

Professional Reflective Practices for Teachers and Leadership Alignment
in a Rural Manitoba School Division

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Abstract

This research studies the ways in which a school division in rural Manitoba incorporates reflective thought or applies reflective practice into their daily work. The purposes of this study were to:

- a) discover whether practitioners in one rural Manitoba school division are able to articulate a clear and explicit understanding of reflective practice as a professional growth strategy;
- b) take an in depth look at the types of reflective practices that are occurring within that school division;
- c) assess the coherence and alignment that exists at the classroom level right through to the divisional level in the selected division.

Data collected in this study was analyzed against some key features of reflective practice as well as against some key features of leadership and system alignment. The selected topics in the area of reflective practice were: (i) dissonance as a driver; (ii) the importance of reflective practice being inquiry-based; (iii) the shifting of existing beliefs about the reflective process; (iv) the need for vulnerability and trust as a precursor for successful reflection; (v) the value of a collaborative culture; and (vi) the value of formalizing the visibility of the reflective process. The chosen topics for analysis in the area of leadership and alignment were: (i) shared vision; (ii) consistency of and commitment to philosophical beliefs; (iii) the allocation of necessary resources; (iv) the importance of system alignment; (v) the benefit of capacity building; and (vi) accountability. Impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic as well as a provincial proposal to overhaul the education system in Manitoba were included in the study as a result of the timing of the research undertaken.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Background to the Study

The concept of professional reflection has been a relevant practice in education for many, many years. Leading work in this area began with Dewey's original publication *How We Think*, written in 1933. In a reprint of *How We Think* by MJP Publishers, Dewey gives a clear and understandable definition of reflective thought. The following quote, states that "*Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitute reflective thought*" (Dewey, 2018, p. 8, italics in the original). As a well-known public intellectual and major voice of progressive education and liberalism, Dewey's writings figure prominently in many other subsequent works that discuss reflective practice for educators. His ideologies and publications have also been revisited, revised, and rewritten to help connect their relevance to modern day society as well as to the realm of current instructional practice in schools. That Dewey's philosophy on reflective thought is still at the centre of present day educational publications points to the importance that reflection plays in the development of meaningful professional practice for educators.

The ways in which schools incorporate reflective thought or apply reflective practice into the daily work of educators, does remain somewhat of a mystery though. Both the importance as well as the intangible nature of the reflective process has driven much of the inquiry in this particular study. The argument that reflective practices will improve the quality of instruction provided to students, which in turn increases student learning, seems worth exploring. Katz & Ain Dack (2013) argue that "true learning...happens when the learner is an active participant in

constructing knowledge and is constantly thinking about how new information confirms or challenges previously existing beliefs and ideas” (p. 27). Dufour & Marzano (2011) also agree that when teachers are focused upon reflective practice as the right path to improvement of their craft, student gains in achievement can be expected. Hall & Simeral (2015) argue that “in order to increase skill and cultivate expertise at anything, we’ve got to engage in rigorous and consistent reflection about it” (p. 19). This notion shared by Hall & Simeral (2015) represents an accurate expression of what is to be explored in this study. The purposes of this study are to: a) discover whether practitioners in one rural Manitoba school division are able to articulate a clear and explicit understanding of reflective practice as a professional growth strategy; b) take an in depth look at the types of reflective practices that are occurring within that school division; and c) assess the coherence and alignment that exists at the classroom level right through to the divisional level in that particular educational setting.

The goal of this research is to gain insight into the understanding of, the application of, and the alignment of reflective practices in a single rural Manitoba school division, therefore, this study is designed to address the following three research questions:

- 1) What are the understandings that selected teachers, administrators, and school system leaders have with regard to reflective practice?
- 2) To what extent are these understandings applied in practice at the classroom, school, and division level?
- 3) How well aligned are these understandings and practices implemented within that school division?

Gaining some insights into one school division’s purposeful attention to systemic use of reflective practices could uncover valuable insight into the level of knowledge and application

attainable for other rural divisions or larger school systems. The resulting action could also then be a more purposeful and designed approach to the use of reflective practices in educational settings.

Prior to addressing specifics, it is useful to have a basic understanding of the concept of reflection. For Senge (1990), “skills of reflection concern slowing down our own thinking processes so that we can become more aware of how we form our mental models and the way they influence our actions” (p. 191). Hall & Simeral (2015) characterize reflection as a process that requires dedicated time and practice with particular thinking strategies when they say that “time must be set aside to process, ponder, reorganize our thoughts, attain clarity, and innovate. Reflection invokes a power inside each of us to expand on what really matters and clear our minds of the things that don’t” (p.134). Referring back to Dewey, the author of the book *How We Think*, and also the most prominently referred to author in this area, we are reminded that reflective thought involves purposeful, designed, and aligned processes. “Reflection involves not simply a sequence of ideas, but a *consequence* – a consecutive ordering in such a way that each determines the next as its proper outcome, while each in turn leans back on its predecessors” (Dewey, 2018, p. 4). To maximize the positive effects of reflection on practice, it is therefore important to recognize and act upon the tight link between people’s past experiences and their future actions. Being cognizant of this connection between one’s own thoughts, experiences, and actions represents the beginning stages of meaningful reflection.

Awareness alone does not lead educators to change practice when it comes to embedding reflection into their own toolkit of strategies used for enhancing their professional growth. Understanding some of the barriers or obstacles that stand in the way of embracing this strong educational practice may help to highlight the need for further study of reflective thought in the

realm of public education. First of all, the literature on reflection as a central aspect of effective professional practice for teachers focuses predominantly upon pre-service teachers, identifying for them the importance of understanding the benefits of reflection and also having the opportunity to experience written and verbal reflective exercises through both coursework and practicum work with students in schools.

There does appear to be a gap, however, when it comes to continuing and sustaining this practice once teachers are out working independently in their own classrooms, without formal reflective processes in place on a day-to-day basis. This past year, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, has also seen pre-service teachers shifted to remote learning for their own studies and has also put them into classroom practicums that are less than an ideal reflective environment. Owen (2015), Russell (2018), and Rodriguez-Valles (2014), all speak about the importance of lifelong learning for teachers but each indicates the absence of either specific processes by which to accomplish this, mechanisms to put individual thought into action, or consistent follow-up of any kind once teacher training has concluded. Flessner (2014) even boldly states that post-secondary institutions and schools are often in opposition to one another in the way that universities design spaces for reflective dialogue for pre-service teachers, yet this space for collegial discourse is notably absent in public school settings. Fox, Dodman, & Holincheck (2019) and Nehring, Laboy, & Catarius (2010) point out a lack of research and literature outside the realm of teacher education and how “research into the dynamics and structure of reflective dialogue within professional learning communities is scant” (Nehring, Laboy, & Catarius, 2010, p. 403).

Presuming that educators employed in the field wanted to narrow the gap between practices experienced at the pre-service and classroom levels, the provision of time seems to be

one barrier that exists in public school environments. Creating opportunities for reflective practices to occur within the school day is a valuable and necessary step to supporting teacher growth. Hannay & Earl (2012) make the link between embedded time for professional reflection and improved student learning, while Donohoo & Katz (2019) connect embedding reflection to increased relevance for both teacher and student learning. McHatton, Parker, & Vallice (2013) couple time together with safe space as a necessary component for effective reflection to occur. And when effective reflection happens for teachers as a sustained daily practice in schools, Larrivee (2010) reminds us that teachers are more alert to the impact that their instruction is having upon each student's own learning successes. Finding time to formally reflect upon instructional practices being chosen and used by teachers helps to sharpen the focus upon improved student learning as the desired outcome of effective teaching. Dufour & Marzano (2011) also highlight the need for purposeful attention to and analysis of one's own impact on student learning as an effective strategy for improved teacher practice and ultimately student success.

Another challenge that exists in school systems is creating a culture where educators may understand the value of reflection, have the time embedded to engage in reflection, but are not choosing to actively participate in the practice itself. Selkrig & Keamy (2015) tout increased collaboration when people choose to participate in the process based upon the level of trust in their relationships with colleagues. Donohoo & Katz (2019) also clearly indicate that trust is a critical element for success, but point out that the level of relational trust needed prior to participation with colleagues is much lower than one might expect. The compulsory element of participating in reflective activities that exists during the time of pre-service preparation, becomes less urgent and also less sustainable once teaching in one's own classroom. There is

debate within the research when it comes to educators volunteering to be part of reflective growth opportunities versus them being mandated to spend time reflecting as part of their professional responsibilities. Watkins & Marsick (1992) use the language of reflective teachers being proactive and ready to take initiative or to take charge of their own learning when given the choice, in much the same way that Bernade (2015) indicates that reflective practitioners display a willingness to engage collaboratively even if not required to do so, and Russell (2018) measures relevant learning when educators vote with their feet to attend reflective sessions. The evidence strongly favours the importance of voice and choice and that teacher growth “must involve a willingness to be an active participant in a perpetual growth process requiring ongoing critical reflection as classroom practice” (Larrivee, 2010, p. 306).

While voluntary choice is considered optimal, it is not always feasible in all settings. Therefore, an important distinction to identify is that the notion of mandated membership in the reflective group for accountability, evaluation, and measurement purposes, is different than a requirement to engage in the practice of professional reflection for the goal of growth and the improvement of one’s own instructional skills. When attempting to effectively implement reflective thinking strategies and structures, addressing the need for professional accountability is not always an easy or clearly laid out task. There are several protocols that have been developed by different authors or groups to facilitate reflective practices both individually and collectively. However, having a prescribed set of steps, or a series of predetermined actions to follow, might be perceived to be seen by a number of advocates as counterproductive to the reflective process. Jay & Johnson (2002) argue that there is not a set of techniques that can be neatly packaged for replication and that the hard work of “shifting beliefs is contextual, difficult work and does not happen overnight. It is an adaptive challenge for which there is no algorithm” (Donohoo & Katz,

2019, p. 13). The issue with doing this effectively lies partly in the lack of protocols and processes by which the act of reflection could become more designed, meaningful, and purposeful for teachers. Owen (2014) and Larrivee (2010) concur with the organic nature of the reflective process, classifying it as a way of knowing with little research into the specific manner by which one goes about achieving a more complete understanding of it for oneself.

Another obstacle that could potentially hinder the use of formal reflection by teachers is the traditionally isolated environment in which teaching takes place. In fact, Dufour & Marzano (2011) tout “isolated teaching in stand-alone classrooms as the most persistent norm standing in the way of improving schools” (p. 50). Recent shifts towards a more open-door, collaborative environment had been occurring in public schools in the province of Manitoba as well as across Canada, but redesigning teaching in the face of a global pandemic has undoubtedly contributed to a backslide away from collective work amongst teachers. The teacher in an isolated, singular environment is less prominent as we find teachers working more and more collaboratively. Value is currently being placed not only upon individual learning, but organizational learning, or collective growth of the group. Both building the capacity of professionals and strengthening the collective efficacy of educational organizations figure prominently as trends in pedagogical best practice. Reflection by educators alone and with one another represents one valuable tool to be used in achieving this collaborative and mutually beneficial state. Fox, Dodman, & Holincheck (2010), Nissila (2005), Selkrig & Keamy (2015), Rodriguez-Valls (2014), as well as Hannay & Earl (2012) all report reflective practice not only as personal and collective, but also as a highly contextual social process that deepens understanding, assists with making substantive change, and moderates our own views so that it is more difficult to hide in the comfort of our own beliefs and assumptions.

