachers by engaging with them in such work" (p. 53).

Hebert (1997) described how conversations about inclusion often take place within separate sub-communities within the schools, often without principals. In order to lead inclusive instruction in schools, principals simply must be part of the conversation. Irvine, Lupart, Loreman and McGhie-Richmond (2010) found that when principals attended professional development activities on topics related to special needs these "professional development activities further enhanced the principal's ability to provide leadership and guidance in that it provided them with new ideas as well as affirmation the he/she is doing the right thing" (p. 83). Such activity strengthens the principal's ability to provide supportive and motivating leadership, a core practice for leading inclusion in schools (Irvine et al., 2010). Consequently these principals are also more likely to consider and support more inclusive placements options for their students with disabilities (Praisner, 2003).

So even though implementation of inclusive practices is left to individual teachers in their own classrooms, it is important to recognize the responsibility for advancing the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes is ultimately that of the principal

(Praisner, 2003, Young, 2010). Young (2010) explains:

For principals, the task then becomes to first communicate to his or her staff the values and beliefs associated with inclusion. If an administrator can convince reluctant teachers, and/or those who are not fully informed, to accept the philosophy of inclusion, then related policies are more readily embraced. (p. 56)

Edmunds et al. (2009) argue that principals must “champion school transformations that result in maximal outcomes for all students” (p. 1). While not completely dismissing the organizational issues Leithwood, Patten and Jantzi (2010) recommend, they focus on changes that have the highest desired effect on student learning, including the “extent to which teachers are providing students with immediate and informative feedback, the teachers’ use of reciprocal teaching strategies, teacher student relations, the management of classrooms and the general quality of teaching in the school” (p. 674). These researchers also found that flexible approaches by principals to disciplinary events and engaging staff and other stakeholders in developing school-wide behaviour plans were more important to student learning than the efforts that principals place on the organizational path and its minimal effect on student learning.

When principals address behaviour concerns, especially for historically unsuccessful groups of students, interventions that include components involving families have proven to be the most effective (Dodge et al, 2006). Involving families in education should be a primary focus of the leader of an inclusive school community (Dodge et al, 2006; Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi, 2010). In their 2010 article, Leithwood, Patten and Jantzi found that what influenced student learning the most, yet received very little attention from principals, was what they referred to as the Family Path. Familial influences, and especially potentially

alterable variables (as opposed to unalterable variables that the school staff has no influence over such as parental education, or parental income) can have a high degree of effect on student learning. The study found that involvement of parents in their children's education improves achievement, and that it's the children from low-income or minority families who have the most to gain when educators involve their parents. The researchers clarify that parents themselves do not have to be well educated to be effective. What Leithwood, Patten and Jantzi (2010) conclude is:

Engaging the school productively with parents, if this has not been a focus, may well produce larger effects on student learning in the short run than marginal improvements to already at least satisfactory levels of instruction. (p. 698)

Irvine et al. (2010) also found that communication with families is essential to student success. If principals apply these findings then they will be spending a considerable amount of time and effort in the nontraditional yet core leadership practice of working closely with parents in their child's education (Scanlan, 2009).

The core practices and priorities for leading inclusive school communities identified by Leithwood and Riehl (2005) support the practice of both academic and social inclusion. They include redesigning the school organization, fostering a collaborative workplace culture, managing the delivery of a high quality education with necessary individualized supports, valuing and encouraging parent and caregiver involvement in addition to involving and valuing all students. These practices align well with the Three-Block Model of UDL and the light Katz shines on achieving curricular learning outcomes, building community and creating a valuing and inclusive social and academic learning environment. Leithwood and Riehl identify the need for strong instructional programming in schools that maintains high

academic learning goals for all students. The instructional program they describe would follow a cohesive common framework, such as the Three-Block Model. Teachers would be provided with sustained training in the use of the framework and would participate in professional learning communities (PLCs) tasked with furthering knowledge and sustaining implemented change within the school, which is also suggested in block three of the Three-Block Model (Katz & Sugden, 2013).

Leithwood and Riehl's (2005) core practices include a high degree of collaboration amongst the staff using a new framework and explain the need to arrange and maintain structural conditions that allow students, parents and others to be actively involved in the new school community that is being created. The inclusive practices they describe are a support and resource to the community, for example educators may assist in coordinating social services for families through making referrals, offering up to date information and inviting representatives of programs and services to meet with families. The educational culture of families is also made a priority within these schools through such activities as parent education programs, and involving parents in decision making about their child's education all with the aim of raising families' and student's social capital in the process.

Leithwood's model of Instructional Leadership (2010) captures the research above and summarizes it into four core practices of successful principals of inclusive school communities. These practices include setting direction, developing people, reorganizing the organization and managing the instructional program. Research into principals and diversity most often looks at ethno-cultural and linguistic diversity of the students and parents (Ryan, 2003). Leithwood and Riehl (2005) however also include mental or physical characteristics in their definition of diverse student populations. Katz (2012a) expands this definition when

she explains “diversity does not refer only to children with exceptional needs, nor does it refer only to ethnic, racial, or linguistic diversity” but rather “encompasses all children” (p. 3).

When describing how a principal would set direction Leithwood explains the need for principals to provide a moral purpose amongst school staff to motivate, inspire and focus the work of teachers. Principals set direction by sharing their own values and then building a shared vision of the future with others working in the school. Harris and Chapman (as cited in Leithwood, 2010) reported that this may be done “through a variety of symbolic gestures and actions” intended to align others with his or her specific vision.

Fostering group goals is a more pragmatic process where the intent is to align individual goals with a single set of agreed upon group goals. Cooperation towards commonly accepted goals and determining the necessary strategies to achieve these common outcomes should be the intent of a principal working towards the acceptance of group goals. Setting and maintaining high performance expectations for staff and all students is another crucial practice for a principal setting direction as an instructional leader.

Leithwood’s model of instructional leadership includes the key tenet of developing people including the building of teacher competencies, shaping their dispositions and providing them with additional motivation. Leithwood (2010) wrote that “building capacity leading to a sense of mastery is highly motivational” (p. 44). Providing individualized support and consideration conveys the instructional leader’s respect, and concern for individual teacher differences. Practices that support, recognize and reward teachers are described by Leithwood as key leadership behaviours. Building on the tenet of developing people and individual consideration, “encouraging colleagues to take intellectual risks, re-examine

assumptions and look at their work from different perspectives” (Leithwood, 2010, p. 44) are key ways for an instructional leader to provide intellectual stimulation. Offering teaching staff both formal and informal professional development opportunities where they can reflect on their practice is crucial.

After fostering a vision, shared goals and the opportunity for professional development, an instructional leader must then act as an appropriate model by demonstrating core values in day to day interactions and decision making. A principal needs to be highly visible in the school building, interacting with staff and students, and earning trust and respect.

Redesigning the organization involves creating the right working conditions for the reform in which staff are motivated to engage. The work towards inclusive instruction needs to be highly collaborative and the organization needs to be structured in a way that provides opportunities for a collaborative culture and professional learning communities to be built. Collaboration in turn builds trust that then fosters further collaboration. An instructional leader may need to use his/her skills in keeping collaborators focused on shared goals and develop the staff’s willingness to compromise as well as provide the means to collaborate by offering staff opportunities such as common planning times. Other forms of restructuring such as distributing leadership ensure that the culture and organization structure within a school are reflective of each other.

Another component of instructional leadership is ensuring that educators are connected to others in a wider educational environment. As instructional leader, a principal must extend the focus of those in the school outside the building to engage with families, communities and with their school division colleagues. In this way educators keep current on trends, policies, information and advice from the wider community.

Finally the work of principals in recruiting and hiring staff is embedded in managing the instructional program. Recruiting teachers with the interest and skills to further the values of the school staff and collaborate with like minded teachers is a crucial task of principals implementing an inclusive school reform. Providing supervision and evaluations of instructional programming within the school in order to offer teachers the necessary instructional support is also a key task of an instructional leader. As West et al (as cited in Leithwood, 2010) explain “focusing on teaching and learning is essential” and an instructional leader may need to work to buffer staff from distractions to their work that may be “incompatible with agreed upon goals” (p. 48). These distractions may be in the form of student discipline, media, special interest groups or direction from governing bodies incompatible with an overall vision.

Effective principals will also carefully monitor student progress to ensure high expectations for all students are being achieved. Leithwood and Riehl (2005) describe how “successful leaders in schools serving diverse student populations [must] establish conditions that support student achievement, equity and justice” (p. 22). They explain that what principals require is not a single solution or panacea, but a comprehensive framework that assists them in approaching the moral imperative of inclusion. Rather than looking at narrow measures of change (individual student test scores, individual teacher’s competencies) Fullan (2003) argues that changing the overall context will have a deeper and more sustained effect than hoping for individual student improvement. A principal’s attention to the instructional work of teachers and adoption of a common instructional framework is paramount to improving student learning (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005) and perhaps to creating and leading fully inclusive school communities.

Implementing an Inclusive School Reform

What this literature review helps show is that there are many consistencies between the research that describes the way principals lead an improvement in overall learning for students in schools and the support needed from principals for implementation of a school reform implemented to respond to diversity such as Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning. The literature confirms that the Systems and Structures described by Katz (2012a) are central for implementation of inclusive practices. These consist of the support by principals for an inclusive school policy; the principals' own vision and expertise related to inclusive instruction, distributed leadership practices, the provision of professional development for inclusive practices as well as staffing and budgetary considerations that support these practices (Katz & Sugden, 2013).

Researchers have also identified that instructional leadership of principals is essential for implementing an inclusive school reform such as the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning. Stein and Spillane (2005) recommend it is crucial to focus on the instructional leadership of principals and to understand how they work with teachers in the development of inclusive classroom instruction. Leithwood's (2010) Instructional Leadership framework serves to tie these components in the literature together and raises a number of questions for principals implementing an inclusive school reform. Are principals setting the direction for inclusive instruction and are they committed to developing individual people, giving them the skills and support they need? Are principals involved in restructuring the organization so that a collaborative culture is created, including building collaborative relationships with families and the wider community? Are principals involved in managing the instructional program within the school by providing direct instructional support to

teachers? And finally, are principals involved in monitoring the effectiveness of classroom practices in the school? This study examined the extent to which principals were engaging in these instructional leadership practices as they worked to implement the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning in schools they lead.

Summary

Provinces and individual school divisions in Canada continue to move in policy and practice towards more inclusive educational systems. The educational literature of the last decade that has analyzed the core practices for leading diverse schools with inclusive instruction has provided a consistent course for these leaders to follow.

The core practices of instructional leadership identified by Leithwood (2010), along with the way principals use systems and structures that fall under their control (Katz, 2012a) provided a basis for inquiry into the leadership practices of principals who are working to increase inclusive practices within schools. This study used a naturalistic inquiry described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to ask how principals support implementation of an inclusive school reform exemplified by the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning (Katz, 2012a).

Chapter Three: Methodology

I conducted a naturalistic inquiry as described by Guba and Lincoln (1985) to inquire about and interpret how principals in the field support the reform of inclusive instructional practice within schools through implementation of the Three-Block Model of universal Design for Learning as described by Katz (2012a). The qualitative method yielded “inevitable conclusions about what is important, dynamic, and pervasive” (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p. 55) in the field for these principals. Creswell (2007) explains how a qualitative study can expose a void in existing research literature and this void then forms the foundation for the study. One such void is in understanding the complex role of principals in leading a school community that embraces fully inclusive practices.

It is principals who must provide the vision, set direction and provide the motivation for a school reform to be successful (Irvine et al., 2010; Leithwood, 2010; Ryan, 2003; Villa & Thousand, 2005; Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011). However because the social-behavioural nature of a principal’s work is exceedingly complex (Fullan, 2000), it is unlikely that any single independent variable will emerge as an answer to the question about how principals support an inclusive school reform. The leadership tasks of principals will likely be intricately interrelated and these connections can be best expanded upon through qualitative methods (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). There will also be unique situations and as Guba and Lincoln (1985) explain, it may be the subtle patterns and differences that are uncovered through the interview process, rather than gross similarities that may be the key to understanding the experiences of these principals.

The study was informed in part by the existing literature about inclusion of students with a range of ability and disability, Katz’s Three-Block Model of UDL (Katz, 2012a) and the research literature on how principals support change within schools, specifically through his

or her instructional leadership. The research method used is best described as descriptive interpretivism using naturalistic inquiry. Naturalistic inquiry was especially valuable in uncovering and understanding how principals describe the way they themselves respond and lead a school community through such an important and complex change in school-wide practice. As Guba and Lincoln (1985) describe, phenomena exist where multiple realities interrelate with one another. The complex work of principals in leading the implementation of an inclusive school reform is one such phenomenon. Naturalistic inquiry respects the complexity of this work and is a better fit than postpositivist methods for exploring complex problems where the phenomena exists “in the minds of people – what they take to be problems” (p. 59).

Rather than pure prediction and generalization, the goal of this research was to provide a deep understanding of the findings and development of ideas and knowledge about how individual principals are striving to support inclusion in five schools. Understanding both the common and unique experiences around inclusion helped me to better understand the context for inclusive school reform being undertaken by this small group of individual principals (Creswell, 2007).

The goal in conducting the research was not to develop findings that will be readily generalized to a second situation where differences and other complex variables may exist. Rather Wolf and Tymitz (1976-1977, as cited in Guba & Lincoln) sum up the purpose of this naturalistic inquiry well when they describe how a researcher can document “as closely as possible how people feel, what they know, and what their concerns, beliefs, perceptions, and understandings are” (p. 6). The goal was to analyze and understand the principal’s role in implementing inclusive practice using the Three-Block Model of UDL as an exemplar.

Description of Study Environment

Manitoba, like other provinces, continues to move in policy and practice towards a more inclusive educational system. However variability in defining inclusion has been frequently documented in the inclusion literature (Ryndak, Jackson, & Billingsley, 2000). As Timmons and Wagner (2008) explained, inclusion can range from low inclusion settings to robust high inclusion settings and anywhere in between. Participating school division staff are engaged in a process of implementing an inclusive school reform, so to some degree they would agree that inclusion is a practice they are striving to improve. The school communities involved were typical in this regard.

For the purposes of this study, the Three-Block Model of UDL provided the common framework and understanding of inclusive education with a goal to serve all students socially and academically in the same classrooms. With all principals in the study implementing a common model of inclusive practice, I was able to explore the systems and structures as described in block three of the Three-Block Model of UDL and the instructional leadership practices of these principals, knowing that they have a common understanding, if not the objective, to lead fully inclusive instruction within the five schools. The goal of this research was to identify how principals support implementing fully inclusive practices such as the Three-Block Model of UDL in typical public schools in Manitoba.

At the time of this research there were three school divisions with leaders that expressed an interest in divisional implementation and research around the Three-Block Model of UDL. These school division leaders had chosen to prioritize inclusive education in divisional schools and have taken the initiative to support the principals and school staff in implementing the model. These public school divisions represented both urban and rural

regions of Manitoba, and served diverse populations that included students with disabilities, diverse socio-economic circumstances and students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Participant Selection

School division superintendents provided permission to conduct this research in the school divisions they administer. In two divisions student services administrators aware of this research forwarded a recruitment letter and consent form to perspective volunteers. In another division the supervisor of this research, with approval from the superintendent shared information with potential participants, one of whom volunteered.

Ultimately five school administrators volunteered for the study. The participant group included one vice-principal, who identified as working closely with the principal but was lead on inclusive practices within the respective school. The other four participants were principals who had an average of 7 years experience in that role. All led in early years, kindergarten to grade 8, or middle years schools. The schools ranged in student population from approximately 300 students to upwards of 600 students. Four English Program schools and one French Immersion school were represented. The sample included three suburban Winnipeg and two rural Manitoba schools. The study included one male and four female participants. The sample also included two participants who had the unique experience of being principals overseeing the opening of a new school building and spoke about that experience during the interviews.

During the school year in which the study was conducted, principals in the three school divisions received professional development on using the Three-Block Model of UDL as a framework for inclusive practices. All were at the beginning stages of divisional

implementation of the model in the schools in which they worked. One school's staff had been implementing the model for a longer period of time, initiated by the administration; however divisional leadership's support of the model for inclusion was in its first year.

Source of Data

The collection of qualitative data involved digitally-audio recorded initial and follow-up interviews with five school administrators. The initial interviews with all five participants took place in February and March 2014. The timing of the initial semi-structured interviews gave me the opportunity to hear from the participants at a time when implementation of the model was taking place in at least some classrooms within each school. All five participants took part in a subsequent follow up interview at the end of the 2013/2014 school year, at a time when they could reflect back on the full year of implementing this inclusive school reform.

The questions in the interview guide, along with open-ended probing questions, were intended to create an opportunity for participants to share descriptive information, prompt dialogue about relevant issues and topics and provide the opportunity to explain their practical experience implementing the inclusive school reform. Combined, these two semi-structured interviews were very successful in generating thick descriptions (Creswell, 2007) from principals related to systems and structures and their instructional leadership practices in the implementation of the Three-Block Model. Such detailed description added validity to the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Participants were sent a PDF copy of each of their two transcribed interviews and were invited to member check them for accuracy. As Creswell (2005) suggests I asked participants specifically for their validation of these written analyses as well as asking them

what may be missing. All indicated that the transcripts reflected their intended messages.

The naturalistic interview approach of a qualitative study was particularly well suited to inquiring about the experience of implementation of an inclusive school reform as it provided me with the means to compare both subtle and evident similarities and differences in the principals' self-reported views related to planning and implementation process. Perceived facilitators and any challenges or barriers participating principals encounter and how they address these were discussed. The initial interview guide included the following questions and related sub-questions:

1. Number of years experience in the school as principal
2. Grade levels at the school
3. Please describe the school and student population
4. Please describe the school division's philosophy or policy around inclusive schools?
5. What have been your own experiences regarding inclusive practices? Do you have a vision for inclusion in the school in which you lead? Can you describe a way that you share your vision with others?
6. What is being done specifically to support and develop school staff's skills for the implementation of inclusive practices?
7. Can you describe any restructuring, realigning and/or redesigning of the school organization that is taking place?
8. Please describe any changes to the way resources are allocated in the school such as the way educational assistants are assigned, school funding is provided or places that funding is being spent?

9. How has leadership and decision making taken place in the school in which you work?
Please describe any changes that have been made related to leadership and decision making?
10. Can you describe various ways teachers in the school currently collaborate in their work?
11. How would you describe assessment practices in the school? Can you tell me about assessment that is based on projects, writings, demonstrations, debates, simulations, presentations or other real world tasks?
12. Can you describe your role in guiding the instructional program in the school?
13. What do you feel will help in your implementation of the Three-Block Model initiative in the school? (and/or alternatively) What barriers do you anticipate to implementation for you and members of the school community?
14. What are your own thoughts and feelings specifically about the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning?

The follow up interviews were arranged to take place approximately four months later, just prior to the end of the implementation year. I was able to obtain informed consent from the participating principals to interview them in person again, this time inviting them through the interview questions to expand and reflect on their new current phase of implementation of the Three-Block Model of UDL. The second interview sought to determine any changes that occurred as a result of implementation of the Three-Block Model of UDL and about any new or unexpected facilitators or barriers that were emerging. Principals were also asked again about their thoughts and feelings about the Three-Block Model of UDL at a time when they were further along in the process of implementing the model within the schools. Participants were also well into the process of planning for the next school year and reflected on that

experience. The follow-up interview guide included the following questions.

1. Please describe the stage of school in the implementation of the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning?
2. How has your vision around inclusive practices changed since learning more about the Three-Block Model of UDL?
3. What is being done now to support and develop staff's skills related to inclusive practices?
4. Can you describe any further restructuring, realigning and/or redesigning of the school organization that has taken place?
5. What changes have been to the way resources are allocated in the school (i.e. the way educational assistants are assigned; school funding is provided or places that funding is being spent)?
6. Have you made any changes made related to leadership and decision making in the school now that you have learned about the Three-Block Model of UDL?
7. Can you describe any changes to the way teachers work together in light of implementing the Three-Block Model of UDL?
8. Can you tell me about any changes that have been made to the way assessment is practiced in the school?
9. Has your role in guiding the instructional program in the school changed?
10. What has been helping in your implementation of the Three-Block Model initiative in the school?
11. What do you feel will still be needed to further your implementation of the Three-Block Model initiative in the school?

12. What barriers do you anticipate to implementation for you and the members of the school community?
13. What are your thoughts and opinions about the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning now that you are further into the school year? How committed are you to continued implementation of this specific model of inclusive practice?

Creswell explains that qualitative researchers seek to understand both procedural and affective variables (2008). Therefore, while I adhered closely to the interview guides when conducting the semi-structured interviews, I took the opportunity to ask brief probing questions if participants alluded to affective variables. For example, participating principals took the opportunity to share information about their beliefs around inclusion of all students within the school. Knowing that Leithwood et al. (2010) identify that affective variables such as a principal's "instructional capacity to help at-risk students, learn", "unshakable belief in the potential of these students" and the "persistence, patience, and optimism to create productive learning experiences for children" are crucial (p. 156) it was important to explore themes related to these topics. As Guba and Lincoln (1985) explain, subtle, intricately interrelated connections can be uncovered through qualitative methods and may be the key to understanding the findings and making recommendations based on findings.

Researcher Positioning

Stake (2005, cited in Tobin, 2010) explained that qualitative research is reflective and does not necessarily follow the conceptualizations of others (p. 2). Creswell (2007) explains that in qualitative research the researcher functions as the key instrument, collecting data themselves through interviewing participants and later making interpretations of the data they collect (2007).

In my current position as a Consultant for Student Services with Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, I work for the unit of the department responsible for Manitoba's Standards for Student Services (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006) and regulations in the *Public Schools Act* related to Appropriate Educational Programming. Through this work I have travelled extensively in the province visiting rural, urban and northern schools. I have spent time in public schools, independent schools and First Nations' schools. I have spoken with many principals and observed educational practices in the student services domain in many different contexts.

Through my experience working in numerous schools throughout the province I've seen approaches to placement and supporting students with exceptional needs that varies widely. I appreciate the value of having an inclusive model of practice that includes the widest possible range of students in the same classroom, with the same curriculum. I believe in the link between social-emotional learning and academic learning, and have formed the opinion from experience that segregated educational settings negatively impact students socially and academically. My many positive and negative experiences working and teaching in segregated settings and inclusive school settings contributed to the recognition of themes and meanings that I uncovered through analysis of the data.

My earlier experience as a high school special education resource teacher has also contributed to my beliefs and convictions around inclusive education for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. And although my bias is towards all students being in inclusive classrooms I have been involved in working with both elementary and high school students who had severely challenging behaviour that I agreed at the time necessitated removal from the classroom with same age peers to allow for individualized planning and

supports to be put in place. I have worked with other students who had learning needs and challenging behaviour so significant that it seemed that segregated settings were a reasonable option.

During data analysis and reporting I drew on this background and prior experience.

Creswell (2007) explains that:

Researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear and understand. The researchers' interpretations cannot be separated from their own background, history, context and prior understandings (p. 39).

However Moustakas (1994, cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 235) describes how a qualitative researcher collecting data brackets his/her past experiences and "sets aside, as far as humanly possible, all preconceived experiences to best understand the experiences of participants in the study". Knowing my own biases, during the interview process I adhered closely to the interview guide, kept my own perspectives to myself and responded to the participants neutrally regardless of whether I agreed or not with their explanations or opinions. I avoided sharing my opinions, or engaging in a sharing of my ideas. These interviews were an opportunity to hear from participants. Having never been a principal, I appreciated the fact that participants' experiences are different from my own, and I looked forward to the opportunity to hear about inclusive education from their perspective.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the transcribed and anonymized data was undertaken by me, the primary researcher, with support from my advisor. Transcripts were coded for emergent themes using a constant comparative approach. Interview segments were sorted by theme. Data were analyzed deductively and sorted manually using Microsoft Word based on the review of

literature on leading school reform and leadership for diversity. Deductive comparisons of how the principals thinking and actions align with block three of the Three-Block Model of UDL, Systems and Structures described by Katz (2012a) and the core instructional leadership practices identified by Leithwood (2010) were made.

Inductive analysis was conducted as trends emerged from the narrative descriptions. How and why certain trends unfold is often the crucial information to uncover in educational research (Olson, 2010; Timmons & Cairns, 2010). Through inductive analysis, patterns emerged as some topics were raised by a majority of participants, other topics were being mentioned by one or two of the participants and still other individual topics were mentioned by single participants. As Creswell (2007) suggested the frequency of codes is not reported but was viewed merely as an “indicator of participant interest in the code” (p. 152).

Trustworthiness/Validity and Reliability

Member checking, seeking corroborating evidence and themes from multiple members, and an attempt to collect rich, thick description are three validation strategies (Creswell, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1985) that were used in this study. I also looked for disconfirming evidence to gain an understanding of complexities, ironies or tensions that emerged through the interviews with principals. As the primary researcher I was the person to transcribe the recorded interviews. This allowed me the opportunity to review any notes I made during the interviews, reflect on the interview transcripts themselves and recall any relevant non-verbal communication at times during the interview enhancing the richness of the data. As Carlson (2010) recommends, to avoid potential traps during the member checking phase of validation the transcribed narratives were edited very slightly for better flow while maintaining the participants’ original words. Pauses in speech such as “um” were left out and unintended

grammatical errors were corrected.

Confidentiality and Ethics

Prior to conducting this research I addressed all ethical considerations regarding informed consent, confidentiality and benefits/risks. Ethics permission was granted by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) at the University of Manitoba (Appendix).

While participants in this study were not anonymous to me, all steps to maintain participant's confidentiality were taken. Participants were invited to contact me directly via University of Manitoba webmail and to provide their written consent directly to me, rather than through their superintendent's office in order to maintain their confidentiality as participants in the study. A suitable location for the interviews to be conducted, such as a school office or an alternate location was solely the choice of the individual participant. Participants were reminded at the interviews that any involvement was strictly voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

My advisor and I were the sole individuals to review the transcribed interviews. The transcriptions were stored on a password protected computer and paper copies of the transcription stored in a locked drawer in my work office. Audio recordings of the interviews contained on a digital recorder and transcripts were permanently deleted upon completion of the transcriptions. Paper copies of the transcriptions will be shredded upon completion of this research and digital copies will be deleted from computers and email boxes.

The participants' school division will not be named in any current or future dissemination of findings with all school and participant names being anonymized. Participants' answers to

interview questions were grouped so that individual participant responses cannot be identified.

Summary

This chapter explained how I conducted a naturalistic inquiry with both an initial and follow-up interview to seek to understand how five principals supported the implementation of an inclusive school reform as exemplified by the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning described by Katz (2012a). As anticipated, I was able to uncover information about why and how principals are moving towards more fully inclusive practices. I was also able to hear about the thoughts, feelings and commitment they have towards the reform taking place. Qualitative methods were very effective in uncovering and understanding these procedural and affective variables.

Chapter Four: Results

This chapter condenses and summarizes the in-depth responses to the semi-structured interview questions provided by five participants in this study. I was fortunate to interview participants who were very open and willing to provide rich and detailed responses to the interview questions, often expanding on their own responses to provide extensive examples that illustrated their points. Participants took the opportunity to share opinions and tell their stories. What emerged, as Guba and Lincoln (1985) expected from a naturalistic inquiry, is a true sense “about what is important, dynamic, and pervasive” (p. 55) for these principals. Truly the work of principals in leading the implementation of an inclusive school reform is a phenomenon where “multiple realities interrelate with one another” (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Transcribed interviews were printed, reviewed and then coded first for a short list of emerging key words and themes. As Creswell (2007) suggests, a second round of coding was used to expand those original codes. These were reduced and condensed down to 6 themes that, while not pre-determined, roughly paralleled the framework provided by Katz’s (2012a) Block Three focus on Systems and Structures as well as Leithwood’s (2010) conceptualization of Instructional Leadership.

The themes that emerged from the data included: Inclusive Policy and Practice, Setting Direction, Developing People, Redesigning the Organization, Managing the Instructional Program and Allocation of Resources. Participants were also asked in the interview to describe any facilitators and barriers they encountered or expected based on their experiences implementing their current inclusive school reform. These responses are included not as emerging themes but as specific recommendations suggested by participants on how to address barriers they have recognized and to ensure the identified facilitators for the Three-Block Model of UDL are advocated for and implemented in school divisions and schools.

Support for Inclusive Policy and Practice

At the time of this study, the principals involved were striving to make change in the schools in which they worked, towards more inclusive practices. All spoke about his/her own personal beliefs that favoured inclusion. Participants all described a need for inclusive practices, and each had his/her beliefs in inclusion grounded in past experience. I found that principals in this study had experienced a considerable shift in practice and policy over the course of their teaching careers, starting from a time where the segregated areas and the low-inclusion settings described by Timmons and Wagner (2008) were described as the norm. For example, in this study one principal described teaching academic subject classes where inclusion “wasn’t happening” with inclusion being limited to “Phys. Ed. and the vocational stuff”. Students with disabilities would otherwise be academically and socially segregated back in “their areas”.