The idea that educators purposefully reflecting should lead to substantive change in instructional practice brings forth yet another challenge by way of the speed at which change to teaching and learning is expected to occur. Professional reflection happens before, during, and after the actual instruction occurs, which signifies a continual movement from planning to performance and back. Reflective practitioners choose to locate themselves in a perpetual inquiry cycle where they plan, act, assess, and reflect in a recursive manner both individually and collectively. Jay & Johnson (2002) offer a summary that highlights professional reflection as never-ending, where reflecting leads to further reflecting, the emergence of new questions, and an ever deeper understanding of practice. The descriptors of this organic growth include Donohoo & Katz's (2019) non-linear implementation pattern, Dufour & Marzano's (2011) recurring cycle of ongoing, sustained, non-episodic inquiry, McHatton, Parker, & Vallice's (2013) cyclical and incremental learning, Selkrig & Keamy's (2015) layered and interactive growth, Hannay & Earl's (2012) continual shift in mental models, and Watkins & Marsick's (1992) continuous upward spiral of learning. The length of time needed for entire school systems to comprehend both the value of and the effective use of the reflective practices mentioned above is considerably longer than the amount of time spent on teacher training through the traditional workshop or conference attendance model. What we do know, supported by Klein & Riordan (2011), is that transmission-based professional development, or the one-time presentation of knowledge, is not going to get the job done. The question then is centred around the amount of time school systems are willing to spend in their efforts to gain meaningful and sustainable change.

Carrying on the line of system change, another significant barrier to the use of reflective practices to improve the instructional skills of educators is the fact that both teacher professional

learning after graduation and administrator certification are voluntary in the province of Manitoba. Once a teacher has graduated with a degree in Education, there is no requirement to keep current in the field, to maintain or upgrade pedagogical expertise, or to recertify at any point in one's teaching career. In the absence of any obligation to continue perfecting one's craft, the choice to engage in any form of learning would therefore diminish. Following the public health protocols attached to COVID-19 has also temporarily eliminated many professional development opportunities. The shift away from in-person learning to the platform of virtual interactions is also not the best model to promote either professional networking or the sharing of educational expertise. The number of large-scale systems within the province also adds to the disjointed and inconsistent nature of the profession's approach to improving teacher practice. There exists provincially funded public school divisions, provincially funded independent schools, non-funded independent schools, and federally funded First Nations schools within both urban and rural settings. Teachers, once certified, can teach in any of these settings, at any grade level or subject area that the division or school requires, and teacher placement is at the sole discretion of each of these entities. The absence of any framework to guide the professional learning decisions of so many separate systems inherently creates gaps and inequities that are left entirely to the discretion of divisional and school leadership, or individual teachers themselves.

One final and contextually valuable perspective that makes this research meaningful and relevant is that group reflection can oftentimes be characterized by affirmation of thinking, celebration of actions, and acceptance of assumptions. The target of time spent together becomes more effective when centred upon respectful confrontation and critique of thought patterns, or as Brenade (2015) titles them "perturbations in practice" (p. 45). The productive move is to ask not only what is happening but also to ask why it is happening, and what can be done differently. As

noted by Fox, Dodman, & Holincheck (2019), Jay & Johnson (2002), Larrivee (2010), and Livingston (2014), dissonance as a driver causes rigorous critique of assumptions, questioning of both the status quo as well as common beliefs, and consideration of rich and varied viewpoints, all in an effort to make new meaning of the existing conditions in our own environments. Comfort with dissonance is appearing to be a more normative element of the reflective process. Donohoo & Katz (2019) point out the counterproductive nature of complacency and also issue a challenge to push beyond one's own capability. And in the book *The Culture Code*, Coyle (2018) studies the characteristics of highly successful groups who focus less on achieving happiness and more on solving hard problems together.

Herein lies my interest in not only the ever-changing role of the classroom teacher, but also the school leader and the divisional leader within our educational systems. My career began as a classroom teacher, then saw me move to the role of school administrator, and then to the role of Assistant Superintendent, en route to my current position of Superintendent. My question throughout this journey has always been grounded in the notion of how to best develop the highest quality teachers so that students are prepared to enter society having been equipped with the skills to be productive, contributing citizens. My wondering was always about both the types of supports and the level of clear and attainable expectations given to educators in the area of reflective practices. I wanted to assess and analyze the extent to which the value of reflective practice is understood and embraced. My intent through this research study was to gain insight into the understanding of, the application of, and the alignment of reflective practices in a rural Manitoba school division by answering the proposed research questions.

The Meaning of Reflective Practice in Educational Settings

In this section, I plan to identify the historical and contemporary meaning of reflection and reflective practices. Much of the research, past and present, uses or references Dewey's

description of reflective practice, so the following discussion will weave together the perspectives of more recent authors along with the pioneering work of John Dewey.

Reflective practice shall be characterized as dedicated and designed time for thought and/or dialogue which is focused on the impact of purposeful actions then implemented by educators. It is an intentional act of mind that “alters one’s beliefs” (Nehring, Laboy, & Catarius, 2010, p. 401) and can occur as reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, or reflection-for-action (Benade, 2015, p. 44). Benade (2015) also provides a comprehensive description of each that is consistent with other literature. Reflection-in-action occurs when self-awareness, knowledge, and skills are deployed to deal with puzzles and problems as they arise during teaching, so as to inform next steps. Reflection-on-action can occur before or after direct instructional time, takes more time and involves looking at evidence, thinking about theories and alternatives. Reflection-for-action entails forward planning and builds upon prior or preceding reflection. The outcome of reflective practice must be newfound clarity and changed practice.

In order to make the transition from thought to action, it is important to consider the concept of reflective engagement. For this terminology, I will rely upon the description shared by Fox, Dodman, & Holincheck (2010) and Lyons (2006). These authors define reflective engagement as the deliberate and intentional act of interrupting, or suspending one’s teaching practice to interrogate or inquire into those practices systematically. The intended result of this personal inquiry would be to heighten one’s conscious awareness of one’s actions and then assess the need to either continue as planned or change approaches.

Along those same lines, it is crucial to not only identify but also clearly express one’s own thoughts, beliefs, and actions at any stage of the reflective process. It is equally necessary to have an explicit understanding of certain types of reflection as well as their expressed purpose.

For this research study, the three types of reflective practice that will be used for analyzing the research data are descriptive reflection, comparative reflection, and critical reflection. The purpose of descriptive reflection is considered to be “determining what it is that will become the matter for reflection” (Jay & Johnson, 2002, p. 77). Descriptive reflection could be used by collaborative groups to narrow the focus on a topic of conversation or to identify an agreed upon area of interest for collective data gathering or clearly identified dialogue targets. I will also use Jay & Johnson (2002) to clarify the distinct purpose of comparative reflection as “seeking to understand others’ points of view which may be incongruent with one’s own” (p. 78). Whether reflecting individually or collectively; whether employing descriptive or comparative reflection as the strategy, having a clear, consistent understanding of the aim makes the process both effective and efficient.

Critical reflection, as the adjective suggests, entails a bit more of an in depth examination. Blending the work of Benade (2015), Fox, Dodman, & Holincheck (2010), and Larrivee (2010), critical reflection involves confronting personal and professional belief systems, assumptions, and values by engaging in a cycle of inquiry that digs deeply into existing thought patterns looking for alternate rationales or answers to difficult questions. Further, critical reflection includes viewing a given matter in several different ways, incorporating the next dimension of chosen actions based upon a new and better understanding of the initial problem being examined.

The definitions explored thus far are by no means an exhaustive list of terminology when exploring how teachers, school administrators, and divisional systems leaders interpret and apply their own measures of reflection, but are the most commonly found concepts in the literature. The upcoming chapter includes a look at the salient features of professional reflective practices

for teachers, as well as a more detailed interpretation of the areas in which system leadership impacts engagement in the reflective process. Throughout this research study, any further definitions encountered shall be detailed within the work itself as required.

Context and Significance of the Study

Undertaking this qualitative study on the use of reflective practices by teachers in the province of Manitoba at this time carries great significance to the field of education. Teachers in Manitoba undergo post-secondary training over a length of five years and are then certified to teach. At present, there is no restriction or necessary qualifications for being hired to a particular grade level or subject area, with the exception of vocational teachers, and some school divisions do not utilize a process of formal evaluations beyond the first year, if at all. Currently, the only formal incentive to furthering one's professional upgrading is in the form of an advancement on the pay grid of the division's collective agreement. Teachers who choose to upgrade their credentials through further post-secondary training do so voluntarily and also get to choose their own discipline of study. Exploring the level of comprehension, the depth of use, and the alignment of resources in the area of reflective practices for teachers benefits the education profession. Purposefully designed protocols for reflection can provide accessible, attainable, and relevant learning opportunities by harnessing existing expertise and by supporting collaborative growth in schools and school divisions.

Teachers are not the sole target who benefit from engaging in formal reflective thought processes. Principals and Assistant Principals also have no formal criteria or required credentials before becoming a school administrator other than being a certified teacher. There is not a designated program nor a prescribed set of job-specific skills that must be mastered in order to take on one of these roles, so the leadership styles and learning priorities vary greatly across the

province and even within each school division itself. Superintendents, along with Assistant Superintendents, are equally free to choose their own method, topics, and levels of engagement when it comes to professional learning. They, too, are exempt from any initial or ongoing certification beyond being certified teachers and are able to attend learning sessions predominantly organized by themselves, for themselves. This can become problematic as each school and school division are left to target student outcomes and promote instructional goals in an unguided, and possibly, uninformed manner. Depending upon the leadership, this could also be a well-crafted and meaningful experience, and in fact could be an exemplary sample of reflective practice in action. One significant reason to undertake this study was in fact the numerous diverse professional learning models that exist across the province.

Lastly, at the beginning stages of this research proposal, the province of Manitoba was nearing the completion of a Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education Review commissioned by the provincial government. Recommendations from this Review were scheduled to be shared with Manitoba Education and then also to be presented to the Legislative Assembly in some form. The date for the release was set for the end of March 2020, but the closure of all schools in the province in mid-March hijacked that plan. The goal of this Review was touted to be the creation of a more consistent, equitable, and improved education system in Manitoba. The mechanisms by which the government will achieve these expectations was still to be seen, but was also creating much uncertainty and angst for people working in the field of education. The release of the Review was postponed indefinitely at the beginning of the global pandemic's arrival in Manitoba. Then, one year later, in mid-March again, the forecasting of potential amalgamations, dismantling of school boards, creation of provincial bargaining units, and removal of local taxation powers was confirmed with the release of the contents of the Kindergarten to Grade 12

Review results. In a world still floundering through how to function during a global pandemic, and a province forging ahead with a government plan to overhaul the education system, taking an in-depth look at the embedded practices of one rural school division with regards to improving instruction remained a valuable venture at this point in time.

By looking at one school division whose main goal is improved student learning through high quality instruction, I would hope to find common trends and patterns in the work currently being done. I would also hope that if gaps or challenges are identified in the understanding of, or application of reflective practices as a professional learning strategy, that they could be addressed more explicitly going forward. Increased knowledge in this area combined with the proper skills to effectively implement professional reflection more frequently and in a more purposeful way could produce significant gains in a sustainable, relevant, and possibly scalable way for other school divisions across the province. Subsequently, if there is a lack of support or engagement at any of the three selected roles being interviewed, then appropriate attention and resources could be placed more effectively to help ensure system success. In the throes of the implementation of the governmental review, along with the navigation of teaching in pandemic times, school divisions in Manitoba may benefit from purposeful enhancement strategies such as the effective use of reflective practices by teachers for the purpose of instructional improvement.

Methodology and Research Design

The goal of this research was to gain insight into the understanding of, the application of, and the alignment of reflective practices in a single rural Manitoba school division, by examining the viewpoints of selected educators in different roles and at various levels of that division. The aim was to make sense of the ways in which people's perspectives or beliefs overlap, intersect, or differ from one another. As such, the initial design decision was to approach the study from

the stance of a qualitative researcher. The secondary design decision was rooted in the nature of the intended interactions with key people in one single school division. A third design decision added a quantitative analysis component in order to compare both thematic and role responses. Discussions with participants involved in-depth conversations centred around their perceptions of their own understanding of their social context and behaviours with regard to reflective practices. The philosophical framework that best suited this type of interaction was one where I was able to look for patterns and ultimately make connections between individualistic thought and the views of the larger organization, the school division. In order to best organize, analyze, and search for trends in the information gathered from participants, the methodology being employed was one that allowed me to be able to code, categorize, and compare the data samples and generate emergent concepts or possible theories to explain what was occurring in the environment being surveyed.