Another principal described the school building as having once had a cluster site, where students with disabilities from across the school division were bused away from their neighbourhood school to attend. The principal described this as an advantage in terms of inclusive practices for the school compared to those schools that did not have students with disabilities. The principal noted that a “philosophy of integration and then inclusion is very strong. It’s just been longstanding, for twenty plus years.”

Principals commented on being witness to the trend towards increasingly inclusive instructional practices. The principal of the school that had housed a cluster program site, which continued to have a disproportionately high number of students with disabilities, noticed a downward trend in the number of students with disabilities attending the school to better reflect the actual mix of diversity of children living in the neighbourhood. The

principal noted that in addition to school division practices that encouraged parents to send their children with disabilities to their home catchment area school, the move was also attributable to parents themselves recognizing that the benefits of their children with disabilities attending their home school outweigh any advantages of attending a divisional cluster school site.

Another principal spoke about how inclusion has taken root within the school division saying “we have a statement about valuing differences, and being inclusive of everyone. So I find that everything we do these days, it comes back to inclusive practices.” Participants identified that the school culture has been affected by a shift in policy and practice in favour of inclusion adopted at the school division level that recognizes diversity as the norm, and values the strengths and gifts diversity brings to the classroom. Participants spoke about recognizing that diversity exists in many forms, with one principal explaining that “diversity can be anything from an academic range of ability; it can mean family, cultural contexts which is a range of diversity. It can be gender/sexual orientation as a way to think about diversity”.

One school division’s leadership, in particular, was described as having adopted a philosophy that rejected “the idea of problematizing children and labeling them for their deficits”. In that same division it was noted by a principal that “the leadership from our superintendent’s team and the people that are working in special ed. in the coordinating positions all share a really common vision”. This principal noted that “we do not have pull out specialty programs for certain types of kids so we really have everyone together in one classroom community”.

However even with diversity being seen as the norm and with the goal of having students

together in the classroom, well intended but still overt forms of segregation continued within the schools. Segregation in the form of specialized pull-out programs that would take students with disabilities out of the school building and away from same-age peers such as adapted gym, music and movement, special swimming, and bowling continued. In time principals began looking for more inclusive ways of supporting students with disabilities, and worked to end these practices by saying “let’s stop pulling these kids out and not have these programs anymore”.

Principals were asking practical questions about long established practices of segregation such as “why are we using a special needs bus? Why do we have a lunchroom for kids with special needs?” Principals described how they were looking at inclusion in all school based activities. One principal spoke of how inclusion in school field trips was a specific non-negotiable saying “I’ll get you more support but that child is going on the field trip”. A theme that emerged in this study was “all kids should be welcome in all activities” and that “kids are not asked to not be part of something”.

Other changes were being made that were making schools increasingly inclusive places for students with disabilities, including the way space was being used in the school building. Large lifeskills areas were becoming more likely to be sitting empty during the day with a growing trend for students with physical and intellectual disabilities to be in classrooms. In the future lifeskills areas may be used during class time with a range of diverse students including those who do not have special needs.

A change towards more inclusive practices in French Immersion programs was also described, where a principal said about the past “I’ve been told that when the child is having difficulties they would often suggest that it’s the layer of the French that perhaps that’s the

layer that needs to be removed.” After explaining that support from teachers and parents for inclusive practices in French Immersion has not always been prevalent in the school community, the principal said, “we’ve certainly made gains in that area over time”. That principal went on to explain “not only parents, but staff and the students themselves are seeing that everyone has a part here, and everyone can be a learner in a second language.”

Participants also had the experience of being hired as principals and project managers for a new school building in the school division. Building and planning a school from inception was embraced as a unique opportunity to establish inclusive practices from the very beginning. One principal exclaimed, “let’s start right now, let’s really make the push” and described concisely where students with disabilities who may have otherwise been in segregated settings were placed “in the classes.” Having a new school and new school building seemed to allow for an entirely new set of practices to be established from rewriting mission statements to re-visioning the lifeskills area and the canteen.

Participants described first hand experiences that have helped them establish their personal commitment to inclusion. Principals have seen students for whom inclusion has worked. One principal noted:

I have seen kids that had not been included in an authentic way that have been completely integrated, fully participating in classroom life. That is like a standard or benchmark in my mind where I say “there are no excuses. Everyone can make a place for every child in their classroom.” There are such clear examples of that.

Principals of the five schools represented had support for inclusive policy and practice and had committed to inclusive policies and practices exemplified by the Three-Block Model of UDL. While complexities and tensions were discussed, all principals were clearly striving to

implement more fully inclusive practices.

Setting Direction

As instructional leaders, principals demonstrated how they set direction within schools through the expertise and vision grounded in the Three-Block Model of UDL and striving for inclusive practices. Participants reported how they lead school communities in setting goals and spoke of maintaining high expectations for the performance of both students and staff.

Expertise/Vision

Principals had an average seven years of experience in his/her role. One participant spoke about the role of principal, divisional policy and expertise in inclusive practices, and identified the fact that the school division leadership has recognized the need to hire principals with a background that includes teaching students with exceptional learning needs. A background in resource/learning support is regarded as an asset for new principals to the school division. One principal stated “I know for me in my own leadership as a principal, the fact that I was a resource teacher was a huge impact on my practice” citing a common vision of support, inclusion and diversity in teaching as an asset of principals hired with this background.

The importance of leadership in a school community for implementing a vision for inclusion was recognized by a principal who noted, “first you think about what is your vision as a principal in how do we see children here? How do we work as a whole staff at the vision of inclusion?” The importance of the support from school division leadership and principals in supporting inclusive practices was highlighted by another study participant who said:

We can talk all we want about how to change a practice, but if you don't have that momentum from your leadership, is that things will fall really flat in a school and if

your principal doesn't hold that leadership and that vision, where does that leave you?

Principals in this study gave examples of how his/her beliefs about teaching and learning and past teaching experiences have influenced their current vision of inclusive education and understanding that students learn in different valued ways. One principal with experience at the high school level as a teacher and administrator described how "if you were a writer, school was never a problem for you" and how students who struggled in writing should have been engaged by the practical and vocational courses in high school that better matched their learning style. But that this was not often the way it unfolded:

But the problem was that by the time they got to high school they were so pissed with school, it didn't matter what you gave them. You gave (students) Power Mechanics and what they needed, but they hated school. They wouldn't even go through the front doors.

Another participant gained experience in inclusive practices as a music teacher where differentiated instruction and adaptations to learning and assessment tasks were a familiar approach:

As an elementary music teacher you just learned different ways to be inclusive of everyone. If you are singing, everybody can do it. And if you are playing recorders, the ones who don't have the dexterity to do that, would have something modified on their recorder, or be given another part. If it was a dance or a movement activity, and there were some mobility issues, we worked around it.

Principals also described how Block 2 of the Three-Block Model of UDL fit and helped further an existing belief about the need to plan for the whole range of diversity in a

classroom and provide different avenues for student learning:

Really it's just solidified for me everything I believed about inclusion in the fact that learning isn't just linear, it's not demonstrated in only one way and that our role as educators is to provide a variety of ways for kids to show that they understand concepts and to show that they've learned something.

Collins and White (2001, cited in Schmidt and Venet, 2012) identified how important it was for principals to mold "the attitudes and behaviour of not only staff members, but also students, parents and most of the community towards inclusion" (p. 221). One principal was willing to go further to ensure the vision would be clear by "letting the EAs, the teacher know that this is the way it's going to be." However this principal acknowledged that this was "an awesome staff, very cooperative and looking for new ideas." A different study participant, however, described a situation where more resistance to this vision was encountered reporting "there is resistance because people don't like change."

Goals

One participant spoke about setting goals and explained "through our school goal setting, when we do it in the spring, we talk about our divisional goals and what we want to work on as a school." The school staff had engaged in goal setting framed by UDL and it was outlined that "we had a literacy group, we had a numeracy group, and we actually had a school climate group. And it's student and staff climate. We included the social-emotional piece from UDL."

Another principal spoke about ensuring that goal setting would not be a top down process:

I really wanted to provide opportunities and platforms for people to have input, for them to have engaging meaningful conversations about "what is it that we stand for

here? What do we value? What do we believe? What are the school priorities that match those values and beliefs?” and to really work at it.

Planning within one school led to forming Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that served to keep school wide goals in the forefront. The mixed subject area PLC groupings may have also served to encourage integrated curriculum, another tenet of the Three-Block Model of UDL. As this participant described “it’s not necessarily all the ELA teachers getting together in the literacy group and all the Math teachers in numeracy. There is the Band teacher going in the numeracy one.”

Setting and maintaining high performance expectations for staff and all students and determining the necessary strategies to achieve them was a practice identified by principals in this study. One principal identified the group goal of having teachers increasingly able to support students with strategies and resources in their classrooms rather than having them pulled out of class.

High Performance Expectations

Principals described having high expectations for students, including those with exceptional learning needs:

Regardless of their grade level, or if they are in a combined class or if they are in a single grade class, that they are being challenged at their level. That they are receiving challenges, and that they are receiving support and that they are on a path for growth.

The high expectations principals held for students, teachers and other staff were also held for themselves. In one case it was reported that Katz’ work with the school raised the expectations on division and school administration, holding principals and senior

administrators to account by saying “now your administration and your senior administration have some work to do here”. This principal recognized that “teachers are not going to feel that they have to move forward if you are not”.

One principal described once being a teacher and feeling that the responsibility for teaching students with exceptional needs in the classroom was being taken away by “people that were specialists and EAs.” This principal described feeling like an outsider in the conversation about the child’s learning needs, yet was left thinking “I know this child”, I work with this child every day.” Now as principal a high expectation is held for teachers to step up and take primary responsibility for teaching all learners in the classroom:

When a teacher this year has said to me “I can’t be alone for 15 minutes with this little person in my classroom, I need the EA there” what do I need to do as a principal to look at how to strengthen that teacher’s belief in them self that you are the primary teacher and caregiver and responsible for this child.

Rather than looking to pull out programming outside the classroom, one principal described the expectation that the classroom include the type of “robust and dynamic learning opportunities” to meet the needs of any student in the classroom and avoid pull-out programming. Having worked in a resource teacher role this principal recalled “always trying to help teachers realize their own capabilities within themselves to work with all kinds of children.” Another described how teachers “are allowed to make a lot of decisions”, but that they are aware of both high expectations and non-negotiables such as the expectation that there will be inclusive practices.

Principals also maintained a high expectation for teachers to attend professional development related to students with disabilities, to keep reflecting on their practice and to

keep moving forward in using the Three-Block Model framework. Recognizing that achieving UDL in a classroom is a moving target, the principal explained to staff “you can always get better, you can always do more things and UDL is another push in that same direction.”

High expectations for making inclusion work extended to school support staff. One particular situation required a principal to intervene when a student was going to be expected to ride the school bus without additional adult supervision and the school bus driver was expressing resistance. The principal described how some proactive strategies, reassurance and support were offered to the driver but the high expectation for inclusion on the bus was maintained. The principal also mentored this staff on the importance of a positive attitude by saying “If you believe it’s going to work that’s really going to help.”

Another principal, talking about the expectation for staff to co-teach, asked the rhetorical question “do you make it optional or do you say it’s going to happen?” And then answered by saying “sometimes you need to say it’s going to happen too.” This principal elaborated and said, “it might mean individual conversations. Find out their reasons. Maybe they have a reason why they don’t think it works and you can sort of share your philosophy.” One experienced principal joked that school staff “probably complain behind my back” and then reflected that “I do have high expectations, but they never cease to live up to them.”

This principal also spoke about the high exceptions that the Three-Block Model maintains for all other students in the classroom, asking teachers to consider “how do we weave in opportunities that really push our gifted learners? How do we weave and plan for learners for whom English is an additional language?” So rather than seeing a need to isolate gifted learners or EAL learners, this principal recognized that high expectations for academic goals

and language learning could be maintained in a diverse classroom through UDL.

Principals leading an inclusive school reform identified the importance of maintaining high performance expectations for themselves, their teachers and support staff and for all students in the inclusive classroom. High expectations for inclusive practices and for performance towards expected learning outcomes are identified as a key component of implementing an inclusive school reform. With the vision that all students can learn and can contribute in their own valued way, high achievement is an attainable goal.

Developing People

Participants recognized the individual personal pressures and conflicting commitments that teachers experience, and spoke about a willingness to accommodate and support teachers who feel this pressure. Principals spoke of an approach to educational leadership based in coaching and mentoring teachers, educational assistants and other staff in inclusive practices rather than giving ultimatums or reassigning them. Principals explained how they back up the high expectations they hold for staff by providing opportunities for individualized support and professional development. This aligns with Leithwood's (2010) recommendation that staff must be able to grow professionally, to re-examine their beliefs and to see their practice from a different perspective.

Individualized Support/Considerations

Teachers will all have individual preferences and teaching styles that need to be supported. Principals shared the ways they get to know the individual strengths and needs of teaching staff and then provide individualized support for their professional practice. To support teachers in their practices, one principal described how the school administration asks teachers "what are your professional questions?" This principal reported a need to

understand and connect to classroom teachers, to know what their questions are, what they are working on, and how they are working to improve their practice.

Principals described wanting to provide staff with flexibility and choice. One example that was shared involved making decisions about forming a multi-age classroom in the school. In this case the principal, a self described “believer in the benefits of multi-age” left the decision up to teachers: “we just open that up to staff to say ‘who has wanted to try it and looking for that opportunity.’” Understanding the need for teachers to be involved in professional decisions the principal said, “We wouldn’t want to mandate that kind of idea. It’s something that as a teacher you would embrace.”

Principals also recognized a potentially unhealthy level of commitment and time pressures placed on teachers. One principal reflected on this by saying, “I don’t know where they find the time to do it. One gal’s got two little kids, activities all evening; she must not sleep or something, I don’t know. They do school all day long.”

Another principal recognized that teachers are individuals who may require different levels of support at different times; giving the example of one teacher needing to be offered some professional literature, while another teacher may need more direct assistance. Needing to “differentiate for staff as much as staff needs to differentiate for kids” and recognizing that “different people are ready for different things at different times” was how one participant described this need to recognize individual considerations.

Another participant illustrated how principals may need to support individual teachers by addressing behaviour referrals made to the school office but at the same time encouraging the teacher to reflect on their classroom teaching approaches as a possible underlying issue:

When I have kids come in here, a lot of the time if it’s a behaviour thing, it is

attached to “I don’t get this”. So it’s a teachable moment for me to talk to the teacher. “I had a chance to talk to..., I’m going to address the discipline, but have you thought of trying this (teaching strategy) with him”

In this situation a principal’s expertise, experience and credibility are recognized as crucial when guiding and mentoring staff. As one study participant summarized “When you have that credibility with a staff and you’ve kind of walked the walk, and you’ve had your own PD and thoughts and connections, it’s easier to do that than to pull something out of thin air.”

Principals each provided examples of how individualized support and consideration was being offered. However this was an area where tension and complexity arose. Principals described situations where it was unclear whether some teachers committed to implementing inclusive practices but required support to achieve this vision, or whether they were openly resisting a change in direction due to being overwhelmed or being unwilling to adjust their practices.

When addressing resistance, one principal reflected on using an approach developed through coaching to provide the individual support to staff, where the coach has a responsibility to work with players and teach them the required skills and attitudes.

This is your staff. If there is someone there that doesn’t buy in, you’re not going to get rid of them, especially if you hired them. They’re yours. So I always come back to the coaching thing. That’s how I treat the staff. Same as I would if they were a team.

Some participants seemed to be grappling with this tension more than others with one principal explaining, “I think recognizing that I have to differentiate for staff as much as staff needs to differentiate for kids. Different people are ready for different things at different

times.”

Modelling and Professional Development

All five school staff represented in this study were receiving ongoing professional development on the Three-Block Model of UDL. The Three-Block Model framework provided the common language and understanding for this study of inclusion. Principals described how they came to be involved in specific professional development on the Three-Block Model of UDL. One principal described how it began as a response to an evolving need within the school to teach the curriculum to an increasingly diverse group of students. The principal described how UDL was an approach chosen by teachers to address this challenge:

A couple of staff members approached me about in interest in exploring UDL further. So we agreed to a book study, we wrote a proposal, as to how we would like to grow in this area, and how Jennifer Katz’ support would be of benefit to us. Beginning by purchasing a book for each teacher to use in a book study was a common approach used by principals.

Leaders of one school division represented in the study maintain the practice of having a regular and specific time allotted one day each month following an early dismissal for staff professional development. This time is separate from staff meeting time. The principal reported how they “really differentiate what a staff meeting looks like and what that professional development time looks like in (the school division). It has to be PD oriented.”

Participants described the importance of professional development by principals with one saying “we’re receiving the PD so we can be supporting of the staff.” Another elaborated further:

Keeping myself updated professionally and current is important to me because I think I need to be sure that what I am asking my staff to do, that it's something that I know about well enough that I can coach them in that area.

Participants described their involvement with school division staff in lead positions for numeracy, literacy and UDL in planning school division wide professional development for staff. In this case PD was related to multiple intelligences, a tenet of the Three-Block Model. A goal of this PD was to help teachers strengthen their understanding that “you can do these types of things with an MI twist to it.”

Ongoing PD opportunities were being offered in divisions that would encourage conversations and problem solving around ongoing implementation of the UDL model:

We had a conversation cafe where schools who had begun to explore UDL got together and shared experiences about things that went well, challenges we've encountered and the “ah ha” moments. So there was a chance just to dialogue with other colleagues and administrators about their experiences with UDL.

One participant specifically spoke about the importance of being viewed by staff as a learner, and the importance of a principal attending professional development with staff. This person stated, “I need to model that I'm a learner too.” This principal described how completing a Master's program in Education at the University of Manitoba was a positive experience from the perspective of modeling and offering professional learning opportunities for staff:

I could come back and I could really reflect on our practices and improve them. So usually after each summer I would have “what did I learn this summer sessions” for my staff. After school sessions where I provided dinner, [so they could] come and

hear what I learned that summer and how it impacted me.

A different participant described a number of key practices by which principals become viewed as the educational leader of a school:

Through professional development, through reading, thinking, talking and I think that the co-teaching as principals and the work that we do in supporting the vision in the support team. You are educational leaders in the school.

Principals have positioned themselves as instructional leaders and as learners through their openness to professional development. By providing individualized support, allowing for individual teachers circumstances and taking part in professional development with teachers, principals have modeled openness to exploring inclusive practices, and have encouraged staff to develop their competencies. While some participants have grappled with tensions in the process, these tensions reveal areas where additional support or recommendations for practice can be made.

Redesigning the Organization

In order to create the right working conditions and staff motivation for inclusive school reform, redesigning the organization of the school structure is likely necessary. The work done implementing inclusive instruction must be highly collaborative and the school structure must provide opportunities for a collaborative culture and professional learning communities to be built. A principal must keep collaborating teachers focused on shared goals, develop the staff's willingness to compromise, and offer them common planning time. Other forms of restructuring such as distributing leadership ensure that the school's culture and organization structure reflect each other.

Distributed Leadership

Principals spoke about an approach that uses shared leadership where they seek out co-leaders who will share in the responsibility for aspects of their complex role. The Three-Block Model of Universal Design includes distributed leadership practices that can empower teachers to be educational leaders in the classroom (Katz, 2012a). As one principal asked:

Which are the teachers on my staff that do the most brilliant job of including all kids? Who are the teachers on my staff that diversify their practice, their instruction and get everyone included? Who are those teachers on staff who then share that vision with others?

As another participant described, a principal cannot manage every detail of classroom practice and must rely on others to take on this responsibility: “You are really asking your support team and your resource teachers to lead on that vision in the daily in classroom level.” Another principal made clear the necessity of knowing “who are my go to people for different things” and explained that distributed leadership could be one of the good things that “come out of when you are stretched a little.”

Encouraging staff to mentor other staff is another example of distributed leadership practiced by participants in this study. A participant described how a Math teacher in one school is “going into other classes to do some modeling and support.” In another school where teachers were mentoring and training new staff, one principal said, “you notice teachers’ real skills in inclusiveness when you have a new staff member come on that is not used to your practices.” The ability of a teacher with a vision of inclusion to mentor a new staff member in the practical implementation of that vision can be a powerful demonstration of that teacher’s commitment and skill.

A veteran participant also expressed how experienced principals may have an advantage

over their newer colleagues when it comes to distributed leadership, saying “as I get older I get better at distributed leadership. I think as you become more confident, just as with teaching, you can give up more and more ownership to more groups.”

Building a Collaborative Culture

For principals that I interviewed, a collaborative school culture included student involvement. One principal reported that with a focus on social emotional learning in the classrooms and throughout the school, “there are just so many more opportunities for conversation to get to really know your kids. And kids sense that right away. They sense whether you are interested or whether you are trying to get to know them or not.” Students at one school were involved in conversations with the principal about school climate, including “strengths and weaknesses of the building” and any other areas where the principal wanted to get feedback.

A principal described collaboration with a committee of students to develop a school dress code and electronic use policy. Teachers selected the students who participated, but as the principal described, the students were not necessarily those with top grades; rather they were those who would share opinions and ask challenging questions: “They were the first ones to play with it and then I took it to parents and then I took it to staff. So it’s coming from them and worked out really well.”

Another principal met with students with disabilities individually to find out what options they wanted the school community to provide them:

Every child that was designated as special needs, I met individually with them, even with their communication boards, and I wanted to find out what they were interested in. If we could run any club that you’d want us to run, what would you like it to be?

Supporting collaboration between colleagues was another role principals took on. Principals encountered situations where teachers were actively looking to collaborate and share classroom practices, saying, “I’ve seen my colleague doing that across the hallway and I’m really intrigued by that idea and so could I try that?” Principals described how teachers would carve out additional time to collaborate, outside of the short time designated for collaboration in the school day. One principal reflected that “they need more than the 37.5 minutes. So I see them collaborating often. Lunch hours, recess, after school they are doing planning.” Yet another participant described how implementing the UDL tenet of integrated curriculum created another opportunity for teacher collaboration: “I’ve got two teachers who do their parent-teacher [conferences] together. One’s Math/Science, The other is LA/Social”.

Recognizing that the traditional large staff meeting environment is a deterrent for some teachers in sharing their ideas, one principal described ensuring that smaller group meetings occur to encourage everyone to have a voice. As the principal made clear, “if they know they will have that opportunity in a small group, the team planning group, that’s where they’ll talk, and then we get their good idea. So that works really well for us. And then they all feel like they are heard.” The importance of supporting an authentic collaborative culture was summarized by the principal who said, “the big piece is you have to be including and asking people good questions and giving them time to talk and think. Ask for their input and then don’t just make that an empty exercise.”

Structuring the Organization to Facilitate Work

Principals described their ongoing efforts to create an efficient and productive work environment that would produce improved outcomes for students but at the same time would keep work manageable for teachers. When speaking specifically about planning around UDL

one principal expressed that, “it shouldn’t be more work. We have enough time at school with Team Planning and getting them together with some prep time that that’s when it should happen.” Another principal spoke about the need to ensure that meetings and planning time were used efficiently:

There had been a tendency in this school for [staff] meetings to be housekeeping, let’s plan the next dance, let’s plan the next...and that’s all well and good but that’s really valuable time to talk about your practice, talk about what you are seeing with your kids in your classroom, so that has been a shift in our school where we’re taking half of that meeting time to work on professional focus.

Participants described situations where reorganizing school structures to encourage and facilitate collaborative team work occurred. In one situation the principal reported, “rather than having one 3-4 combined and one 4-5 combined...we thought having four 3-4 combined would allow for a really strong team.” In another school it was explained how the administrators “physically re-structured the building where we’ve moved some teachers so same grade teachers can be near each other in the school.” This participant further explained “we have our two French teachers that are right across from each other, so they share iPads, they share resources. A lot is about proximity.”

Another area where that was considered was classroom composition to facilitate student learning. A principal summarized by saying “We just spent a lot of time talking about class placements and having those round table discussions and really looking for the classroom environment where students will learn best.”

Creating Productive Relations with Families and Communities

Working constructively with families was identified by principals as an important part of

his/her work. This meant occasionally answering tough questions about inclusive practices posed by parents of children with and without disabilities and in at least one case, having to maintain decision making authority while managing the demands of an active and vocal group of parents. Principals described the need to show leadership and confidence in the teaching approaches chosen by the school leadership and staff:

Families that are sending their kids here and they want to see the traditional approaches. So you are educating parents. We just had our parent teacher interviews. You are educating families, the parents as well as the students on that “this is okay; this is how they are showing their learning.”

One principal was actively engaged in informing parents about new combined class configurations that will be in place for the fall and explaining to them how this arrangement supports inclusive teaching practices:

We are having a meeting and explaining the UDL model will be part of our presentation to inform parents about how this will look in the classrooms and why we feel this will be best for the teachers as well as their children and how they’ll learn best.

In another situation a principal described the need to explain the rationale for a shift to more inclusive practices to parents of children with disabilities who asked, “what happened to bowling, what happened to our kids being pulled out of gym? We like adapted gym.” Appreciating these concerns, the principal outlined that the concerns of the parent included “is my child safe? Are they getting the help that they need?” The principal suggested that “case by case we could really show parents that yes their children are right in the midst of all their peers and thriving and doing well....and what parent doesn’t want that?” Inviting a

parent into the school is one approach used by this principal to help build a sense of trust.

One principal described the effect of an anxious parent being welcomed in the classroom to see her son, saying “She just sees how included he is. She always worried that he wouldn’t be”.

The French Immersion program created an opportunity for one staff to work productively with families of students with learning challenges. The principal worked to provide the vision and direction to staff in ensuring the French Immersion program was inclusive. As the principal described, “there are many things we can do to support all children in our environment. And if the decision of the family and the child is to have them learn French, then we need to find the ways to make that work.”

Participants described the active involvement of parent groups in fundraising for activities and organizing cultural activities for students. Parents were involved supporting an Arts program and running a parent council. However one study participant described how direct parent volunteerism during the school day seems to taper off in one middle years noting, “I don’t know if they think that because they are 12 and 13 and 14 that “we don’t need to come to the school.”

Connecting the Classroom to the School, Division and Community

Situating and connecting a school to the wider community is another tenet of instructional leadership. As instructional leader a principal must extend the focus of school activities outside the building by staying current on trends, policies, information and advice from the wider community.

Principals described how classroom teachers were not working in isolation. Student Services staff and divisional support were reported to be actively involved. As one principal

described, “you’ve got your support people with you, resource and guidance helping you to answer ‘what’s happening with Billy?’” In this case, the principal communicated with the classroom teacher and students frequently about issues and situations that arise in the school. Additionally the principal explained, “I do the same with my office people, office and caretakers, because these guys, hook up with some of those kids too” to create an environment where students can be supported by the wider school community.

Another principal spoke about a change in special education philosophy where school staff has been looking at helping students and families connect with the wider community rather than isolating them from after school and community activities:

We were running a Special Olympics program in our school. We stopped that and we talked to parents about what groups were available in the community in the evenings. Because that’s opening up more doors for those kids to meet more peers in their neighborhoods.

The principal explained how this fit with efforts to promote authentic social inclusion outside of the school building and beyond the school day. The principal was involved in actively changing some very traditional special education practices and asking questions such as “why do we take kids swimming when that’s something parents could integrate them into?” The principal was actively guiding parents in connecting their child with disabilities to the wider community rather than working to provide a substitute for it.

Redesigning the organization of the school can create the working conditions and staff motivation for inclusive school reform. Inclusive instruction in schools requires a high level of collaboration and the structure of the school must foster a collaborative culture; open to the input and the concerns of students, families and the wider professional learning

community. A principal must offer teachers common planning time and focus them on the achievement or shared goals around inclusion. Ultimately it is necessary for the school's culture of inclusion and organizational structure to reflect each other.

Managing the Instructional Program

Ultimately a principal is responsible for all aspects of teaching and learning within the school. This responsibility begins with recruiting and hiring staff with the interest and the skills to further the vision of the principal. Supervising and evaluating the instructional program within a school in order to give teachers the necessary instructional support is also fundamental to managing the instructional program. In addition, an instructional leader may need to work to buffer school staff from distractions to their work that may be "incompatible with agreed upon goals" (Leithwood, 2010, p. 48). Distractions that must be managed may include student discipline, addressing parent demands, handling media inquiries, responding to special interest groups or reframing direction from above that seems incompatible with the school wide vision for inclusion.

Staffing and Mentorship

Principals described their active work in hiring staff with the necessary skills who would work to support the vision for inclusion that they and the school division leadership were working towards. One principal described asking potential new classroom teachers and learning support teachers specifically about their understanding of UDL and Multiple Intelligences and asking applicants for new positions directly "would you be willing to work in this model?"

Another principal reported how interviewing new teacher candidates involves asking

about Universal Design for Learning; “and if UDL wasn’t familiar to them just probing and questioning in the area of multiple intelligences.” Candidates need to have knowledge about using different student groupings and must be familiar with the concept of democratic classrooms. As the principal made clear, “looking at potential teachers for our building I was very aware of whom I wanted to have here and the kind of philosophy I wanted them to have”.