The design of this qualitative study incorporated the use of semi-structured interviews with all identified participants and followed those up with a brief clarifying conversation confirming dominant trends with each participant. Four school divisions in rural Manitoba were identified as possible candidate divisions. Each of these four divisions had identified improved professional practice for teachers as a divisional priority area. The Superintendent of each division received a letter outlining the purpose of the study, indicating their role in the study, and inviting their participation. As the primary goal of this research was to determine the level of comprehension and coherence within a finite system which has been engaged in the work of improving teacher practice, the possible participant divisions were approached and accepted only if each system level group also agreed to participate. Specific criteria given for participation in this study can be found in Appendix A: Letter of Invitation for Divisional Participation in the

Study. As outlined in Chapter 3, Methodology, consideration for the length of time an administrator or administrative team have been in place, the turnover of staff in the school, and whether the school is considered to be engaging in this priority area in an exemplary way, played a part in the final selection of the participant school.

Upon receipt of the signed Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) from the Superintendent, the administrators at the schools in that division also received a Letter of Invitation for School Participation in the Study (Appendix C). Communication indicating that the division was choosing to participate in the study should be the limit of the interaction regarding the choice presented to the school(s) in terms of their own participation. The amount of information shared with the possible participant school(s) is being limited to eliminate the possibility of introducing a bias in favour of one school over any other wishing to participate.

Upon receipt of the signed Informed Consent Form (Appendix D) from the school administration, the teachers in that school received a Letter of Invitation for Teacher Participation in the Study (Appendix E). Communication indicating that the division and the school were choosing to participate in the study was the limit of the interaction regarding the choice presented to the teachers in terms of their own participation. The amount of information shared with the possible participant teachers is being limited to eliminate the possibility of introducing a bias in favour of any one teacher over another wishing to participate. Participation for all candidates consisted of an individual interview as well as the ability to proofread and amend or add to any of their initial interview comments. A follow-up conversation by telephone was utilized to further clarify trends, to introduce and discuss any gaps in information, and also created one further opportunity with regards to sharing information on this topic or changing any commentary made in the individual interviews.

Once a signed Informed Consent Form (Appendix F) has been received from two teachers from the participant school, the interview process was to be scheduled and undertaken. Questions for the Superintendent (Appendix G), the Principal (Appendix H), and the teachers (Appendix I) had been designed to address the differences in the roles that each participant level plays in the reflective process. For example, the audience of learners for the Superintendent is administrators; for administrators, it is teachers; and for teachers, it is students. This range of diverse learners merited some slight customization of the questions, but the main idea of each question remained constant across the participant roles. As participants in this research may have unintentionally become known to one another, each participant was asked to critically review and make any necessary revisions to their own interview transcripts prior to their inclusion and analysis. This step had been added to ensure that each participant was also able to filter their own words with regard to comments that may have identified either themselves or potentially a colleague in their school. It was made abundantly clear to participants that the purpose of this qualitative study was to look for understanding of, application of, and system alignment with regards to reflective practices for teachers, and was in no way looking to evaluate any participant teachers' practice with regard to any divisional initiatives currently being implemented.

In terms of data analysis, the interview transcripts were coded and included in a themed analysis to help identify trends, patterns, and differences. The follow-up check-in also allowed one final opportunity for both clarification and potential additions from the participants. From the original interviews, I coded, categorized and compared the information shared by each of the participants. Had there been a need to ask clarifying questions, to affirm particular information, or to more clearly understand diversity between responses, the ability to follow up with each person by telephone in case there was a need for additional dialogue and deepened

comprehension. The data from the follow-up conversations was gathered, analyzed, and layered into the prior themes that were identified through the individual interview process. The intent of this design was to mirror the reflective practice process as much as possible during the data collection phase of the study.

A reflective inquiry cycle would look like designing the plan, facilitating the designed plan, assessing the progress against the designated outcomes, and then revising the approach to achieve the next level as indicated by the initial data obtained and analyzed. Professional reflection is iterative, ongoing, and responsive in a way that it moves learners or a learning environment towards the logical next steps. As Watkins & Marsick (1992) indicate, critical reflectivity is “the bringing of one’s own assumptions, premises, criteria, and schemata into consciousness and vigorously critiquing them” (p. 297). Building an opportunity for critical reflection by myself into the design of the study was a more difficult process, but this trend verification and connection through the follow-up or check-in conversations produced richer results.

Limitations and Delimitations

A delimitation of this qualitative study was found in the decision to select only one rural school division and not considering urban divisions. The rationale for choosing a rural division over urban divisions lay predominantly in the size factor as well as a number of positive culture features that are outlined in further detail in Chapter 3. The choice to approach select divisions actively pursuing improved instructional practice further shrunk the pool of candidate divisions, but also allowed for more in depth conversations with knowledgeable participants. As the lone researcher, my familiarity with the work of school divisions in my own region may have influenced my ability to remain completely objective when prioritizing the possible candidates for

the study. The underlying premise of this potential bias exists through the likelihood of more frequent exposure to the work of divisions near my own versus those farther from my range of proximity. I did endeavor to look critically for a match between the topic of this research and the priorities identified by divisions. Visiting the websites of divisions in the province, and looking at their Continuous Improvement Plans was one way of identifying potential candidate divisions. Attending learning sessions of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) was an arena where promising practice in given areas is showcased, and represented the second way of identifying possible participant divisions. A professional development committee, made up of MASS members, chooses the topics and divisions who present at these learning sessions. While Katz & Ain Dack (2013) remind us that “most people believe that they are the exception to thinking errors and biases” (p. 52), and it is admittedly difficult to identify or name all possible delimitations, the intent throughout has been to complete this research in the most unbiased manner possible and address as many predicted or anticipated subjective influences in the design phase of the work.

Limitations to the study would be the inability of this work to address differences in the types of reflective processes being used or the support available due to grade level, subject area, language of instruction, or size of school. There is also a limiting factor when considering public schools as compared to privately-funded, and/or federally funded school systems like those on First Nations or within the catchment of the Division Scolaire Franco-Manitobaine (DSFM).

This qualitative study could have been opened to address many further aspects, but attempts to stay rooted in gaining insight into the understanding of, the application of, and the alignment of reflective practices in one rural Manitoba school division was the focus of my

research. Any conclusions that fall outside the answers being sought will be highlighted in Chapter 5 as potential areas for further study.

Organization of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into five chapters. The first chapter consists of the introduction, which contains within it the background to the study, the meaning of reflective practices in educational settings, the context and significance for the study, the purpose or problem statement, the methodology and research design being used, any delimitations and limitations, and the layout of the entire thesis.

Following this first chapter, the second chapter presents the literature review and the conceptual framework for the study, paying particular attention to the breadth, scope, focus, and relevance of the research being undertaken. The analysis of the literature digs more deeply into the salient features of reflection for teaching professionals, and then also discusses evidence of the importance that leadership and strong systemic alignment add to the effectiveness of embracing reflective practice as a means to improve educator learning.

Chapter three includes a more detailed description of the chosen methodology as well as the selected design, the study environment, participant selection, researcher positioning, data collection, data analysis, confidentiality, and ethics. Particular attention is given to addressing the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic on the ability to complete the research as initially planned.

Chapter four recaps the data collection process, walks through the ways in which the data was analyzed, discusses the results that were uncovered, and outlines the findings of the research. The analysis work displays perspectives from the stance of the research questions, the interviewed group as a whole, and then finally each individual participant.

Chapter five provides a summary and conclusions, looks at the implications of the work undertaken, revisits any identified limitations, and highlights potential recommendations for practice and future study.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Introduction

The task of educating children comes with a requirement for educators to stock their teacher toolkit with multiple skillsets, many instructional strategies, as well as an ability to choose the most effective approaches for a plethora of ever-changing student needs. At the same time, administrators play an important role as they need to provide both pressure and support to those teachers who are working hard to improve their repertoire of instructional strategies. What this research project will address is: a) to discover whether selected practitioners in one rural Manitoba school division are able to articulate a clear and explicit understanding of reflective practice as a professional growth strategy; b) to take an in-depth look at the types of purposeful reflective practices that are occurring within that school division; and c) to assess the coherence and alignment that exists between the levels in that particular educational setting.

Comprehension of the theoretical aspects of reflective practice, the application of the theory, and the collective work towards that practice are all critical mechanisms to improving the ability of educational professionals to better understand, assess the impact of, to best implement, and then adjust their instructional effectiveness. According to Fox, Dodman & Holincheck (2019), “reflection has been identified as one of the key ways to help teachers broaden and strengthen their professional learning experiences and increase their effectiveness as educators” (p. 369). Rodriguez-Valls (2014) argues that reflection is not just a convenient or helpful choice, but that “critical thinking is an essential, not optional, part of assuming teacher responsibilities” (p. 304). Taking this notion of reflective practice as an expected action even one step farther beyond an invitational choice, Schön (1983) boldly states that “unreflective practitioners are equally limited and destructive whether they label themselves as professionals or counter

professionals” (p. 290). These educational researchers present compelling arguments which lead one to believe that there is not only a suggested need to improve in the area of reflective practice, but a professional obligation.

In the remainder of this literature review, I will first delve more deeply into what the literature identifies as the salient features of reflection for teaching professionals, and then show evidence of the importance that leadership and strong systemic alignment add to the effectiveness of embracing reflective practice as a means to improve educator learning. In this review, the key features of reflective practice as presented and discussed in the educational research are: (i) dissonance as a driver of reflection; (ii) the importance of reflective practice being inquiry-based; (iii) shifting existing beliefs about the value of reflection; (iv) the need for vulnerability and trust as a precursor for successful reflection; (v) the value of a collaborative culture; and, (vi) the value of formalizing the visibility of the reflective process. In terms of leadership and systemic alignment, the topics of: (i) shared vision, (ii) consistency of and commitment to philosophical beliefs, (iii) the allocation of necessary resources, (iv) the importance of system alignment (v) the benefit of capacity building; and, (vi) accountability are all highlighted as critical elements present in order for systems to successfully support instructional improvement.

Clarifying Terminology

Included in the Introduction to this thesis are comprehensive definitions for reflective thought; reflective practice—which encompasses reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action and reflection-for-action; as well as reflective engagement, which addresses descriptive reflection, comparative reflection, and critical reflection. In order to provide consistency and clarity with regards to understanding the terminology being used in this research study, there are several

other terms that merit explanation and whose definitions will be used throughout the study as outlined here. Multiple sources of research literature have similar supporting definitions, but for the purpose of this study, the following definitions will be used by the author to promote both clarity and consistency moving forward.

With regards to thinking skills, the concepts of metacognition, self-reflection, tacit knowing, and intuition will be defined and explained below. According to Hattie & Zierer (2018) as well as Katz & Ain Dack (2013) **metacognition** is a term for thinking about one's own thought processes or a person's knowledge about his or her own cognitive processes. As summarized by Hall & Simeral (2015), **self-reflection** is the purposeful use of formal thought processes to gain awareness, to plan deliberately, take action intentionally, assess the impact of actions, adjust the course of action based on feedback, and engage in this cycle repeatedly. Schön (1983) explains **tacit knowing** as our initial awareness of our feelings, even though we cannot express how we came to know or in what way the knowledge became internalized. Hall & Simeral (2015) also provide language to pinpoint **intuition** as the brain collecting information through experience, training, knowledge, and repetition to the point where processes no longer need to be consciously worked out or reasoned.