Another principal described the process of mentoring experienced teachers who are new to the school community and who are unfamiliar with the model of inclusion being implemented in the new school:

We have a new teacher to our school this year, very experienced, but came from a school where the resource model was “pull them out, work with them, push them back in” and we don’t do that here. So I think for some staff it’s really some hand holding at the beginning. Some explanations, some face to face talks about what we believe. “We’ll support you in any way that you need” either myself working in rooms, the VP or resource teachers.

While explaining the benefits of supporting teaching staff as mentors for other teaching staff, one veteran principal disparaged her own lack of recent classroom experience, by asking rhetorically, “when is the last time you were in a classroom?” However, participants did all have teaching backgrounds from which they drew their experience, including one who held a curriculum lead teacher position and another who was a veteran high school math teacher. These participants had honed their instructional skills in the classroom and gained their credibility as teacher leaders.

Participants worked to maintain credibility by remaining active as teachers in the

schools in which they lead. One principal explained, “I also teach guided reading three times a cycle. I teach every day.” In another school the principal and vice-principal also maintain their connection to the classrooms and to teaching. The principal reported, “we all have certain classroom teachers that we co-teach and work with throughout the year.” One principal outlined how the principal and vice principal were working to be “teaching principals” co-teaching with teachers in the classrooms to truly get the sense about how all students can be differentiated for in inclusive classrooms.

Principals were active contributors to discussions about teaching and learning in schools. They involved themselves in “talking about the kids, talking about practice” and asking teachers “what are you doing in the classroom to support this learner?” Principals also worked as active mentors to teachers, not with an intentionally evaluative stance but with the goal of supporting their professional development. It must be acknowledged, however, that it is difficult for principals to separate their evaluative role from their attempts to work alongside teachers as colleagues, and it may be just as difficult for teachers to separate out this understanding.

Collaborative Decision Making

Participants were improving their practices to ensure staff was engaged and involved in decisions that affected teaching and learning. As one principal noted, when speaking about determining topics for professional development days, “it shouldn’t be me deciding it; it should be us deciding it.” Another participant described how the principal and vice-principal in one school were striving to include teachers in decisions about teaching and learning in the school explaining about the staff “we all have a voice”.

Principals described having open door policies where teachers were encouraged to raise

concerns and to ask questions. As one principal reported, “I think it’s important that if they have questions they feel that they can come and bounce things off me.” Another principal was working to ensure that decisions that were being made in disparate groups were at least communicated to teachers and educational assistants. The principal asked rhetorically, “We’re meeting and are talking about kids. Alright, while it’s nice that we’ve done that but how do we filter that down to the teachers, and the EAs?”

One principal illustrated how collaborative decision making about creating combined classrooms worked to ensure buy-in about a decision that may otherwise have been a divisive issue for the staff:

And at the end of the day maybe not everyone loves that we are ending up with four [grade] 3-4 combined classes, but that’s the best decision for the school and for the students. And the staff agrees to that even though they may be the one that needs to make the change.

Team Planning Time

Lacking time to plan was emphasized by all participants as a potential barrier to implementing the Three-Block Model of UDL. However it is an area where school staff, and in some cases school division leaders have focused resources and attention. For instance, in one school division “Teacher Talk Time, three release days that teachers in K-5 can use to work specifically in numeracy and literacy” is provided. As the principal described:

The intention is that you want people to collaborate and talk about their practice, come together, talk about the children, talk about work samples, teach in front of each other, talk about what they are seeing, what are their big questions... and inevitably it often comes back to “how do we include all learners?” and make

meaningful teaching decisions about all of those kids in our class to help them succeed.

Within another division a school staff used team planning periods to ensure that administrators, guidance, resource and the computer technology teachers meet once a cycle with teams at each grade level as well as the Arts, Home Ec. and Technology Education teachers. As the principal said, “they know every week they are going to get 40 minutes with us”. Educational assistants also have a meeting time with administrators each cycle “so stuff you bring to staff you can now bring to them”.

In another school the principal described how administrators and resource teachers cover classrooms “so that teachers can learn from other teachers.” Providing the rationale for the practice the principal said, “I think they learn better from being with other teachers who are doing it.”

After describing the efforts to provide teachers with team planning time, one principal said, “I think teachers do appreciate time” and then defended allocating significant amounts of it to planning explaining “teachers don’t waste time. They might (talk) for the first few minutes and then they are into it. They are just wired that way.”

Scheduling in Cohorts/Teams

One participant indicated that “timetabling to allow teachers who really work well together, for them to have common preps, or common timetables so they can co-teach” was a significant task for principals who participated in this study. In the words of one principal “co-teaching is tough because it’s always easier to say than to do because we’re restricted by timetables.”

One school community may be ahead of others in its school division in accommodating

co-teaching and collaboration as the principal reported, “we are a little bit ahead of the curve because other schools don’t have that. They want to do it but it’s not easy. You have to have people cover some classes but it works out.” In this school creating the timetable is a collaborative process that reportedly meets the needs of teachers:

You know our timetable right now is pretty good. We have team planning on there and everything else and I kept the timetable two years in a row. I’m asking them now, “is our timetable good? What do you want for next year?”

Another principal described the process of developing a timetable that balances and addresses competing pressures by emailing staff and asking about any aspects of collaboration that staff feel the timetable could help facilitate: “if there is co-teaching, if there are things that you really want to focus on and the timetable will make a difference in how you do that, send me your request.” The principal later expressed, “it’s worth it in the end” but acknowledged the difficulty of “trying to make it all fit.”

Co-teaching

One principal described how implementing the Three-Block Model of UDL prompted the school staff to consider co-teaching for the first time. As the principal reported, “every teacher has a co-teach period” and the principal provides “a second adult in the classroom and doing some smaller group instruction, dividing and doing some guided work in the areas of reading and math.”

With schedules and timetables designed to best facilitate collaboration, principals described the need to ensure that their vision for collaborative practices translates into the classroom:

You do all that big picture work with your staff but then you also have to work with

your support team and what they imagine that work to be and then how they translate that into their work in the classrooms by co-teaching.

One school's leadership was moving to combine the traditional roles of Resource Teacher and Guidance Counselor to increase the support provided in the classroom. The principal reported:

What we've seen is by having those two positions separated out there is less actual work by either of those people in someone's classroom.... A lot of people come with that guidance background, or are looking for a specific guidance position, but we really wanted to really strengthen the support in the classrooms.

In some schools, participants described recruiting co-teachers and facilitating connections. One principal explained "I'm going to bring in my school technology teacher who has been doing a lot of co-teaching. I'd like to get him more involved with the whole process."

Another study participant described making a similar connection: "We had talked to one of our male resource teachers and asked if he wanted to do a little bit of co-teaching this year, so we've freed up some time in his schedule."

Consistent, Authentic and Co-developed Assessment of Outcomes

One theme related to the Three-Block Model of UDL about which several participating principals spoke was the occasion to give teachers a structured opportunity look at curriculum outcomes. Principals cited the implementation of the model as being an "opportunity to relook at curriculum". Participants were finding that in some instances teachers had not looked at their curricula for many years. As one principal explained, this re-examining of curricula refocused teachers on outcomes, and had a direct impact on consistency in assessment: "I want this kid to know this at the end of this unit."

As another principal reported, “the level of planning was deeper and more thoughtful and I think that part of the planning was thinking about what outcome needs to be achieved. What is the essential learning?” This person elaborated further to suggest:

They were digging deeper and looking at the curriculum again, and some of them admittedly said that “I haven’t looked at this in a while” because you get into a pattern, and some of our staff here have been in this building, in this grade, for 20 years without change. So it was a refresher for everyone.

Another principal described how this re-examination gave teachers the opportunity to use curricula to develop programming for students with significant learning challenges based on grade appropriate curriculum, “where you are respectful of the individuals needs but you are also considering what is in the Grade 4 curriculum that you can mesh the goals into”.

Participants reported that use of rubrics and other forms of authentic assessment developed with students were also increasing in schools that participated in implementing UDL:

Teachers involve students in the creation of criteria and rubrics and then involve them in looking at “where are we on the rubric?” And they’ll practice in front of the teacher and receive feedback, perfect it and then come back.

The way that teachers assess student outcomes has been changing, however participants still saw some teacher resistance and reluctance to make changes. As one study participant explained “we still have some of the traditional paper and pencil, and people who will keep that as their last hill to die on.” The concerns raised by this school’s staff were described: “What is this going to look like for us? How are we going to be comfortable to defend or explain our anecdotal (assessments)?” Because a lot of teachers say “I’ll sit and listen to a

kid read for fluency and so on, but how do you explain that to a parent that's looking at this?"

However progress was reported. The same participant gave the example of one teacher in the school; "the kill and drill, textbook, read type" who has begun to create some centers based learning opportunities in the classroom. As the participant recalled, "it really made him nervous." Learning about UDL was having the effect of "making them more comfortable and validating to them that it is okay to be doing these things."

On the whole this change in practice was described by principals to be a challenge but not a barrier:

I think the challenge is the getting teachers to wrap their brain around it to offer those opportunities to all kids. Because I think that can be a real legitimate challenge.

Looking at the curriculum and finding "what are the essential questions, and the "how do I plan for that" and "what does the rubric look like." It's a different way of thinking than the ways a lot of teachers have had to do in the past.

Overall principals spoke about the range of different assessment that they are now seeing used by teachers in the classroom. Examples participants gave included writing samples, reading inventories, project based learning, using iPads for video recording, art infused learning, conversations, observations, songs, poems and skits. As one principal said:

I would say that assessment is always grounded in the real work of kids. We've moved away from, paper pencil, less textbooks, and tried to make the educational experience real.

One principal summarized the rationale for differentiated assessment by explaining "if you are saying that there are many ways to be smart then you certainly need your assessment

practices to match those values and beliefs.” Another principal described the evolution in the thinking of school staff, describing how “the majority of teachers say “you know what? Kids really do learn differently. I need to teach differently. And it’s okay for me to do an observation and put a mark on it if I want to.”

Buffering

Principals spoke a considerable amount about their role advocating, supporting, getting to understand and facilitate the work of teachers. In some cases this would be material resources, supports or equipment. Another principal described “trying to think about how we could do it better, if it’s a timetabling thing that I could solve.” For another principal buffering included improving teachers’ working conditions so that they could focus their attention on the classroom:

And I see my role in terms of leadership as really aligning the stars, like giving them all the materials, and equipment and PD. Everything I can do to stack the table to be able to do the work that they have to do.

Appreciation and a respect for the value of a teacher’s time were also referred to by principals in the interviews. One principal held small meetings with different school teams to address specific issues and then meeting as a larger staff to address issues of interest to everyone. As the principal explained, “when we have our full staff meeting, which is twice a cycle, then what happens is we meet for 10 minutes. And everyone’s had their time. So our staff meetings are very short.”

Even after explaining the high expectations one principal holds for implementing a UDL approach in the classroom, this expectation is tempered with an appreciation of the pressures and time constraints of teachers. Perhaps knowing that the Manitoba Teachers Society has

linked the pressure of planning for students with diverse needs (MTS, 2010, p. 20) to increased stress, anxiety and preparation time for teachers, one principal described treading cautiously when perceived to be increasing teacher workload:

A teacher may say “I’ve got this prep off, can I come and work with you?” You can and that’s fine but you are using your prep to do that. Some are good with it, others may not be.

One principal summarized by saying, “I need to make sure that learning is priority for everyone. And whatever I can do to make that better then that’s what I need to do.”

Monitoring and Sustaining

Principals engaged in efforts to evaluate and develop plans to sustain inclusive practices that have been implemented during the reform process. One participant described how this was a part of school planning “so that you put it as a priority and you actually work through the ways that that’s being demonstrated in the school.” For this school staff, implementation involved year end data collection directly related to the identified priority around diversity of teaching strategies. The principal outlined the result of this data collection process saying “through that data collection we were able to determine that there were some things that needed to systematically, structurally change.”

One principal described the role of visiting classrooms in order to monitor, evaluate and coach teachers on classroom practices:

When I go into rooms I’m using Notability on my iPad where I have a rubric of what I want to look for in my walk thorough, things that I want to see happening in classrooms. And after I’m in the rooms sending my immediate feedback, “I love what I saw here, had you thought about this, or, what’s happening in this area?”

Another principal also spoke about the importance of visiting teachers in the classroom and spending that time: “When I visit a classroom it’s not the three minute walk through. It’s more like a 15 to 20 minute *stay and learn* what they are learning.”

School division practice played a role in monitoring the effectiveness of programming and practices within schools through annual reviews conducted in areas such as Phys Ed, assessment or Student Services. Divisional leaders want to understand “where we are, where would we like to go, and what do we need to get there?” Principals may make these reviews an opportunity to “also reflect on some of the models that we follow, like the class review, UDL, co-teaching, use of EAs.” Principals reported how they have a very good sense of where teachers are in implementing this particular inclusive school reform:

I have two teachers that I would say are actively improving. They are very involved in it and now they are reflecting and making changes. And then I have another two teachers that are beyond beginning. They’ve implemented some but not to the degree that the other two teachers have.

Study participants also reflected on how the information they have gathered has influenced their own thinking about implementation of the Three-Block Model of UDL:

I could see the students that would normally have struggled in other classroom contexts be alive and involved and engaged and able to demonstrate their understanding through the different opportunities.

Principals spoke about ways they hope to sustain momentum and build upon the current inclusive school reform and how they can support teachers to “do more of this in their classrooms in the upcoming school year.” One participant expressed relief that teaming meetings, a potentially crucial component of implementing the reform, “are going to carry on

more next year.” Another principal also spoke about the importance of carrying on successful practices and not cutting corners in implementing the Three-Block Model:

We are looking at “how we sustain?” A teacher will say “we’ve done the survey last year, why do I have to do it next year?” So we are having conversations about that.

All the kids have now seen Block One, all nine lessons. So does that mean next year in the fall are we going to go through the nine lessons again? I say yes.

Divisional support for sustaining the inclusive school reform was also identified as instrumental for the staff in one school. As the principal expressed, “for us as a staff to know that this wasn’t just something we started and is now going to end, it’s going to be ongoing feels really good professionally to know.” Alluding to the possibility that the momentum would not be carried if the division was to go in a different direction the principal said, “I think that feels great to know that it’s going to move forward again and we’ll be able to deepen our understanding, and our practice.”

Principals reported accepting responsibility for teaching and learning in schools. This begins with recruiting and hiring staff with the interest and the skills to further inclusive practices. Principals described how they work to give teachers the necessary instructional support and allow them to focus of the task of planning and teaching. Principals’ leadership included their work in monitoring classroom practices and creating a learning environment where the shift to fully inclusive practices could be sustained.

Allocation of Resources

School resources can include various items such as furniture or instructional materials in addition to human resources and access to professional supports. Principals in this study spoke about the importance of resource allocation that included both human resources and

physical resources such as furniture and technology.

Assistive Technology and Multi-leveled Resources

Participants described their ability to access the physical resources for implementing inclusive practices based on UDL such as technology, furnishings and materials from their school divisions as a non-issue. As one principal reported “we have access to the books and the materials, and we can get the supplies for their centers.” One principal even explained that budgets for resource and guidance have increased, saying “I know that resource and guidance have received more money recently to do some things that they haven’t done before.”

However principals described how they would engage staff in a process of justifying such purchases and ensuring that the materials and technology they purchase help achieve the educational goals that had been set. One principal detailed the decision making process one school’s leadership followed for resourcing a new classroom space:

Let’s first talk philosophically about what children are going to be doing in these spaces, how are they going to be doing these things?” As a teacher you imagine what will children be doing and then talk about the environment, and back that whole conversation up with “philosophically, where are we going to stand?”

Principals also spoke about how dollars traditionally allocated to resource rooms and supporting pull-out programming were being increasingly allocated to the classroom to support inclusive instructional practices. Dollars traditionally allocated to resource were now being used to purchase multileveled books, or adaptive technology for use in the inclusive classroom. School staff are looking more purposefully at purchasing reading materials in a way that may support engagement and inclusive practices.

The use of technology has also been supporting inclusive practices in one French Immersion program. As the principal explained, using student led/center based learning needed to be balanced with the need for students to achieve the French language outcomes. Because students in the early years often revert to English when self directed they tend to require teacher led activities. So the question the teachers needed to answer was “how are the children still receiving enough of the French language even while they are engaged in centers? How do you plan for that? What sort of visual aids can you provide?” The principal reported how the use of technology became part of the solution: “We talked about using the technology like the iPads so the teacher can record her instructions, or read a segment of something.”

Resource Teacher Assignment to Classrooms

Participants described seeing a significant shift in the role of the resource teacher within schools. As one principal recalled, “resource, when I first arrived, was a pull-out model.” Today principals describe that staff members in the schools follow a model where “resource teachers are more in the classroom. They are not in their offices” to “creating that mindset that you’re a team together in the room.”

One principal explained how the resource teacher’s role changed to also support a wider range of students, including additional support and enrichment learning opportunities for gifted and talented students who require them. Another principal described the significant change where the roles of resource teachers and guidance counselor have been combined to support increasingly inclusive programming in the classroom. Now rather than working in distinct academic and social emotional domains “this support teacher goes into that classroom and helps that classroom teacher support all the needs”. One participant, a former

resource teacher, described how teachers in supporting roles may be looking to principals for the opportunity to be increasingly collaborative and supportive of learning in the classroom:

I know what it meant to have my principal understand my work and support me in that work. If we all say co-teaching is important but your administration isn't helping you to get into classrooms you are stuck. So then I translated that work into my work as a principal.

For one school staff a philosophical shift that reduced traditional special education programming and brought the students with special needs into the classroom also brought resource teachers and educational assistants to the classrooms. The time once spent planning and supporting segregated programming was now spent co-planning and supporting teachers and students in the classroom.

Educational Assistant Allocations to Classrooms

All principals spoke about supporting the trend of allocating educational assistants to classrooms rather than having EAs assigned to individual students. As one principal said “there are other ways that that assistant can be supportive in that classroom.”

However principals reported facing systematic obstacles regarding the use of Educational Assistants that included resistance from classroom teachers who voice their worry about “safety of children” and union contracts that require EAs are given regular coffee breaks. There had also been no mention from participants about any specific training for teachers in their role working with educational assistants in the classroom. Principals spoke about working to change the current beliefs about educational assistants, teachers and students with exceptional learning needs.

Changing the prevailing belief that certain students require an EA with them at all times

was a common goal of principals. As one principal made clear, “What I want my teachers to understand is that support does not always mean educational assistant. Support could look so different in so many ways.” Another principal described this as an overall goal: “We’ve committed ourselves to really trying to assign EAs to classrooms and not attaching them to children and keeping that flexible use of educational assistants”. Another principal described the goal of fostering a “mentality that the EA is there to help everybody, because a lot of the times what do they do? They sit beside the student.”

For students who do need additional adult support, deliberate grouping of students was being done to facilitate adult support trying to avoid the stigma and drawbacks of assigning one adult to one child. Principals spoke of being very conscious of the complexities and drawbacks to the presence of an EA including learned helplessness and social isolation. All spoke about not creating a barrier to inclusion or a dependency on that EA. In this way EAs and the teachers working with them were able to work with the whole class or with different students who all may need support at one time or another: Having educational assistants understand their role in facilitating peer interactions was highlighted by one participant:

Getting our teachers and EAs to recognize the power of peers, and their role in supporting their friends in the classroom, that’s a really key aspect and a big paradigm shift for a lot of people.

Principals described needing to overcome obstacles to be able to use educational assistants in a flexible way that provided the targeted support that students need for inclusive programming. One principal resisted the idea of scheduling EA break coverage by utilizing the existing support that was already in the classroom:

We believe that the classroom teacher and their peers can fully support that child for

breaks, 15 minutes at recess, over the lunch period and unless it's medical or a safety risk we are really expecting that that could happen. And that was a huge systems change that I think fundamentally signaled to everybody that we really believe that is primarily the teachers job first and foremost to support those learning needs of those kids and they are not dependent always on the EA.

Assigning educational assistants to classrooms was also described as supporting the goal of re-engaging teachers with students with special needs and ensuring that teachers assume the responsibility for the student and his or her programming.

However in spite of a vision that sees students supported by classroom teachers and a network of peers, a tendency for principals to rely on one to one Educational Assistant support for students with special needs seemed to linger. As one principal expressed, "in order to support kids you may need that second body there." This tension around the role of the Educational Assistant was just one area where participants in the study revealed the complexities and tensions principals feel while striving to lead an inclusive school reform.

Complexities and Tensions

While principals all spoke enthusiastically about their own commitment, implementation in the school and their school division leadership's support of the Three-Block Model of UDL there were a number of complexities and tensions surrounding the implementation of the model that surfaced during the interviews. One principal revealed having the impression that all school communities in the division were moving forward on implementing the Three-Block Model of UDL and being shocked to hear and see when other people say "oh really? You're doing that kind of stuff?"

Acknowledging resistance amongst school staff, one principal reflected on using a

coaching approach, much like students on a high school basketball team, in order to work with teachers and reinforce the required skills and attitudes:

This is your staff. If there is someone there that doesn't buy in, you're not going to get rid of them, especially if you hired them. They're yours. So I always come back to the coaching thing. That's how I treat the staff. Same as I would if they were a team.

Another principal revealed "I've got an awesome staff, very cooperative and looking for new ideas. I know other buildings had more grief." Not all principals were having the same level of success in implementing the Three-Block Model of UDL. One participant in the study seemed to face greater resistance and explained somewhat pessimistically:

You need to be able to find ways, it's almost like a sales job it's sad to say, because you need people to buy in and be able to understand the vision, not "this is what we're embracing and what we are doing", even if it's one thing for them to try and they grab onto it. It's a bit of a sales job. And there is resistance because people don't like change.

This participant also made a comment that spoke to the importance of experience when reflecting on an upcoming change in administration in the next school year, saying the more experienced administrator "has a whole pile more experience than me" and "may be even more influential". This administrator seemed to reveal frustration that resistance to inclusive practices remained.

Perhaps knowing that Katz includes inclusive practices without exception as the ideal to strive for Three-Block Model of UDL, participants defended the fact that some academic or life-skills based pull out programming continues within the schools. One participant

described a scenario where some student specific learning is addressed where students may be pulled from the classroom: “There is still some time where they need to do some programming on their own, just some of the life skills stuff that they do need that they can’t get in a math class for example.”

As another study participant reported, the pull out may occur to provide targeted support for an academic domain and may be done in a small group:

We may not just be pulling one student out; we may be pulling pockets of students out, or in different areas for learning, and then bringing everybody back into a big group.

One principal left the door open to some specifically required pull-out programming saying “we really don’t make it an option that we pull children out” but further explains “there has to be a specific reason for that.”

Principals revealed instances when they may inadvertently send a mixed message about their commitment to inclusive practices and the Three-Block Model of UDL. A perception that they are deferring their instructional leadership and responsibility for inclusive practices may undermine their own efforts to encourage more fully inclusive practices:

If someone was to ask me about wanting to know more about UDL I would send them to (teacher A) or (teacher B) because they are the ones that could speak to it the best.

Unfortunately an unintended mixed message may be sent to staff if the principal’s message is “this is how it’s going to be” and the principal subsequently directs questions about the UDL approach from school staff or from families to other staff.

Principals all spoke about the key role guidance and resource teachers play implementing

classroom based support and co-teaching in the inclusive classroom. However tension was expressed by one principal who lamented how the pressures to staff and structure the school can make those positions vulnerable to being reallocated. As the principal explained, “at times that I do play with my resource and guidance time because that’s where I have some flex, and I do have guilt over that.”

Unfortunately, principals sometimes felt that they were not always able to provide the direct instructional leadership they wished to provide. One principal lamented, “I’m called back to maintenance issues and things that have just nothing to do with what I really want to do.” Principals who were striving to implement more fully inclusive practices were affected by the complexities, demands and brutal realities described by Fullan (2000). However their discussion of barriers to implementation of the Three-Block Model of UDL was tempered with more optimism. They seemed to see them more as obstacles that work ethic, planning and support could overcome.

Barriers to UDL

Participating principals responded to a question asking them to describe barriers they experience in implementing the Three-Block Model of UDL. The most common themes to emerge were planning and planning time. Planning for teaching curriculum in an integrated way was a common concern, with this component of the Three-Block Model being identified as the most challenging to implement for the participants of this study.

Participants described working with staff and colleagues who are “core traditional people” who have been using curriculum in a somewhat incongruent way for a long time. One participant explained the challenge by saying “it is daunting if you are looking at it and you

don't teach that way or have that mindset. To be planning these huge blocks of things when you don't "think like that" or you haven't thought like that, it takes a lot of time." As a principal summarized "it came down to giving people the time to wrap their heads around how this would look differently for them in their rooms."

Principals echoed the view that this is the area that many teachers need more support:

I think there were some people that went "oh yes, I can sink my teeth into this, and now I can see how I can really plan this", and other people were overwhelmed. So I think that's a pretty good statement of where we are at.

Even for principals who reported that teachers in the schools were implementing the model in an effective way spoke about planning time as an ongoing need:

I think we've still done the program well. They still get adequate time but I wish there still could just be more.

The need for planning time and support seemed to focus most on practical questions about how to implement an integrated curriculum. One principal said "what teachers were really stuck on was the practical". This principal acknowledged "that is one area that I think is hard and then further reported:

I've had conversations with teachers about the work of looking at the curriculum and the integration of the curriculum areas, looking at specific learning outcomes and general learning outcomes and getting overwhelmed in that meshing and melding of cross curricular outcomes.

With study participants describing their practical questions such as "when do we get the time? Is it release time?" One participant agreed saying, "I do find that one of the barriers would be the time for planning and the other barrier would be the time to visit other

classrooms” but then spoke about the support offered by their school division leaders “if you mention it to (Student Services Administrator) she’ll say “I’ll give you a half day.” So the barriers can be overcome.” Another principal in a school community that adopted the UDL model early gives advice to other principals and summed up the importance of planning time:

When we go to in-services and people ask “how do you do this, how do you do that?” I’m saying “team planning, team planning.”

Principals spoke about the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning as “really just about good practice and awareness of how kids learn” and as “just good teaching.” However having a label and a name for the approach was described as a possible barrier to implementation for some. One principal recognized that “people are kind of sick of the name (UDL).” Using an approach that has a name seemed to make teachers question “is this something that is going to go away? Is it just an initiative from the division that they’re not going to support?”

Another participant spoke of “a shift of talk and language, not to talk about UDL, but to talk about social inclusion, to talk about best practices in your subject area and being inclusive of all subject areas making common links.” A principal spoke about how discussions within one school division occurred around using a different name for the approach to “make it our own” and as another principal expressed “my hope would be that it would just be seamless and that this is just good pedagogy.”

Facilitators of UDL

What emerged as a primary facilitator of the inclusive school reform based on Three-Block Model of UDL in schools was seeing the evidence and the shift in attitude that emerged as a result of the implementation. Principals spoke about a distinct change in the

teaching and learning cultures in the buildings. One principal explained that the social-emotional component of the Three-Block Model was the key component that “has affected our discipline” within the school building and has encouraged a deeper commitment to the Three-Block Model approach.

Another participant credited UDL with an improvement in students’ ability to learn and demonstrate their learning from curriculum, explaining:

To walk in the door and feel welcome and belonging, that’s huge. And you can’t teach curriculum if you don’t have them, you can’t. So that, right on the get go, is important.

When challenged by teachers about the time spent on the social-emotional learning rather than curriculum, one principal defended it by explaining how it ultimately facilitates learning:

I say to them don’t worry about your curriculum stuff, because if your kids are eating out of your hands, and you have a good rapport with them, you will get through that curriculum so much faster. You will catch up and pass it.

Principals also cited division wide supports such as the availability of Lead Teachers who are able to assist and demonstrate as key facilitators of the Three-Block Model. Divisional support that was described included release time to address planning barriers and the support of experienced school division lead teachers:

The division, as part of their promise to remain committed has offered some release time for teachers to get together and plan and collaborate, so when I go back to the barrier being time, I really do feel that there is some effort on the part of the school division to give us that time to process and plan.

One principal spoke about the need to have a few staff that believe in the model and who are willing to become fully immersed in it. The principal made clear, “you can’t do it if you don’t have some cheerleaders on your staff. And (teacher 1) and (teacher 2) would be my cheerleaders.”

A participant also identified that the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba has played a role in facilitation by providing teacher candidates with the model during their professional training:

If teachers came out of the faculty with a handle on “how do you plan so that all of your student’s needs are being met, taking all of the different types of learners, taking in exceptionalities?” If they’re taught to plan using the curriculum as the guide, I think that we would have a lot more successful inclusion.

There was a sense expressed that the Three-Block Model, by addressing social emotional learning and engagement would in itself facilitate and encourage further and deeper implementation by addressing common barriers faced by teachers in diverse classrooms. What emerged was a sense that so long as there would continue to be adequate support from divisional leadership, training and time for planning the Three-Block Model would be embraced by teachers.