In the realm of leadership theories, constructivism, transformative leadership, instructional leadership, and distributed leadership will all be used and thus require further clarity. Klein & Riordan (2011) outline **constructivism** to be when learners actively build their own knowledge and skills; constructing their own framework for thought and action. Carolyn Shields, one of the leading Canadian experts in the area of **transformative leadership**, touts this type of constructivist leadership as the deconstruction and reconstruction of embedded knowledge frameworks among leaders. **Instructional leadership** relates specifically to the

targets of curriculum, teaching, and learning according to Katz & Ain Dack (2013), encouraging a focus on improving the classroom practices of teachers as the direction for the school (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). Finally, Leithwood et al. (2004) help us to understand that the way in which to construct, transform, and focus most effectively is through **distributed leadership** where the practice used in order to influence people is exercised by more than one single person in the organization. Being able to identify and engage in either transformative, distributed, or instructional leadership at the appropriate times and places helps create a culture that supports the development of effective and successful reflective practitioners.

To round out the definitions, a glimpse into systems thinking is necessary. Here we look at alignment, collective capacity building, heuristics, algorithms, and protocols. Senge (1990) is a leading researcher and author who studies learning organizations and simply identifies **alignment** to be when a group of people function effectively together as a whole entity. In order to accomplish this task, focus upon increased capacity throughout the organization becomes a cornerstone requirement. Fullan & Quinn (2016) look at **collective capacity building** to be “the increased ability of educators at all levels of the system to make the instructional changes required to raise the bar and close the gap for all students” (p. 57). **Protocols**, as Katz & Ain Dack (2013) outline, are structured sets of guidelines used to help facilitate both effective and efficient communication or problem solving for groups of educators. Selkrig & Keamy (2015) add that protocols are also purposeful and deliberate ways in which collegial discussions may be undertaken together. Pink (2009), along with Katz & Ain Dack (2013), highlights the difference between an algorithmic or heuristic approach to interacting with people and/or problems. An **algorithmic approach** is when a set of established instructions down a single pathway are followed to one conclusion and a **heuristic approach** is when you experiment with possibilities

and devise a novel solution. Both approaches are worthy to understand and consider when examining appropriate and productive alignment of educational systems.

Salient Features of Professional Reflective Practices for Teachers

It seems fair to begin with the concept of reflective thought, being defined by Dewey (2018) as “active, persistent and careful consideration of one’s belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 8). That being said, it seems equally important to deconstruct reflective thought into some of its salient features or those most notable characteristics that improve its relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability as an embedded practice for teachers. The following entails a synopsis of those features highlighted in the educational literature.

Dissonance

While reviewing the literature surrounding reflective practice, the starting point very typically originates in a place of dissonance, or a disturbing recognition that there is a driving need or urge to change or improve a situation. Pink (2009) aptly describes “the path to mastery – becoming ever better at something you care about – is not lined with daisies and spanned by a rainbow” (p. 122). Larrivee (2000) points out the necessity of uncertainty as a hallmark that signifies the emergence of new learning, as well as a requirement for “inner struggle as an important stage of the reflective process” (p. 304) and Wheatley (2009) references how “we can’t be creative if we refuse to be confused” (p. 48). Katz & Ain Dack (2013) urge a revised view of cognitive discomfort away from being an unfortunate consequence towards being an essential prerequisite of new learning. And by embracing confusion, especially in areas one ought to know about, Schön (1983) flags the reshaping of thought that happens by working through those confusions.

Often problems are not readily evident and must be constructed or formed by examining problematic situations in a messy and organic way. “If it is true that professional practice has at least as much to do with finding the problems as with solving the problem found, it is also true that problem setting is a recognized professional activity” (Schön, 1983, p. 18). In his book *The Culture Code*, Coyle (2018) points out that happiness is not the main focus of a reflective group, but that fulfillment occurs around that group thinking through and solving hard problems together. To accomplish this, “involves many moments of high-candor feedback, uncomfortable truth-telling, when they confront a gap between where the group is, and where it ought to be” (Coyle, 2018, p. 55). Through the designed and intentional reflection on experiences that may have been triggered by a discomfiting discovery, Watkins & Marsick (1992) confirm that the search for new and challenging perspectives will cause experimentation with new thinking patterns, different actions, and ultimately shift feelings about familiar or routine problems that are encountered.

So, the starting point of reflective practice is identifying dissonance as it occurs, followed up with seeking out problems potentially hidden in the status quo. The final chapter of this journey then lies in the approach by which one challenges the stability of day to day practices. When we seek out disconfirming evidence, Katz & Ain Dack (2013) state that we are then able to face the awareness that there exist limitations to our given understanding. “The main point, however, is not to strive for some abstract ideal of coherence. It is rather for all the participants to work together to become sensitive to all the possible forms of incoherence” (Senge, 1990, p. 243).

This leaves educators in a recursive circle of action, or possible inaction. As Schön (1983) points out, situations are changed when clarity or understanding is actively sought, but understanding

also improves through attempts to alter circumstance. Being able to explicitly acknowledge and label one's goal or purpose when tackling dissonance is challenging at best.

Inquiry-Based

The second salient feature commonly found in the literature is that reflective practices should be rooted in a stance of inquiry, approached with an open-mind, and undertaken using a 'growth mindset'. Dufour & Marzano (2011) assist with the definition of a growth mindset by sharing the work of Carol Deck who coined the phrase which means "the belief that academic achievement is the result of sustained effort rather than innate ability" (p. 186). In opposition to this is one's need to consistently appear as though they are ultimately knowledgeable with regards to their choices and actions. This closed-mindset, as Katz & Ain Dack (2013) remind us, is when the aim is to "maximize our strengths and minimize our weaknesses, and we try to present our strongest version of ourselves to the outside world" (p. 64). There is indeed hope however, as long as a teacher is authentically aware of what they truly know, willing to recognize that knowledge is fluid or subject to change, and they "have the ability to undo and relearn knowledge" (Hall & Simeral, 2015, p.47). When a learner is willing to wholeheartedly engage in a problem-solving exercise by openly applying an inquiry framework, following the implications unearthed, and then actively listening to the situation's back-talk, Schön (1983) calls this an inquiry-based approach.

Once committed to accepting and enacting an inquiry stance throughout the reflective process, there follows a need to explore the rationale for sustaining a growth mindset approach with the intent of remaining an open-minded practitioner. To be clear, thoughts and actions that truly originate from a place of inquiry aim to address the unknown and are most often about solving deeply challenging issues and not strictly addressing them in a superficial way. Fox,

Dodman, & Holincheck (2019) back this up by sharing that “teacher education has been criticized for watering down the term reflection and using it to merely affirm existing beliefs, rather than genuinely engage teachers in confronting and examining how their beliefs affect their actions and students” (p. 368). Donohoo & Katz (2019) concur with support for what they call a progressive inquiry methodology whereby the professional learning structure is a focused, persistent effort towards the application, experimentation, and analysis of better ways of teaching and learning in schools and classrooms. Senge (1990) and Jay & Johnson (2002) claim that inquiry skills are the way to deal with complex, conflicting issues, and the way to reach newfound clarity leading to changes in perspectives and then actions. Each of these authors addresses the concept of inquiry cycles from a slightly different slant, citing rigour, persistence, and dissonance, yet they all have comfort with discomfort at the centre of their works. In order to get through the messiness of the unknown, educators must own up to not always having an answer and commit to authentically looking for the best next steps.

Ultimately, reflective thinking that is rooted in inquiry prompts changes in practice that would not have surfaced through other means. If time is not taken to question whether evidence, actions, or thoughts are right or wrong, then teaching will continue in the way that it always has been done. Larrivee (2000), Katz & Ain Dack (2013) and Flessner (2014) all point to the need to continually evaluate and put forth for critique our existing beliefs, assumptions, and hypotheses so that they may be weighed against disconfirming evidence or other plausible interpretations. Learning how to reflect on tacit knowledge, how to express one’s own viewpoint, and then listen to the perspectives of others is, as Nissilä (2005) purports, the inquiry-based route to improved reflective practice skills.

Shifting Beliefs

Life inside and outside the classroom finds people relying upon prior experiences, repeating that which has been seen, heard, done and learned without question. “We are often unaware of having learned to do these things; we simply find ourselves doing them” (Schön, 1983, p.54). As identified in the definitions, tacit knowing is our initial awareness of our feelings, even though we cannot express how we came to know or in what way the knowledge became internalized. Pink (2009) calls this set of assumptions about human behavior “the operating system” (p. 16) of society, while Leithwood et al. (2004) use the term “mental models” (p. 64) to capture the way in which people interpret their environment or summarize their ideas and beliefs in a coherent way. Educators, as Valls (2014) identifies, find themselves teaching in the way they were taught, duplicating what worked well for them, eliminating that which was not a positive learning experience, and treating the use of a new strategy or trying something different than what they have always done in much the same manner. One possible detriment to teachers blindly following tacit knowledge is that it tends to “reinforce past misperceptions and prejudices, which lead to no learning at all, or to learning of error” (Watkins & Marsick, 1992, p. 289). The progress or success of students and the growth or learning of teachers are both negatively impacted when educators stay rooted in the comfort of status quo instructional practices.

Donohoo & Katz (2019) tell us that the biggest barrier to implementing quality instruction is remaining entrenched in internalized belief systems. Much earlier, Senge (1990) also identified the importance of

being aware of our assumptions and holding them up for examination. This cannot be done if we are defending our opinions. Nor, can it be done if we are unaware of our

assumptions, or unaware that our views are based on *assumptions*, rather than incontrovertible fact (p. 246).

Essentially, we need to have a method by which to surface and address our own operating system of thought because belief systems will not change all on their own. This sentiment is echoed by Hall & Simeral (2015) who agree that taking action is required, and in fact do not see that as the hard part, but instead claim that the difficulty arises in creating new thought or action in place of old ones. Changing patterns, even when it is known to be necessary, is difficult and “one thing that all of us as human beings tend to do to avoid new learning (i.e. change) is interact with the world in a way that seeks to confirm what we already think, believe, know, and do, rather than challenge it” (Katz & Ain Dack, 2013, p. 10).

It is in this way that reflective practice is used as the tool to not only challenge but also change beliefs and assumptions. Larrivee (2000) highlights that “engaging in critical reflection brings commonly-held beliefs into question” (p. 295) and states that “through self-reflection, teachers can learn to see beyond the filters of their past and the blinders of their expectations” (p. 299). Russell (2018), Benade (2015), and Schön (1983) identify reflective practice as a fundamental feature of teaching and further identify the main purpose of reflection being to surface, engage with, criticize, and most importantly, learn from the tacit understandings of experiences. One critical pitfall pointed out by Fox, Dodman & Holincheck (2019) is the danger of reflecting at a contextual level only may tend to validate existing principles instead of expanding new knowledge and developing the dispositions required for deep engagement in reflection. Teachers need to step out of their own context and sometimes view a lesson or teaching moment as an isolated event, dissecting it as an individual part and not always as a

comparison against the whole. Once again, a keen and accurate interpretation of one's thought processes in relation to intentional instructional choices is a crucial element of reflective practice.

Vulnerability and Trust

As mentioned in the previous section, one of the difficult challenges that reflective practices help to overcome is the shifting of one's beliefs towards embracing new thought processes and patterns. In order for teachers to consider reflection as a means to improve, there is a level of safety that needs to be in place so that educators can be vulnerable in their learning. And "although education is a learning profession, teachers are not always quick to admit to 'not knowing' in any kind of public or semi-public arena, especially in areas that they believe they should already 'know' about" (Katz, Earl, Jaafar, 2009, p. 53). The choice to stay rooted in their narrow habits stems in part from fear of a world that is hungry for rigor, and partly because of a professional devotion to project what Schön (1983) calls an image of solid competence.

The current climate in Manitoba with regard to education is one of scrutiny aimed at finding reasons for low scores on international Math, Reading, and Science tests compared to other Canadian provinces and looking to find cost savings in the process. This creates angst and uncertainty for educators and leaders who are working diligently towards successful student learning and must now also quantify their own levels of competence to the public and elected officials. Other inhibitors can be what Selkrig & Keamy (2015) identify as "low-quality and judgmental feedback made by peers" (p. 425), what Katz & Ain Dack (2013) phrase as inaction due to a crippling fear of the potential downside of action, even though it may be considered possibly harmful to do nothing, as well as their reality check "that both children and adults are often penalized for mistakes" (p. 66). The possibility of formal evaluations, disciplinary actions, teaching assignment changes, or even job loss can enter the thinking of educators who are open

and willing to admit that they are not fully certain of the effects of their own teaching methods or choices of instructional approaches.