Summary

This chapter summarized and consolidated the responses of five principals engaged in an inclusive school reform, specifically the implementation of the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning. Analysis of the data showed that themes emerged that aligned well with the Block 3 Systems and Structures described by Katz (2012a) and the Instructional Leadership practices identified by Leithwood (2010). The final chapter

summarizes these findings and includes recommendations for future research into the role of principals in implementing inclusive school reform.

Chapter Five: Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Through this study I hoped to learn from participating principals about the school community discourse around inclusion, the supporting systems and structures in place, and any competing pressures that threaten the implementation of this inclusive model of practice in the schools in which these principals lead. The consistencies I found when I compared the research literature on inclusion and what has been written about the role of the principal in leading school communities through reform was striking. The core practices of principals leading a turnaround or change did not only compliment inclusive practices but aligned with them exceptionally well. Not only were the end goals of the two fields the same (improved academic outcomes, improved engagement) but the means were nearly identical (redesigning the organization, providing a vision, providing adequate support and professional development). Making school communities inclusive and ensuring schools were places where students excel academically are synonymous concepts.

For this investigation data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five participants involved along with their school division leadership in implementing the Three-Block Model of UDL. Principals in the context of Manitoba school communities implementing the Three-Block Model were asked about the ways they fostered an inclusive educational environment by managing systems and structures under their control and their own instructional leadership practices. Ultimately I was able to uncover the process participants followed in their efforts to implement the Three-Block Model, and to discover what they identified as the barriers and facilitators of the process (e.g. attitudes, economics, training, personal experiences). Principals described the complex role they have in leading a school community that embraces practices intended to make schools places that are fully

inclusive of students with diverse learning needs as a result of disability.

My beliefs as a researcher, the research literature I had reviewed related to leading inclusive schools and the common discourse all suggested that the leadership of the principal would be important to implementation of an inclusive school reform. What was surprisingly affirming in conducting the interviews and analyzing the transcripts was just how connected and involved school principals who participated were with the decisions and practices related to social and academic inclusion. These individuals' grasp and control over this instructional leadership question in schools was strong. Certainly these principals' involvement mattered and had the potential to greatly influence the inclusive school experiences of students in the classroom.

Summary of Findings

This qualitative study showed that the leadership practices of the five participants, aligned well with the conceptual frameworks and practices described by Leithwood and by Katz. Principals spoke about themes related to Instructional Leadership as described by Leithwood (2010) and of their command over the systems and structures under their control as described by Katz (2012a). Tenets of the two conceptual frameworks raised in interviews were able to be separated into the following six themes.

Inclusive Policy and Practice

Participating principals spoke about their own commitment to furthering inclusive classroom practices, a "significant determining factor in creating effective inclusive settings" according to Irvine (2010, p. 72). Participants however did suggest that in many ways they are still striving to implement inclusive practices for all. However while Ainscow assumed that "it is unlikely that complete inclusion will ever be achieved" (cited in Ryan 2010, p. 21)

principals in this study challenged this contention, whether that be discontinuing long-established special education programming, maintaining a non-negotiable stance in favor of inclusive placements, or supporting families in their choice of French Immersion for their child with exceptional learning needs.

Principals indicated that inclusive policies and practices have “taken root” in these school divisions with inclusion being a constant consideration in decisions made by division leadership. This is consistent with the trend to view diversity as a benefit to the school community (Angelides, Antoniou, & Charalambous, 2010; Blackmore, 2006; Ryan, 2003) and is also consistent with the Philosophy of Inclusion in Manitoba that states that school staff are to “embrace inclusion” (Manitoba Education, 2001, introduction p. 3). There was reported to be a vision and direction from divisional leadership in favour of inclusive practices, along with degrees of support for the school staff’s efforts in implementing this vision.

Setting Direction

As Katz and Sugden (2013) describe, principals’ support and facilitation related to inclusive instruction is central to implementation of inclusive practices (p. 17). The depth of experience and expertise of participants likely added to the influence they have over inclusive practices in schools. It was clear participants had credibility and influence. I heard veteran principals explain how they experienced firsthand how inclusion benefits students through their time in the classroom and in the principalship and how this experience has helped clarify their vision.

Principals spoke about how leaders who bring established expertise and vision for inclusion to the role of principal are actively promoted within the school divisions where they

work. Participants spoke about how as principals they must be prepared to be unwavering in the direction set for inclusion, sometimes in the face of resistance from parents, community and staff. Some principals whom I interviewed had moved ahead in a way that aligned with the advice of Fullan (2000) and of Schlechty (2000) to see dissent as informative and an opportunity to learn and react to the challenges faced by teachers. However some participants revealed tension around balancing this advice with a desire to recruit and retain staff that shares the same vision for inclusive instructional practices.

Along with following goals set out by their school division leadership, principals provided meaningful opportunities for staff to engage in setting school based goals that supported their vision of inclusion and worked to avoid the trap described by van der Bogert (1997) where teachers who have not been invited to be collaborators resist or even resent an ambitious call for inclusion. Principals also held high but realistic expectations for themselves, for teachers and other school staff in providing rich and inclusive learning opportunities and for all students to receive an inclusive school experience.

Developing People

Instructional leadership includes as a key tenet the need to develop people. Leithwood said, “building capacity leading to a sense of mastery is highly motivational” (2010, p. 44). Developing professionally builds on competencies, shapes dispositions and provides this additional motivation to staff. Providing individualized support and consideration conveys the instructional leader’s respect and concern for individual teacher differences. Encouraging teachers to take intellectual risks, to re-examine their assumptions and to look at their work from different perspectives build on these tenets.

Participants were all full-time administrators in large school buildings, but still taught

lessons, co-taught classes, and attended or led professional development with school staff, a practice Pristine and Nelson (2005) believed to send a powerful message to teachers about the importance of their work in classrooms. These principals positioned themselves as role models as much as possible.

Redesigning the Organization

In describing their multifaceted role, participants spoke about the ways distributed leadership, a tenet of Block 3 of the Three-Block Model of UDL (Katz, 2012a), has been employed to share responsibility and empower others. Principals described how vice-principals, student services teams, resource teachers, and classroom teachers, as Schlechty (2000) recommends, are sharing authority, responsibility and leadership for inclusion in schools. Promoting mentorship and identifying the experts within the schools was a tactic even experienced principals use to manage their own workload, described as a necessity by Fullan (2003). These principals recognize that there may be others on staff who can help address the challenges teachers encounter in the classroom. The link was made between experience, confidence, ability to share leadership and confer ownership to others. Veteran principals spoke about having the confidence to ask colleagues to share leadership and moving into a role of supporting an overall vision for inclusion and backing up others in their leadership work.

Principals in this study were creating organizational cultures that value collaboration with students in discussion about school policy, modeling an approach that values teacher student relations as Leithwood, Patten and Jantzi (2010) recommend. Principals were creating opportunities for everyone in the building to be engaged by trying to ensure that workloads and other issues do not interfere with the ability of teachers to work together. There were

examples of this being a deliberate structural shift within the school designed to facilitate the collaborative workplace culture supported by Leithwood and Riehl's core practices for leading inclusive school communities (2005).

Principals also spoke about the need to ensure productive relationships with families just as Leithwood, Patten and Jantzi (2010) and Irvine et al (2010) recommend. Participants talked about being sympathetic to parent concerns yet steadfast in their beliefs about inclusion. They described, as Leithwood and Riehl (2005) did the need to have parents actively involved in the school community being created and also to educate and show the effectiveness of new more inclusive practices to parents. Principals spoke of trying to find a balance where parents felt confident that their concerns were being heard, but where principals maintained their leadership and decision making authority. Creating authentic opportunities for parent input is likely to be an ongoing challenge for principals in this study

Managing the Instructional Program

Principals spoke about the necessary staffing and reorganizing in order to facilitate an inclusive instructional program based on the Three-Block Model of UDL. They described how a teacher's ability or at least interest in furthering the principal's vision and efforts towards inclusion and use of the Three-Block Model was a foremost consideration in hiring new staff. They also spoke about wanting a willingness from staff to break with traditional roles such as Resource Teacher and Guidance Counselor to provide a more holistic approach to student services in the inclusive classroom. Essentially principals were describing a shift in the norms, skills and relationships described by Fullan (2000) that "can make a direct difference in teaching and learning" (p. 161).

Collaboration rather than top down decision making was reported to have staff agreeing

to try new techniques that may have otherwise prompted resistance. Unlike those in the situation described by Hebert (1997) principals in this study were actively taking part in the conversations about inclusion. Not surprisingly a collaborative school workplace is the most common core practice for leading inclusive school communities found in the reviewed literature (Angelides, Antoniou, & Charalambous, 2010; Irvine, Lupart, Loreman, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010; Leithwood, 2010; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Ryan, 2010; Scanlan, 2009; Vila et al., 2005; Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd, 2011). Principals interviewed for this study spoke about spending a great deal of effort engaged in the complicated work of timetabling and planning opportunities for teachers to collaborate in cohorts and to plan instruction in teams. And while school division practices provided some opportunity for structured planning I heard how principals and resource teachers would often orchestrate additional coverage so that classroom teachers could engage in mentorship or co-plan. After working to overcome the timetable restrictions that may prevent co-teaching, principals also described their role in setting up and encouraging co-teaching relationships where teachers with complementary skills would work together.

Principals also reported that implementation of the Three-Block Model of UDL gave them and school teams the much needed impetus for reexamining Manitoba curricula outcomes. For two decades Manitoba has mandated that the same essential learning outcomes are appropriate for the vast majority of students (Manitoba Education and Training, 1994). Burgstahler (2009) and Katz (2012) recognized the need to maintain the same high instructional standard for all students. A consistent and high level of expectation guided by curriculum is a key tenet of leading a school system through change (Schlechty, 2000).

Principals explained that planning to integrate different curriculum refocused assessment

on essential learning and shifted teacher's focus from the planned learning activity back to the overarching curricular learning outcomes. The shift reminded teachers that a given learning activity is only one means for a student to learn and then demonstrate the outcome. This examination helped reinforce for staff that there may be many different means for students with different strengths to ultimately achieve the same learning outcome from the curriculum.

With a refocus on the curricular learning outcomes through the block two tenet of integrating curricula (Katz, 2012a), participants in this study described how they are seeing a range of different assessment methods being used within schools. Principals were conscious of the fact that student assessment needs to parallel social and academic learning that values diversity. And while participants explained that they are still engaged in working to convince some staff to adopt a new range of assessment practices, authentic assessment that engages students in the type of real world assessment tasks describe by Moon, Brighton, Callahan and Robinson (2005) have for the most part taken hold in schools.

Principals in some instances balanced their high expectations for inclusive practices and curricula with an appreciation for the many demands they see facing teachers. Principals reported being strong advocates for teachers, recognizing their role in supporting and trying to ensure teachers have the support, time and materials they need to do their work. Principals, as West et al (as cited in Leithwood, 2010) recommended, found themselves buffering teachers from distractions so that they could focus on the essential tasks of teaching and learning.

Principals reported on their efforts to improve and monitor the instructional program in schools, collaborating and supporting teachers with instruction as Kugelmass and Ainscow

recommend (2004). Reporting themselves to be highly visible instructional leaders (Leithwood, 2010) participants spoke about visiting classrooms, monitoring progress towards school priorities, and staying aware of the issues faced by teachers. Participants identified this to be an important part of their work. Principals also spoke about their awareness of the need to sustain momentum in the inclusive school community (Katz & Sugden, 2013), by receiving ongoing support from school division leaders for the work being done at the school level (Fullan, 2003). Situating the school in the context of the wider school community, such as the school division, is a key tenet of Instructional Leadership as described by Leithwood (2010).

Allocation of Resources

While participants spoke about not having any issues providing technology, classroom furnishings and materials, principals did describe how their work included assuring that the use of resources supported their overall vision for inclusion. For example principals described looking to ensure that classroom materials or furnishings would support the learning of diverse students in the classroom and were consistent with the vision the principal has for the inclusive instruction within the school (Katz, 2012a).

When it comes to allocating human resources, the shift was philosophically the same. Principals had to consider how resource teachers, guidance counselors and educational assistants all support the whole range of student diversity within the classroom. One shift about which participants spoke involved having educational assistants assigned to work with classes or with teachers, rather than assigned to individual students. Additionally the restructuring of the traditional Guidance Counselor and Resource Teacher roles was being implemented to facilitate increased support from these student support teachers in the

classroom. These principals stressed an increased focus on fostering natural peer support, and an expectation that the learning opportunities provided to student with exceptional needs is primarily the responsibility of teachers and of principals (Schlechty, 2000) as opposed to educational assistants. Principals prepared teachers and themselves for this responsibility through professional development in the Three-Block Model of UDL. The model was used to show teachers how to provide opportunities for all students to access the same learning opportunities as their peers (Katz, 2012a).

This study was intended to uncover the experiences of Manitoba principals implementing an inclusive school reform. To do this I used descriptive interpretivism using naturalistic inquiry as described by Guba and Lincoln (1985). Naturalistic inquiry was an especially valuable method for understanding how principals describe the way they lead staff in schools through an inclusive school reform, specifically the implementation of the UDL framework (Katz, 2012a).

Creswell (2007) explained how a qualitative study could expose a void in existing research literature. The findings confirmed that the foundation for this study, the void in understanding the complex role of principals in leading an inclusive school community, could be addressed by combining the literature about inclusion and the literature on school improvement/reform/turnaround. Participants spoke about themes from both domains when describing their work supporting an inclusive school reform in Manitoba schools. The findings of this study support the value of blending these two literature bases to guide future research into the leadership of principals implementing inclusive practices in schools. As a consequence of the findings of this study, a number of recommendations for practice and research can be articulated.

Recommendations for Practice

While further qualitative and quantitative research will be needed in order to expand the generalizability of the findings, this study uncovered a number of key aspects of leadership for inclusion that should help to guide principals in implementing an inclusive school reform. Teachers in classrooms require the instructional leadership of principals in order to create the socially and academically inclusive classroom environments that still seem out of reach for many students with more complex learning needs. The following recommendations are made to further the objective of implementing such reform to meet the goal of academic and social inclusion for all students.

Division and school leaders need to clearly define inclusive practices. This study defined inclusion as enrolment of students with disabilities in the inclusive classroom environment with non-disabled peers. Today more than ever we understand that it is inclusive classroom instruction that provides students with disabilities the best academic and social opportunity to learn. The Three-Block Model of UDL was used to frame how the instructional leadership practice of principals was affecting the teaching and learning that was taking place within schools. As one participant explained, seeing kids that had not been included in an authentic way in the past who are now fully and successfully participating in academic and social life of the classroom constituted a huge achievement, and, “There are no excuses; everyone can make a place for every child in their classroom.”