Despite these potential barriers, Donohoo & Katz (2019) confidently express that trust is a key component for participation in effective vicarious experiences. They also recognize that only a small amount of relational trust leads to teachers taking supported risks together in their school environments. Coyle (2018) agrees with the ‘leap of faith’ notion and says that doing so alongside colleagues “causes the solid ground of trust to materialize beneath our feet” (p. 107). Interestingly, much of the navigation, planning, and implementing of pandemic protocols has indeed been a ‘leap of faith’ with much uncertainty about the kind of ground that would materialize beneath us. As long as professionals are challenging one another’s perspectives and thinking critically instead of rapidly affirming each other using a group think mentality, confidence in both thought processes and actions increase. Larrivee (2000), Senge (1990), along with Katz, Earl & Jaafar (2009) are all aligned in their thinking that being critically reflective entails acting with integrity, speaking openly, committing to face fears, developing skills to challenge in a productive manner, stepping out of comfort zones, and pushing beyond one’s own capabilities. Where there is enough trust built up to allow for vulnerability, being able to scrutinize practice with competence and commitment is a sustainable venture. The ability to work through a less than perfect attempt at teaching a lesson or interacting with a learner, allows a teacher to reflect, assess, plan a next attempt, and then put an improvement effort into play. And when this becomes an embedded part of practice, the sustainability of relevant and purposeful reflection increases.

Vulnerability is a powerful and reliable spark that ignites cooperation and trust in group interactions. Coyle (2018) challenges our inability to realize the strength of this intuitive

connection stating that “we have a natural tendency to try to hide our weaknesses” (p. 76) when we should be doing the exact opposite. Most often, teachers navigate through sense-making by using individual reflection, however, Leithwood et al (2004) indicate that when teachers feel compromised or threatened, they “are more likely to engage in collective sense-making” (p. 34). As one example, teachers looking at data from standards tests, like the provincial assessment results here in Manitoba, can cause heightened anxiety. Depending on the purpose for analyzing these results, or the audience for which the analysis is being prepared, the level of urgency to organize a rationale can become higher. The strength of a supportive learning environment, as described by Livingston (2014), allows professionals to take greater responsibility for both identifying and reflecting on their learning needs, and also recognizing themselves as continuous learners. And despite the fact that reflection can temporarily inhibit action according to Schön (1983), it is still plausible to find low risk contexts in which reflective practices can occur.

Sometimes the sheer magnitude of the possible choices or actions that emerge from critical reflection can be overwhelming and lead to inactivity. Starting off small and building the dynamic of trust helps lead to the worthy goal of stronger teacher practice in the name of improved student learning. When these small, attainable goals are achieved over time then we begin to see that the bigger picture or system changes are also starting to occur. As Katz & Ain Dack (2013) state “conceptual change happens when people make their current beliefs explicit, subject them to scrutiny from themselves and others, consider how new information either fits or challenges their existing beliefs, and then make permanent changes to what they know and do” (p. 7). Positive change can happen from being in a safe, supportive group setting and by embracing the practice of reflective thought.

Collaboration

Identifying a path of learning for oneself, charting a course to obtain new knowledge or skills, and then embarking on the learning journey is something that happens for individuals in planned, formal ways as well as in intuitive, informal ways. Undertaking learning alone is a manageable and even beneficial process, however, “collective learning occurs in the workplace that is different from individual learning or one’s own goals” (Watkins & Marsick, 1992, p. 292). In Dufour & Marzano (2011) this idea is clarified when they argue that “no single person can unilaterally bring about substantive change in an organization” (p. 2); that the days where charismatic leaders being able to change systems has shifted towards building capacity across a broader base of people. Coyle (2018) follows up by flagging the positioning of team structures as an improved approach to problem solving. He indicates that the hierarchical structures of the past hinder the creative thought offerings of individuals in any group setting. Impactful work happens in collaborative inquiry groups which involve being challenged alongside with challenging others. Katz & Ain Dack (2013) tell us that this productive environment thrives when the participants “understand that they are likely not very different from those around them” (p. 63), and that the idea of someone else’s superiority is their perception and not reality. In light of these positive effects, a natural conclusion might be to follow the advice of Coyle (2018) and “create spaces that maximize collisions” (p. 82). The ability of a school system to create productive time for professional interactions, idea sharing, and dialogue could be a worthy exploration when looking for new ways to harness and improve existing expertise.

So, if operating individually and working collaboratively represent points on a spectrum or continuum of professional growth choices, one must once again look to reflective practice in order to accurately assess the best manner to “be both autonomous and happily interdependent

with others” (Pink, 2009, p. 88). In Hattie & Zierer (2018) their pedagogical knowledge is used to assist in guiding educators to see that “educational expertise is a product of exchange and cooperation” and that “lone wolves can be successful, but they can be even more successful if they work together with others” (p. 25). Senge (1990) is yet another sage in the area of organizational strength, and he helps us understand that personal views lead to shared vision in much the same way that individual reflection leads to a solid foundation of skills for collective inquiry, dialogue and discussion. These foundational skills will carry individuals farther in their own growth as Donohoo & Katz (2019) point out that knowledge creation occurs for individuals when embedded within a community and connected to the context of that community. Teachers who are both formally and informally sharing ideas and actions will talk about, question, celebrate, and value new knowledge with one another. This continual and repeated attention to a topic or strategy keeps it at the forefront of thought and practice. Hall & Simeral (2015) present similar ideas as Nissilä (2005) in identifying the purpose of reflective work as being able to integrate beliefs and experiences, both personally and collectively, with the goal of enhancing both one’s own growth as well as the growth of others.

During this process of blending individual reflection into effective collaborative opportunities for thinking and processing thoughts together, the target or aim of the group is to put new found knowledge and skills into action. Hattie & Zierer (2018), Carroll (2009), and Livingston (2014) all characterize the predominant purpose of working together cooperatively to unequivocally be enhanced success by all students on prescribed learning outcomes. They clearly identify a need to understand and evaluate the impact of teachers on student learning, and to harness their collective intelligence for the primary benefit of student learning but also for a residual benefit of teacher learning too. Carroll (2009) claims that a collaborative culture will

“improve student learning beyond what any of them can achieve alone” (p.13) while Hattie & Zierer (2018) affirm that “it is the collaborative nature of the learning that makes the difference” (p. 29). It then comes as no surprise that Dufour & Marzano (2011) point out that a good use of time for administrators is to build the capacity of their collaborative teams, in fact it is a better use of time than supervising individual teachers. Leithwood et al (2004) also praise the participation of educators and administrators in collective work as substantially extending individual development.

Visibility

The literature review thus far has looked at the conditions under which reflection happens, what is necessary for reflective practice to be done well, and some reasons why teachers would look to reflection as a means to improve their own instructional effectiveness. One main tenet of engaging in the work of being a reflective practitioner rests in the process of how it is formalized, either through verbal interactions, written words, or using other tracking protocols. Schön (1983) verbalizes that “one must use words to describe a kind of knowing, and a change of knowing, which are probably not originally represented in words at all” (p.59) and goes on to mention that even when an attempt to put thoughts into words occurs, it is likely to come out as either inadequate and/or inappropriate. In addition, Schön (1983) addresses the value of being able to manipulate one’s spoken language skills in an ordinary conversation, while also emphasizing the need to master multiple media means in order to bolster one’s reflective communication repertoire. By this, he challenges thinkers to find ways to articulate or make concrete the thought behind things that are automatic or tacitly known. These are the types of actions that typically just occur without much thought as to why or how they happen. At the end of the day though, Wheatley (2009) boils it down to a basic human need for people to tell the

story of their concerns and struggles; to be listened to and be willing to listen to others. She eloquently states that “conversation is the natural way humans think together” (p. 33) and that an ability to do this well enhances one’s contribution to the betterment of others. Pink (2009) lends agreement with the challenge to “humanize what people say and you may well humanize what they do” (p. 137). When one values or honours the passion and expertise that educators possess by providing an arena in which they may vocalize their thinking, a more purpose-filled dialect emerges.

Simply putting people together in a group does not equate to quality professional learning taking place. Throughout his cited literary works, Steven Katz (2009 & 2013) implores groups to engage with processes and protocols to avoid the trap of calling all collective gatherings a professional learning community or PLC. Hattie & Zierer (2018) call the creation of space for common dialogue a designed opportunity to think, Valls (2014) clarifies how having a process for listening and participating deepen conversations, and Selkrig & Keamy (2015) noticed that the use of protocols moved groups to a level of critical reflection in their collegial conversations. Benade (2015) found that quality collective reflection should be both proactive and directed in its focus, emphasizing the need for purposeful planning in advance, as well as chosen mechanisms such as writing, digital recording, or verbal sharing. There also exists a need for continuity of efforts as “growth, improvement, progress, and development don’t just happen overnight, and they typically don’t happen accidentally. They’re a result of intentionality, planning, conscious effort and thought” (Hall & Simeral, 2015, p. 14). On some levels, making one’s thinking visible is quite simply asking oneself questions out loud and in front of others. The type of questions asked also need to be purposeful. Hannay & Earl (2012) highlight the importance of asking both ‘what worked’ and ‘what did not work’ in an organized way. Hattie & Zierer (2018) too indicate

a necessity to search for the answer to how teaching influences learning along with the evidence that supports the response. Having a designed, agreed upon, and well-chosen protocol is crucial to the success of a formalized process for sharing thinking.

The process of teaching is indeed complex and can sometimes be viewed as a ‘way of being and doing’ more than a series of prescribed steps. Jay & Johnson (2002) demand we protect against lock-step methods, especially when it comes to reducing the process of reflecting to a standardized recipe. Schön (1983) describes what he calls incongruence between the embodiment of a teacher’s artistic performance and the existence of strategies available by which to provide an external description of what took place. He goes on to point out that a teacher’s ability to accurately gauge time for embedded reflection presents as a “smooth flow of action” (p. 279) that may not be readily identifiable to others. The seamless way in which reflection-in-action happens could lead other teachers, or administrators to believe that it is not happening at all, which does an injustice to the level of skill being utilized on this practice. Hall & Simeral (2015) tell us that “highly reflective teachers are, indeed artists” (p. 130) and also dispel the notion that a foolproof model or formula can ever replace the uniqueness that teachers bring to their reflection about and articulation of the deep learning taking place for students. Quite simply put, “shifting beliefs is contextual, difficult work and does not happen overnight. It is an adaptive challenge for which there is no algorithm” (Donohoo & Katz, 2019, p. 13). The importance of a teacher’s responsibility to embrace the hard work involved in perfecting their craft does not come with directions to follow, which makes the task both more difficult and rewarding all at the same time.

Impact of Leadership on Reflective Practice

While the quality of classroom instruction tops the list of high yield, in-school strategies for improving student learning according to Hattie's (2018) Visible Learning meta-study, Leithwood et al. (2004) cite the research that indicates strong leadership as the second most influential factor. In fact, "there are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader" (Leithwood et al, 2004, p. 5). For those in leadership roles, there exists a responsibility to provide educators with clear direction, well-crafted plans, and supportive resources to best enable success in classrooms. And, according to Dufour & Marzano (2011), effective leaders do not sit around waiting for others to begin the hard work; they take stock of their surroundings, reflect on the situation, the skills they bring, and the necessary actions to undertake. They are also both realistic and inspirational when they proclaim that "the best educational leaders are in love – in love with the work they do, with the purpose their work serves, and with the people they lead and serve" (p. 194). So, these authors suggest, effective formal leaders possess a balanced combination of operational knowledge, organizational skills, and strong pedagogy coupled together with the ability to value and cultivate a culture of relationship building. Katz, Earl & Jaafar (2009) list the key skillset of educational leaders which includes encouragement, motivation, agenda setting, monitoring progress, sharing leadership, resourcing, and capacity building; quite the diverse set of tools. In their analysis of leadership development programs, Leithwood et al (2004) emphasize the inclusion of reflective practice so that there are chances for discussion, coaching, and mentoring in the context of problem solving. This lines up with the belief of Dufour & Marzano (2011) that "creating the conditions to help others succeed is one of the highest duties of a leader" (p. 86).