Manitoba has had a philosophy of inclusion for over a decade, however the concept of inclusion remains “contentious, and in some areas ill defined” (R. B. Macmillan, personal communication, February 28, 2012). The ambiguity in the term “inclusion” may arise from

the various acceptable interpretations of inclusion. Within public school division policies and practices may all express a belief in inclusive practices but do not consistently define inclusion concretely and then ensure inclusive practices that match their policy are in place without exception.

The Three-Block Model of UDL was used to frame how the instructional leadership practice of principals was affecting the teaching and learning that was taking place within schools. School division leaders and school staff must clearly define for themselves what inclusion will mean for them in order to eliminate ambiguity and unclear expectations around inclusion.

School division leaders must ensure principals are prepared to set direction for an inclusive school community. In order to successfully sustain and inclusive school reform a principal must have expertise in inclusive practices and an unwavering belief in a vision for inclusion. A principal must be able to demonstrate his or her vision through day to day interactions, and decision making. School division leaders must recruit and assign principals who have the ability and disposition to further efforts to improve the instructional program. A principal of an inclusive school community needs to be highly visible, interacting with staff and students, building trust and respect.

Research literature has told us that to implement inclusive education, changes need to be made in the roles and qualifications for principals (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). Theoharis (2010) places the responsibility on those who train principals to provide them with the skills to create service delivery models that provide inclusive learning for all students. To that end, the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba has a key role to play on promoting inclusive instructional leadership training, as do the school division leaders who hire, train

and promote principals from within.

Principals must make developing people a key task. The principal leading and sustaining an inclusive school reform must be able to share a vision for inclusion but then must back up the vision with specific action including the development of teachers' skills for implementing this inclusive school reform. Principals must not only provide teachers with sufficient professional development and opportunities for professional learning (Leithwood, 2010; Scanlan, 2009; Villa et al., 2005) but must also model being a lifelong learner.

Participating with teaching staff in both formal and informal professional development opportunities should be seen as a core practice for leading inclusive school communities. Through this action principals not only reflect on their own practice but also strengthen their ability to provide supportive and motivating leadership (Irvine et al., 2010).

Principals must provide the individualized support and consideration that teachers need in order to create and deliver inclusive classroom instruction. Providing individualized support and consideration conveys the instructional leader's respect, and concern for individual teacher differences. In some situations, changes will need to be made to how staff is assigned. In other circumstances the principal may need to choose to only hire or retain people with the disposition and work ethic needed to follow the principal's vision for an inclusive school community.

Finally principals should offer training to teachers about their role in working with educational assistants in the classroom. Training should include the appropriate duties of teachers and EAs, how to direct EAs in day-to-day activities and how to ensure the work of EAs supports students in achieving student specific goals related to gaining independence.

Principals must reorganize the school to support inclusive practices. Choosing the people who can further inclusive practices and then providing adequate professional development on a common framework for inclusion are not enough to implement and sustain an inclusive school reform. Principals must still work to create a collaborative school culture that is deep rooted in the school community. An instructional leader may need to use his/her skills in keeping collaborators focused on shared goals and develop the staff's willingness to compromise as well as provide the time to collaborate. A collaborative workplace culture will require the principal to consider restructuring school timetables to ensure common planning times for teachers, cohorts and teams.

Distributed leadership, or other such forms of shared leadership is also needed to remove organizational barriers, and to provide the intensive leadership required for full and unconditional inclusion of all students. Principals however must be careful not to send an unintended mixed message saying "this is how it's going to be" but then direct the difficult questions to other staff members. Principals must be positioned to answer the practical questions raised about the inclusive school reform they lead.

Principals must also ensure they are taking steps to connect the school community to its wider environment and that they are building productive relationships with families and communities. Leithwood and Riehl (2005) consider the need to arrange and maintain structural conditions that allow students, parents and others to be actively involved as a core leadership practice. The inclusive school community should function as a support and a resource for families and the wider neighborhood. For example school staff should assist families in coordinating social services through making referrals, offering up to date information and inviting representatives of programs and services to meet with families.

Principals must also extend the focus of their efforts outside the building and engage with others in the school division to keep current on trends, policies and information.

Collaboration across boundaries is an important feature of inclusive school reform and a school division wide approach to implementation of the Three Block Model of UDL would strengthen its implementation in individual schools. It's been explained that principals should be collaborating with other school leaders to share innovative practices within and across schools (Fullan, 2003; Scanlan, 2009). Certainly in this study, school division leaders, teacher leaders and principals were a driver of inclusive school reform and a source of professional development and of support.

Principals must position themselves as instructional leaders in the school. Leithwood and Riehl (2005) identify the need for a strong instructional program in schools that maintains high academic learning goals for all students. The Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning is based on providing access to the curricula and maintaining high expectations for all students through meeting individual needs in the classroom. This requires a high level of instructional leadership from the principal implementing the model as an inclusive school reform.

Instructional leadership practices also include staffing, providing instructional support, monitoring school activity and buffering staff from distractions to their work. As Leithwood et al (2010) advocate, practices such as assuring students receive immediate and informative feedback, monitoring the teacher's use of strategies, being aware of teacher student relations and guiding the management of classrooms, are essential when principals have the task of improving the school's instructional program.

Principals must allocate resources in a way that supports inclusive practices. To

implement inclusive education, principals must consider changes to both the ways resources are purchased for schools, (Loreman, 2010; Philpott, Furey, & Penney, 2010) and how staff are assigned and utilized (Giangreco, 2010). School division and school leaders must look for ways to use resources and budgets to support inclusive practices rather than intentionally or otherwise support practices that exclude students from classroom participation with peers. For example school teams should be investing in multi-leveled resources and assistive technology as opposed to class sets of identical reading materials targeted to one type of intelligence. Classroom furnishings should be acquired with inclusive uses in mind. The conversation about purchasing classroom furnishings should begin with asking how students are going to be engaging in learning with one another.

And while material resources should be a consideration, principals should primarily focus on the allocation of planning time, professional staff and educational assistant support in classrooms. School division leaders, responsible for hiring and in many cases for defining the roles of educational assistants, must ensure that the hiring and allocation of educational assistants supports the vision of inclusive classroom instruction. Principals also need to counter the belief that certain students require an EA with them at all times. Flexibly assigning EAs to classrooms and not attaching them to children should be the practice of principals implementing an inclusive school reform. Principals must hold high expectations that teachers assume responsibility for each and every student including responsibility for overall supervision, engagement and academic programming.

Identified barriers to implementing an inclusive school reform must be avoided. The common barrier mentioned by participants in this study was a potential lack of planning time, especially the planning time needed to work through practical questions, to co-teach and to

integrate curriculum outcomes. Principals must not only increase available planning time through the challenging task of timetabling and ensure that planning time is free of conflicting issues and pressures. Increased planning time was seen as necessary for any teacher working to implement the Three-Block Model of UDL and especially important to staff using the framework for the first time. Participants found that this common barrier was being addressed in the school divisions in which they worked; however ensuring ongoing support from divisional leadership in this area was identified as fundamental.

Another potential barrier principals must avoid is allowing an inclusive school reform, such as the implementation of the Three-Block Model of UDL, to be thought of as a passing trend that will have no long term support. Principals spoke of the need to shift the language and the thinking about the model so it becomes embedded as the way that teachers think about their planning and pedagogy within the school division. Principals need to be steadfast in their expectation that social and academic inclusion occurs in classrooms throughout the school and that the tenets of the reform, including integrated curriculum, student choice, cooperative learning and differentiated instruction, are followed rigorously.

Identified facilitators of an inclusive school reform must be promoted. Once the Three-Block Model is implemented, school division leadership must continue offering a quantifiable amount of ongoing support. Support in the form of release time for planning, divisional lead teacher support and support for teachers who want to learn more about inclusive practices and those who are willing to mentor colleagues were common recommendations made by participants.

In this study principals shared that they have noticed decreases in challenging behaviour and increased in student's ability to learn by addressing student's social emotional learning

up front. Principals and school division personnel should gather evidence about improvement in school climate and also of academic improvements that result from implementing the Three-Block Model and share this evidence with each other, with teachers and with families. Focusing attention on improvements in the learning environment may prove to be the best facilitator of this inclusive school reform.

Recommendations for Future Research

Understanding how systems and structures and instructional leadership work together to advance inclusive instructional practices in Manitoba is an important area for further research. Teachers, principals, school division leadership, faculties of education and the department of education in Manitoba all have a legal and ethical responsibility to promote inclusive practices in schools. It is understood that a principal's support in creating effective inclusive settings is tremendously important (Irvine et al, p. 72, 2010) yet there is an insufficient amount of research examining just how principals lead inclusive school communities. Research into the role of principals in addressing diversity tends to explore ethno-cultural and linguistic diversity of the students and their parents (Ryan, 2003). As Stein and Spillane (2005) recommend, more research into the instructional leadership of principals and the creation of inclusive classrooms also needs to be taking place.

I had proposed that this qualitative study would make a contribution to the field in terms of understanding the role of principals in implementing a change towards fully inclusive instructional program as exemplified by the Three-Block Model of UDL. I believe this study has provided a foundation for future investigations. It is important to understand how a principal creates the conditions for such a profound pedagogical change as a shift towards fully inclusive, universally designed systems, structures and instruction. Future research

should further explore this connection.

The ways principals support implementation of an inclusive school reform should be examined over a longer period of time than this study allowed. For example quantitative measurement of specific outcomes related to the principal's role in supporting implementation of the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning over time should be the focus of future research. While the findings exposed domains that participants identified as important, a void still remains in understanding how principals, working to create an inclusive school community, affect a measure of inclusive practices in the school or measurable student outcomes. Further research may provide empirical evidence about what degree the efforts of principals make a difference.

The way principals involve parents and the effect this has on student learning was only touched on in this study. The literature showed that the involvement of parents in their children's education, especially for marginalized students such as those from low-income or minority families improves achievement. Interactions with family were spoken about by participants in this study. Further studies could explore the influence principals have on parent and caregiver involvement and the extent that this affects learning in inclusive classroom communities.

Further studies could also examine whether or not there is there an optimum level of distributed leadership that helps facilitate implementation of an inclusive school reform. For example, can a principal defer responsibility for implementing inclusive practices to a vice-principal and achieve the same results? Or is there a degree to which a principal should step back and expect others to take responsibility in order to realize an optimum increase in inclusive practices within a school?

With principals bearing the ultimate responsibility for making inclusion work in schools (Young, 2010) it is crucial that we continue to learn more about principals' role in implementing a practical and effective model of inclusive education (Baker, Wang and Walberg, 1994). I trust that this research into how principals in Manitoba support an inclusive school reform exemplified by the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning will contribute to this understanding.

Conclusion

Imagine a school where all students feel they are valued and contributing members of their classroom community. Where diversity, whether it is related to gender identity, linguistic, ethno-cultural or the result of disability, is understood to enrich and improve the classroom learning environment. With the many differences in strengths, abilities, interests and needs in this school it's recognized that the term "diversity" really describes everyone.

Teachers at this school are prepared to meet the needs of each student living in the neighbourhood, as diverse as they are, in the same classroom as their same age peers. Teachers here agree that learning is as much about opportunities to explore ideas and for social emotional learning as it is about academic achievement. Even students who were once excluded from the classroom due to their exceptionalities are flourishing in this school's classrooms with the necessary supports in place. This school, while greatly benefiting its students with disabilities, is also seen as a supportive environment for their families, siblings and same-age peers.

In this school the principal has shared a bold vision for the academic and social inclusion of all students without exception. She believes that all students can learn when they receive

the right type of support at the right time. She demonstrates her commitment to inclusive practices through her decision making and day to day interactions. This principal is seen each day engaged with the staff and the students in the school. She has motivated and inspired the school staff to embrace her vision of inclusion and make it a reality. Teachers see that their individual goals align with the agreed upon group goal to have fully inclusive instruction within classrooms. Through formal and informal professional development the principal encourages teachers to question their existing ideas and to challenge themselves professionally. The principal is an instructional leader who collaborates with teachers on issues of everyday instruction and classroom management.

Everyone in the school community knows that the principal holds high expectations for every student's success and that she has high expectations for school staff as well. She invites teachers to be leaders in the classroom and expects them to share in the responsibility for making inclusion work. This principal ensures that systems and structures, such as timetables that include team planning time, are in place for teachers so they can collaborate and to co-teach. Everyone feels that a truly collaborative workplace culture has been fostered. Successes here are celebrated and the staff feels confident that their efforts are leading to gains for every student in the school.

The findings of this study demonstrate that it is realistic for principals to lead an inclusive school reform in the way described in the scenario above. Participants in this study spoke positively about their own experiences guiding a school community through implementation of the Three Block Model of Universal Design for Learning. Much of what they reported aligned with the description of instructional leadership given by Leithwood and of Block 3 Systems and Structures described by Katz. This study also exposed some of the complexities,

tensions and barriers that may need to be addressed so that successful and sustained implementation can occur.

Because of this knowledge we can look to these combined conceptual frameworks to better understand how principals can succeed at implementing an inclusive a school reform, such as implementation the Three Block Model of Universal Design for Learning. It was clear from reviewing the bodies of literature on inclusion and of the role of the principal in school reform that leadership of the principal is crucial to successfully implementing inclusive practices in schools. By understanding how principals support implementation of inclusive school reform educators in Manitoba can move closer to meeting the moral and legal obligation to have school communities fully inclusive of all students.

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Appendix, Research Ethics Approval Certificate



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APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

January 16, 2014

TO: Brent Epp (Advisor J. Katz)
Principal Investigator

FROM: Lorna Guse, Chair
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

Re: Protocol #E2013:145
"How do Principals Support Implementation of an Inclusive School Reform?"

Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received human ethics approval by the **Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board**, which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2). **This approval is valid for one year only.**

Any significant changes of the protocol and/or informed consent form should be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.

Please note:

- If you have funds pending human ethics approval, please mail/e-mail/fax (261-0325) a copy of this Approval (identifying the related UM Project Number) to the Research Grants Officer in ORS in order to initiate fund setup. (How to find your UM Project Number: <http://umanitoba.ca/research/ors/mrt-faq.html#pr0>)
- if you have received multi-year funding for this research, responsibility lies with you to apply for and obtain Renewal Approval at the expiry of the initial one-year approval; otherwise the account will be locked.

The Research Quality Management Office may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba *Ethics of Research Involving Humans*.

The Research Ethics Board requests a final report for your study (available at: http://umanitoba.ca/research/orec/ethics/human_ethics_REB_forms_guidelines.html) in order to be in compliance with Tri-Council Guidelines.