The remainder of this section will address the topics of shared vision, consistency of and commitment to philosophical beliefs, the allocation of necessary resources, the benefit of capacity building, and the importance of accountability. These are all highlighted as key elements of system alignment and the literature reviewed shows the way in which effective leadership enhances the benefits of teacher reflection.

Shared Vision

Taking a look outside of education can sometimes bring into focus the critical elements when we use the language of shared vision. Coyle (2018), while analyzing the consistent success of a restaurateur named Meyer, quips “you have priorities whether you name them or not... if you want to grow, you’d better name the behaviors that support the priorities” (p. 209).

Agreement also lives within the world of education as Dufour & Marzano (2011) urge leaders not to settle on lackluster or superficial descriptions of shared vision, but to go deep into the realm of understanding each key term along with the meaning of the vision itself. Intentionality in the development of shared understanding and mutual accountability to a vision are components that Fullan & Quinn (2016) also cite as pivotal for leaders to create coherence in their learning environments. With the number of uncontrollable challenges that leaders can face, Katz & Ain Dack (2013) tell us that our efforts are indeed well-placed by focusing on something as controllable and impactful as time spent communicating a clearly articulated, explained, and understood vision.

Falling directly behind the necessity for a clearly articulated shared vision is the task of setting a clear direction towards obtaining that vision. As noted by Senge (1990), the importance of providing a completed plan is drastically lower than the value of involving people in the planning process, which accelerates learning for the group as a whole. Establishing goals and

expectations; strategic resourcing; planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and curriculum; ensuring an orderly, supportive environment; and promoting and participating in teacher learning are the five significant dimensions of instructional leadership as outlined by Katz & Ain Dack (2013). Through their use of the word ‘establishing’, it can be presumed that process outweighs product regarding the development of action plans in schools. To further support the idea of collaborative direction setting, Dufour & Marzano (2011) speak about ‘defined autonomy’ which they go on to explain “ultimately calls upon leaders to *define* what is to be tight throughout the district” (p. 33). By default, then, the ‘what’ is chosen, but the ‘how’ teams work towards achievement of the specific goal remains the reflective target for the collective group of people implementing the selected action.

Commitment to Philosophical Beliefs

Hall & Simeral (2015) define reflection as being a habit that requires continual attention and development, and further state that ‘engaging in the reflective cycle requires practice, diligence, and focus’ (p. 41). To honour that commitment to developing reflective practice skills, the creation of adequate time together in safe spaces with trusted colleagues needs to be a priority, and McHatton, Parker & Vallice (2013) squarely place the onus upon leaders to provide these learning opportunities. Hattie & Zierer (2018) indicate that responsiveness of leaders to the needs of the collaborating professionals has a strong correlation to collective efficacy, while Dufour and Marzano (2011) add that leaders display confidence in the collective efforts by putting reflective protocols in motion to facilitate necessary change. With the sheer volume of tasks, initiatives, or competing interests that are present in schools, a leader’s ability to filter the priorities and keep the value on mechanisms that promote reflective thought is key to improved instructional practices.

The supporting rationale for a commitment to reflective practice is greater success in the arena of student learning. Fullan & Quinn (2016) share their views that “the leader who helps develop focused collective capacity will make the greatest contribution to student learning” (p. 57) and Senge (1990), too, points to the development of the capacity for reflective team learning as a driver of desired results. Leaders who create conditions for effective adult learning also lead to increased levels of student achievement (Dufour & Marzano, 2011). The motivation and capacity of group members to increase student learning is directly influenced by their interactions and experiences with those in leadership roles (Leithwood et al., 2004). The attitudes and acceptance of a reflective, collaborative, learning culture originate as a priority for both leaders and educators, but the ability to sustain this culture is either made or broken through the belief in and support of the formal leader.

Resources

As already outlined, one of the five significant dimensions of instructional leadership is strategic resourcing of the identified goal or strategy. If reflective practice is a focus chosen and implemented by system leaders, then the resources required by the school and division are time, process, modelling, and shared leadership. These supports do not by any means represent an exhaustive list, however, they are the ones that appear most prominently in the literature reviewed for this study.

Looking critically at the way in which teachers utilize the time they have together and incorporating processes that promote a truly reflective culture have the potential to produce immense gains in the realm of instructional practice. “How can we expect people to learn when they have little time to think and reflect, individually and collaboratively?” (p. 303) is the question called out by Senge (1990). Since his work, there has been an attempt to answer this

question by Katz & Ain Dack (2013) who posit that amount of time alone is not the issue, but that the productive use of time on the ‘right things’ could be open for examination. They do assert that “this is in line with what we’ve repeatedly heard from teachers and administrators as ‘lack of time’ is consistently cited as the number one barrier to implementing authentic professional learning” (p. 3). Larrivee (2000) also attests, “making time for thoughtful consideration of their actions and critical inquiry into the impact of their own behavior keeps teachers alert to the consequences of their actions on students” (p. 296).

Even though Katz & Ain Dack (2013) identify lack of time as the leading barrier to authentic learning, they also share that attention to designed protocols “help focus on the task at hand, and they help mitigate the impact of some barriers” (p. 71). In a later work, Donohoo & Katz (2019) remain advocates for purposeful structures and designed protocols, citing that their use helps to increase risk taking in front of peers and also establishes trust between colleagues. Senge (1990) made note as well that it is necessary to implement structured mechanisms if the concept of institutionalizing reflection and surfacing mental models were to become standard practice in an organization.

Benade (2015) speaks to the need for leaders and teachers to model their reflective actions for colleagues and students. There is much opportunity in education to model collaboration with colleagues, engage in an inquiry-based approach, make one’s own thinking visible, or perhaps display an open-minded stance. These are all salient features of reflective practice and using them in appropriate and purposeful ways is a tool by which leaders can perpetuate their relevance. Katz, Earl, & Jaafar (2009) write how “an important part of the encouragement and motivation role that formal leaders play, then, is to model what ‘not knowing’ looks like in authentic ways, using themselves as examples” (p. 53). Leading by

example is a quality that exemplifies administrators as lead learners and increases credibility with teachers.

People within a system are also a valuable resource or avenue for leveraging expertise and knowledge, but one that requires harnessing, guidance and direction from the person or people with administrative authority to design such a structure. Wheatley (2009) classifies a leader as being “anyone willing to help, anyone who sees something needs to change and takes the first steps to influence that situation” (p. 144) which introduces the idea of shared leadership brilliantly. Building leadership roles, formally and informally, throughout a system is a crucial support for teachers and administrators alike. Leithwood et al. (2004) link what is required to effectively improve both teaching and learning to the formal leader’s ability to engage in practices that help develop people. Principals and Superintendents must have core knowledge surrounding direction, environment, pedagogy, and dynamics in order to make informed choices or decisions about appropriate shared leadership endeavours. A quality example of shared leadership might be in the area of curriculum implementation because “administrators are not expected to be the content experts, but they do need to know enough about content to understand the necessary professional learning demands for teachers” (Katz, Earl, & Jaafar, 2009, p. 86). The ability to accurately gauge their own level of curricular expertise and then pair it with that of their informal leaders exemplifies effective shared leadership. One last example of shared leadership is situational as it addresses the individuality that each formal leader brings to the table. Coyle (2018) spotlights the power behind showing one’s infallibility instead of trying to hide it from members of the learning community. This open stance creates a humanness that invites input, promotes a natural tendency for others to step up in an attempt to counterbalance

another's weakness, and provides an opportunity to showcase a known, or possibly unknown, strength of an informal leader.

The Value of School System Alignment

Without the support of administration, many an educational philosophy or initiative has not made the transition from promising idea to sustained practice. "There seems little doubt that both district and school leadership provides a critical bridge between most educational-reform initiatives, and having those reforms make a genuine difference for all students" (Leithwood et al, 2004, p. 14). Operating under this premise, the initiative being explored in this research study, reflective practices, would qualify as a reform strategy or implementation of change for educators. Senge (1990) argues that alignment is a necessary condition if the empowered work of any individual in a large system is to have an impactful and empowering effect on the whole team. He further states that "when a team becomes more aligned, a commonality of direction emerges, and individuals' energies harmonize" (p. 234), which in turn enhances both the common understanding of shared vision as well as deeper comprehension of how individual efforts complement one another along with the efforts of the whole.

It also stands to reason that the type of reflective practices happening at the classroom level must also be occurring at the school leader level and at the division or system level, with slightly different targets. Katz & Ain Dack (2013) identify the aim of teachers to be defined by the learning needs of their students, and the aim of leaders to be defined by the learning needs of their teachers. The next logical conclusion from this would be that the target of system leaders should be defined by the learning needs of their school leaders. The way in which each group uses reflective thought to plan, act, assess, and think further about their impact on the learners they are directly responsible to is aligned by the nature of the practice itself. Hattie & Zierer

(2018) confirm this when they scribe that “the importance of planning is no different for school leaders or for system leaders” (p. 165). They even call out the required steps in the planning process as knowledge of the situation, solid and informed analysis of that situation, listed measures of success, choice of a high-yield initiative that matches the challenge, and ongoing evaluation of progress towards the identified goal. They call this recipe “the essence of good teaching and good system development” (p. 165). Should alignment or systems thinking be missing from an educational organization, or done poorly, Senge (1990) warns that success will be elusive because the end result is “painting lovely pictures of the future with no deep understanding of the forces that must be mastered to move from here to there” (p. 12). Mapping out the concrete plan and developing a clear series of steps needed to implement that plan are the critical first steps to solid alignment in a school or school division.

Capacity Building

One difficult task that leaders face when aiming for system alignment is accurately assessing the level of self-awareness as well as evaluating the skillset of the people within the system. Hall & Simeral (2015) convey that “to be a better observer is to be a better teacher” (p. 22) and that the goal of capacity building is to strengthen understanding of experiences and develop expertise using reflective habits. They are even bolder in their belief that the development of effective self-reflection skills allows for improved preparation and increased success in any situation where learning is to be evaluated. Moving beyond looking and thinking, the act of teachers and leaders ‘doing’ alongside learners, in either a direct, formal manner or indirect, informal way, according to Katz & Ain Dack (2013) has a 0.84 effect size on student success. It is hard to argue with this compelling research that supports a collective, collaborative and sometimes co-teaching approach to reflective practice when engaging an audience of

learners. These collaborative situations represent “the conditions that bring out our best – we’re focused on something we really care about; we work intensely together, inventing solutions as needed; we take all kinds of risks; we communicate constantly” (Wheatley, 2009, p. 130) and the residual collective capacity pays dividends in the long run for individual educators and systems alike.

Building upon this idea that learning alongside one another has inherent benefits, it becomes important to look at the way in which professional learning is approached in a large educational system like a school division. Traditionally, the manner in which professional development opportunities have been organized is in a ‘top-down’, hierarchical or vertically aligned way. Teachers have not typically been involved in the identification of their own professional growth needs, in choosing the source of professional development sessions, nor in deciding the format or delivery method for their learning. This poses challenges at the classroom level as Katz & Ain Dack (2013) point out, because this vertical delivery model does not provide what they call ‘just in time’ or ‘job embedded’ learning that better meets the needs of teachers and also builds stronger capacity. Shifting thinking from a traditional or hierarchical system to one that is ‘flattened’ or horizontally aligned is a prime chance for divisional leaders to take reflective practices on a test drive. Being able to provide opportunities for people to learn together and choosing to participate in that growth process gives instructional leaders at the school and divisional level a chance to experience reflective practice alongside colleagues. There is no guarantee that system-wide learning opportunities will lead to individual growth, nor is there a guarantee that individual learning will lead to organizational growth. But Nissilä (2005) does tell us that without strong ways for individuals to learn and grow, organizational growth cannot happen and Leithwood et al (2004) offer that an effective response for building capacity

“is to develop a strong, in-house, systematically aligned, professional development program” (p. 26).

Alignment, according to Katz, Earl & Jaafar (2009), “means helping maintain the network focus in schools by showing staff how it fits with other pieces, most often other district requirements” (p. 55). They urge system leaders to work diligently at connecting the dots between initiatives to help minimize the perception that learning is forced or that goal areas are in competition with one another. It also means that the mindset needed to incorporate reflection into implementation, Hattie & Zierer (2018) assure us, can be taught and learned. Better still, learning to use a mind frame grounded in reflective thought actually forms the basis for how educators will think, make decisions, and form judgments on a day to day basis. Fullan & Quinn (2016) address alignment descriptively as system coherence where they sum up the way to best build capacity as superintendents and principals is by shifting behaviours on a large scale. By that, they identify that educational leaders should “model being lead learners” (p. 100), where they “learn alongside” (p. 100), they “shape a culture that fosters an expectation of learning for everyone, taking risks and making mistakes but learning from them” (p. 100), and they “build capacity vertically and horizontally in the organization with persistence and single-mindedness until it affects learning” (p.100). Formal leaders should also embrace their own ongoing loop of reflecting, assessing, planning, and acting in order to achieve success in their work towards improved system alignment.

Sustainable alignment in a school division relies on superintendents and principals having a clear understanding of the value behind building capacity, and then delivering the proper professional development to achieve high functioning groups of people. As Fullan & Quinn (2016) attest, “the key to a capacity building approach lies in developing a skill base across all

leaders and educators in the system, focusing on a few goals, and sustaining an intense effort over multiple years” (p. 57). Coyle (2018) describes any needed intense effort “to be to get the team right, get them moving in the right direction, and get them to see where they are making mistakes and where they are succeeding” (p. 220). The result of this focused team approach becomes what Dufour & Marzano (2011) call high-performing teams, who also now have the ability to build shared knowledge, to facilitate collaborative dialogue, and ultimately drive the perpetuation of reflective practices as team members or leadership changes occur. An educational organization with high capacity for learning has empowered professionals to positively influence others in a comprehensive and sustained way (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Accountability

One of the main roles of superintendents along with other central office leaders is to ensure that the identified goals of the organization are actually being met. As mentioned, this begins with clarity of purpose and understanding of shared vision, but also needs to be followed up with what Dufour & Marzano (2011) characterize as a vigilant degree of monitoring. The difficulty that this presents is that when educators embrace reflective practices as a strategy to improve their own abilities, they are encouraged to take ownership of their thoughts and actions in ways that may challenge existing belief systems, leave them vulnerable, and encourage them to take risks with the art of teaching. It is important for system leaders to recognize that “encouraging autonomy doesn’t mean discouraging accountability” (Pink, 2018, p. 105). What it does mean is that the process by which one assesses achievement will also need to be a deeply reflective venture.

One issue when it comes to the standard of accountability for teachers and administrators is that not all learning can be attributed entirely or directly to any one specific teaching approach

or instructional strategy. Schön (1983) pens stories about the way in which professionals are identified, mainly as a result of the technical expertise that they possess. He also contrasts that with the lack of acceptance for reflection-in-action as a credible form of professional knowing. This leaves teachers in that nebulous place that Schön describes as “a high, hard ground where practitioners can make effective use of research-based theory and techniques, and there is a swampy lowland where situations are confusing “messes” incapable of technical solution” (p. 42). Leithwood et al (2004) compound the challenge by introducing two-way accountability between leaders and participants into the conversation. The research of this group speaks to how principals are accountable to superintendents when it comes to performance measures of students, but also how superintendents are then held accountable for equipping principals to effectively complete the tasks required of them. The analysis by Leithwood et al. (2004) touts the importance of both interdependence and mutual accountability at all levels of an organization, which does not always satisfy the thirst that some have for concrete and correlational evidence that the system or any one thing in the system is indeed working. And with a concept like alignment, measuring the effectiveness of processes, protocols, professional learning, and thought processes is far from a direct cause and effect analysis.

The task of measuring large scale effectiveness of initiatives from a systems level does then need to be based upon research, evidence, and meta-analyses of promising practice in the world of education. Looking at the success of a school division through the lens of complexity theory for example, would call for examining the effectiveness of its feedback mechanisms, the number and type of loosely coupled structures, and perhaps the dynamic nature of the whole system and not just its individual parts. These open and indeterminate measures are not what public, parents, or governments often want, so educators sometimes attempt to provide

compartmentalized evidence in targeted areas of interest. This too comes with cautionary advice from Donohoo & Katz (2019) who explain that “it is incumbent upon educators to take what is known from educational research and find ways to apply it meaningfully in the context of their school environments” (p. 7). So while empirical data is important, the application of the information in specific environments must be done in a way that makes sense and works for that system. Policymakers tend to rely upon large-scale studies with regards to leadership effects on the system, but Leithwood et al. (2004) also indicate a gap in some studies that “underestimate leadership effects in schools where it is likely to be of greatest value” (p. 22). Some sage advice is offered by Pink (2018) when he implores leaders to seek out continual, critical, and authentic feedback so that there is an internal gauge for how an organization is performing, as well as an indicator for what else may need improvement.

The job of assessing levels of alignment, progress, and capacity of an organization does fall predominantly on the system leader’s shoulders. That said, Schön (1983) brings forward the responsibility of the teacher when he writes that “within a broader range of accountability, short of a possible violation of the law, it is the professional’s peers who are best equipped to determine whether he [sic] has performed satisfactorily within his [sic] contract” (p. 293). Selkrig & Keamy (2015) lay a professional obligation at the feet of teachers because “there is an inherent expectation that educators will work towards continuously improving their practice and quality of teaching. Underpinning this expectation is an assumption that educators also engage in the process of reflection” (p. 421). Fox, Dodman, & Holincheck (2019) also claim that professionals actually look for reviews from peers and continually engage in rigorous cycles of self-reflection when assessing their own performance.

The need for accountability in education is not dismissed, nor denied by teachers, administrators, schools or divisions. It is acknowledged and embraced as a multi-faceted, interconnected, and sizeable task to both quantify and qualify. There is not one measure, nor one lens, that can provide evidentiary proof of learning for all students, so educators use many tools, instruments and practices to accurately report on progress in many ways to multiple audiences. At a basic level, Pink (2018) has much to say in the area of accountability and does an excellent job of setting the stage for the questions being proposed and asked in this research study. He notes that “people *want* to be accountable – and that making sure they have control over their task, their time, their technique, and their team is the most effective pathway to that destination” (p. 105) and that “the science shows that the secret to high performance isn’t our biological drive or our reward-and-punishment drive, but our third drive – our deep-seated desire to direct our own lives, to extend and expand our abilities, and to make a contribution” (p. 145). It seems fitting to conclude this section, and set the stage appropriately for the upcoming research, with a sentiment from educators Katz & Ain Dack (2013) who remind us that “the investment in *learning how to learn* is the one that will yield the greatest return” (p.8).

Conclusion

Once again, what this research project addressed was: a) to discover whether practitioners in one rural Manitoba school division are able to articulate a clear and explicit understanding of reflective practice as a professional growth strategy; b) to take an in depth look at the types of purposeful reflective practices that are occurring within that school division; and c) to assess the coherence and alignment that exists between the levels in that particular educational setting.

To that end, the literature review chapter began by clarifying key terminology which assisted with the comprehension of reflection. The review then went on to identify and describe

the salient features of professional reflective practice which included (i) dissonance as a driver of reflection; (ii) the importance of reflective practice being inquiry-based; (iii) shifting existing beliefs about the value of reflection; (iv) the need for vulnerability and trust as a precursor for successful reflection; (v) the value of a collaborative culture; and, (vi) the value of formalizing the visibility of the reflective process. Finally, the review also looked at leadership and systematic alignment, in terms of the following key features: (i) shared vision, (ii) consistency of and commitment to philosophical beliefs, (iii) the allocation of necessary resources, (iv) the importance of system alignment (v) the benefit of capacity building: and, (vi) accountability.

It was interesting to examine the practices of one rural Manitoba school division in terms of their understanding and application of reflective practices compared to the salient features that emerged from the literature. It was also informative to analyze the viewpoints of teachers, an administrator and a superintendent against the key features of leadership and alignment. The upcoming chapter on methodology and design will explain the ways in which the study will be conducted, as well as the manner in which the data will be collected, analyzed, and interpreted in order to best answer the research questions of this study.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Summary of Research Study

The purposes of this study were to: a) discover whether practitioners in one rural Manitoba school division are able to articulate a clear and explicit understanding of reflective practice as a professional growth strategy; b) to take an in depth look at the types of purposeful reflective practices that are occurring within that school division; and c) to assess the coherence and alignment that exists between the levels in that particular educational setting. As a Superintendent of a rural Manitoba school division, my wondering has always been whether or not both the supports and expectations in the area of reflective practices given to educators are clear and attainable; whether their value is understood, embraced, and supported by formal leaders in schools and divisions. The salient features of reflective practice for teachers, and the key elements of effective leadership as well as strong alignment in school systems are all realistic and achievable. I am keenly interested in the extent to which professional reflection is being practiced, encouraged, and resourced, which is why the goal of this research study is to gain insight into the understanding of, the application of, and the alignment of reflective practices in a rural Manitoba school division. Specifically, the study was designed to address the following three research questions:

- 1) What are the understandings that selected teachers, administrators, and school system leaders have with regards to reflective practice?
- 2) To what extent are these understandings applied in practice at the classroom, school and division levels?
- 3) How well aligned are these understandings and practices implemented within that school division?

At the conclusion of the study, my aim was to know if there existed both common language as well as common practice in the area of teacher reflection in one chosen rural Manitoba school division. I also wanted to know if the reflective practices occurring in the classrooms are in line with the intended learning and support being provided by the administration at both the school and divisional levels. Having looked critically at the strategies in place in one school division, chosen for its focused work in the area of improved instructional practice for teachers, shared trends along with potential gaps in practice were identified. This work then allowed me to ascertain whether the intended focus and provided supports in place were indeed being understood and implemented throughout the greater system. The absence of certain themes or topics identified through the interviews also permitted me to zero in on whether more attention was required in any given area related to effective reflective practices. Asking if there was a deficit when it came to comprehending the theoretical aspects, to putting the theory into practice, or with working collectively towards that understood practice, also allowed me to address topics that might have been missing from the literature or that merited exploration in further studies.

Research Design

This research is a small-scale, qualitative study using both qualitative and quantitative analyses. It was conducted within a single rural Manitoba school division that has identified improved instructional practices as a priority in their division. Having looked at one school division whose main goal is improved student learning through high quality instruction, I looked to find common themes, trends, and patterns in the work currently being done. I also gathered information about any gaps or challenges that were identified by the interview candidates when they were answering questions about their understanding of, or application of reflective practices

as a professional learning strategy. New concepts, information that was absent when compared to the literature, or trends that surfaced from misconceptions were then highlighted and addressed more explicitly as potential topics for future studies.

The goal of this research was to gain insight into the understanding of, the application of, and the alignment of reflective practices in a single rural Manitoba school division, by examining the viewpoints of educators in different roles and at various levels within that school division. The aim was then to make sense of the ways in which people's perspectives or beliefs overlapped, intersected, or differed from one another.

Site

One rural school division was chosen for this research study for several reasons including the size of the division, the low transiency rate of teachers and leaders, plentiful access to outside professional development opportunities, system-wide familiarity with teaching strategies, and accountability measures. The general size of rural divisions in Manitoba lend themselves to increased familiarity and accountability from within as they are typically a more manageable size than urban divisions. Distance from urban centers also positively influences an increased amount of in-house, collaborative work using shared expertise from within a rural school division. The cost to travel larger distances to access additional learning can be prohibitive, and tends to promote less transiency of teachers from school to school or division to division. Typically, rural educators are residents of their school community and/or deeply connected to the students and families of their school community, which can also contribute to sustained work in the same environment for multiple years.

The school divisions identified as possible participants in this research study were chosen based upon an identified focus of improving teacher practice within their division. Four rural

divisions, excluding my own, were invited to participate, and were given the criteria to assist with self-selection in advance of responding. Selection of the chosen divisions was made by looking at the strategic plans, the professional development plans, and the school improvement plans of each applicant division. Only those working on teacher efficacy, professional learning cultures, and/or reflective practices were considered and the first division that responded with a signed Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) was included in the research study.

As the principal researcher, I contacted each Superintendent of the four identified rural divisions who are actively engaged in the work of improved teacher professional learning practices as their primary focus. The Letter of Invitation for Divisional Participation in the Study (Appendix A) was e-mailed to the Superintendent of each of the four identified divisions. One applicant division was then chosen to participate in the interview stage of the study. The first interested division that matched the criteria and who responded with returned consent forms was selected to be in the study. All applicants received either an *Acceptance to the Study E-mail* (Appendix J) indicating their upcoming involvement in the study or a *Participation Not Required and Thank You Message E-mail* (Appendix M) indicating that their participation would not be required at this time. Those applicants who were not accepted for the study also received a thank you for their interest and offer to participate.

Participants

The initial design decision was to approach the study from the stance of a qualitative researcher. The secondary design decision was rooted in the nature of the intended interactions with key people in one single school division. A third design decision emerged to include a quantitative element to the analysis process. Discussions with participants were in-depth conversations centred around their perceptions of their own understanding of their social context

and behaviours with regards to reflective practices. The philosophical framework that best suited this type of interaction was one where I was able to look for patterns and ultimately make connections between individualistic thought and the views of the larger organization, the school division. This design choice allowed for the comparison of several different viewpoints from different levels of one larger system.

In order to best organize, analyze, and search for themes in the information gathered from participants, the methodology being employed was one that allowed me to be able to code, categorize, and compare the data samples and generate emergent concepts or possible theories to explain what is occurring in the environment being surveyed. The qualitative analysis was used within each topic area to group common trends in that identified topic. The quantitative analysis was used to compare topic areas to one another and to compared participant answers to one another. Both the qualitative and quantitative data analyses were used to answer the research questions that were posed.

Given the research interest in divisional supports and alignments, as well as individual teacher understanding related to professional reflection, the study looked to recruit the following participants: (i) one member of the division's senior administrative team; (ii) one school level administrator; and (iii) four teachers from the same school as the school administrator. Due to the stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic and the small number of teachers at the chosen school, only two teachers were able and selected to participate. Rural school divisions very typically have only one member of the Superintendent's team that is responsible for instructional leadership and teacher professional growth, so it was unlikely to expect to be able to interview more than one divisional leader. To be inclusive to all schools in the chosen division, interviewing only one administrator meant that even schools with only one administrator qualified to participate in the

study. The chosen school did have only one lone administrator. The reason for choosing four teachers from one school was twofold; first there would be room for any participant to have opted out along the way without jeopardizing the integrity of the study, and even though not needed, one substitute teacher could have been managed to accommodate all four interviews on the same date should they have needed to occur during the school day. All interviews were able to take place either during the school day or during the provincial Spring Break vacation week. School divisions that were considered for the study were limited to those who are actively engaged in the work of teacher professional learning practices.

The Superintendent chose to be the divisional leader participating in the interview process, but could have chosen the appropriate divisional designate to participate. This designate could have been an Assistant Superintendent or other educational leader, but the Superintendent was the person taking the lead on the work being done to forward professional learning for administrators in the selected division. This interview participant was asked to give the perspective of division-wide knowledge, initiatives, and supports being shared and implemented in all schools. This person also had some insight into the level of engagement, progress, and improvement occurring in the various schools, which helped when selecting the participant school for the remaining interviews.

The invitation to all schools in the division was made once the Superintendent had returned a signed Informed Consent Form (Appendix A). Only one school responded with an interest to participate, so the acceptance of the participant school was affirmed by myself verifying that the school had stable administrative leadership, low teacher transiency, and high engagement in the work of improved instructional practice. Referencing the need for stable administrative leadership in the school increased the likelihood that focused work on improved

instructional and reflective practices has been occurring for a number of years. Identifying low teacher transiency, helped increase the odds that the teachers being interviewed have participated in the culture and learning of that school for a number of years. Considering high engagement in the work of improved instructional practice meant a more developed understanding of and willingness to discuss the work underway. The administrator of the chosen school in the division was provided with a letter of invitation (Appendix C). The Superintendent was asked to limit any communication with the school; only speaking about the desire of the division to participate in the study. Upon receipt of the signed Informed Consent Form (Appendix D), the teachers of that school received a letter of invitation (Appendix E), and the school administrator received similar instructions about refraining from discussing the project outside of indicating their own and the division's willingness to participate. The Superintendent and Principal did not require Board approval for this research with potential candidates as a requirement of the division's internal process.

The two teachers who chose to participate were known to one another through incidental conversation and through the possible overlapping invitations to complete the interview process. They were informed that the study was looking at the theoretical comprehension of reflective practice as well as the alignment of this understanding in their school system and was in no way an evaluation of their own practice as it related to the goals of the division. There were not more than four teachers who volunteered to participate, so my final choice of participants, did not need to consider the number of years of experience, grade level, and subject area taught when deciding upon interview candidates. This consideration would have helped to ensure a diverse sampling of experience and would have helped minimize the "group think" influence that could have existed in similar grade levels, subject areas, or years of experience cohorts.

Data Collection

Individual interviews with the selected candidates followed the semi-structured format and took place at a time and location that was suitable to both the interviewee as well as myself. Interviews with the selected candidates afforded more open dialogue and allowed the participants to speak on a topic to a level and for an amount of time that matched their own expertise and comfort. Possible constraints of using a semi-structured interview included participants talking about information that was off topic, or requiring some additional prompting to expand upon certain items. Conversation diverting away from the focus of an interview question as well as the occasional prompts were required during the interview process.

As stated in Chapter 1, the Introduction, as well as Chapter 2, the Literature Review, it was useful for participants to have had a basic understanding of the concept of reflection. As part of the Acceptance to the Study (Appendices J, K, & L) and again at the beginning of the formal interview, participants in this research study were given my working definition of reflection. This working definition, in my own words, is a compilation of the perspectives of Senge (1990), Hall & Simeral (2015) and Dewey (2018). The interpretation of Senge (1990) states that “skills of reflection concern slowing down our own thinking processes so that we can become more aware of how we form our mental models and the way they influence our actions” (p. 191). The information from Hall & Simeral (2015) characterizes the process by identifying that “time must be set aside to process, ponder, reorganize our thoughts, attain clarity, and innovate. Reflection invokes a power inside each of us to expand on what really matters and clear our minds of the things that don’t” (p.134). Lastly, the working definition incorporates the thoughts of Dewey (2018) who states that “reflection involves not simply a sequence of ideas, but a *consequence* – a consecutive ordering in such a way that each determines the next as its proper outcome, while

each in turn leans back on its predecessors” (p. 4). These overviews of reflection from the literature were used to form my definition, which then assisted participants with framing their thinking in such a way that reflection was purposeful, designed, tightly linked to a person’s experiences, and highly influential upon their actions. From my perspective, and for the purposes of this study, reflective practice was characterized as dedicated or designed time for thought and/or for dialogue which is focused on the impact of purposeful actions that are implemented by educators. This definition, a preamble, as well as the interview questions were provided to participants ahead of time in order to maximize the quality of feedback acquired during the interview time itself. Participants were informed that they could have made notes, but that those notes would not be included as collected data for the study. Participants were also being given an opportunity to ask for clarification through e-mail prior to the interview being conducted.

The interview questions for the Superintendent (Appendix G), the Principal (Appendix H), and the teachers (Appendix I) were similar in nature but were designed with slight differences to help address the varied role that each person played at their own school division. The duration of each interview was predicted to be approximately 90 minutes in length from start to finish and did not exceed that limit for any candidate. It was my intention to complete the interviews on site at the school division office or the school as arranged with the chosen division and selected candidates, but needed to adjust the process and shift to virtual interviews using Office 365 Teams due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were asked to spend up to an additional hour or two after the interview to review the transcript of their interview prior to it being included in the study. All participants also took part in a follow-up conversation to clarify emerging trends and to provide one final opportunity to address any possible gaps in their information. The follow-up or check-in conversation was completed after the data from each

individual interview had been collected and transcribed. All participants interviewed also received a summary of the study results if they so chose at the outset of the study.

Upon completion of the interview stage, I sent a copy of the transcript of the individual's interview to the interviewee to read over for accuracy. At that point, the participant made any changes, deleted commentary or made additional comments if desired, and then returned it to me. Participants only had two weeks in which to review the transcript, and after which time, a reminder e-mail to respond was sent. If a response was not received, then I assumed approval of the transcript sent. Participants indicated whether or not they wished to receive a summary of the research at the bottom of the consent form and how they would like it to be sent.

This research study did not pose any risks beyond the level of the normal routine of a person's daily life. Participants did find it difficult to commit the time in their schedule to participate in the interview process due to the ever-changing and unknown demands emerging throughout the province's pandemic response process. I was prepared to provide substitute teacher coverage for the school-level participants but did not need to do so. The administrator and the two classroom teachers participating in the study were not then required to participate in the interview on the same day. Participation was completely voluntary and participants were able to leave the study at any time without penalty or consequences simply by informing me by telephone, text message, or e-mail. All participants chose to remain in the study and had their data included in the research. Each interviewee was asked a series of questions about professional learning for teachers in their division. Each interviewee received a copy of the questions in an interview guide prior to the interview session. Participants could have chosen not to answer all questions and still have their given responses include in the study, but all participated fully in the process from start to finish. If they chose to withdraw from the study at

any time, all data, including audio recordings, printed transcripts and notes related to that participant would have been immediately destroyed.

The benefits of participating in the study included dedicated time for professional reflection for each interview candidate. Participants commented on the value they gained from participating in the process. The responses given also assisted them to identify common trends and dominant characteristics found in the way that their division approaches professional learning. The conclusions reached in this study should help inform future practice with regards to common understanding, leadership supports, and attention to alignment when it comes to using reflective practices as a means towards improved professional learning.

Confidentiality was maintained through the use of anonymous and generic identifiers for the participating division and all participant interviewees. Pseudonyms were employed for any names, place names, or other identifiers that arose in the interview process. Electronic files and audio recordings were password protected and stored in a secure location. The actual list of participants' names and any identifying data was kept in a locked filing cabinet separate from the notes, recordings, drafts, and final version of this research study. The data collected from the interviews was strictly used for the purpose of completing this research study and all confidential material will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of all four interviews, I transcribed each interview, sent the transcription to each participant for verification and/or correction, and then used the verified transcripts to begin a comprehensive analysis. The processes of coding and thematic analysis was used in order to group common concepts heard across all interviews. When completing the initial coding phase, I sorted and defined phrases paying attention to the salient features of reflective

practice identified in Chapter 2, the Literature Review, but also looked for new or emergent commonalities or trends. The identified key features of reflective practice discussed are: (i) dissonance as a driver of reflection; (ii) the importance of reflective practice being inquiry-based; (iii) shifting beliefs; (iv) the need for vulnerability and trust as a precursor for successful reflection; (v) the value of a collaborative culture; and, (vi) the value of formalizing the visibility of the reflective process. In terms of leadership, the initial topics of: (i) shared vision; (ii) consistency of and commitment to philosophical beliefs; (iii) the allocation of necessary resources; (iv) the importance of system alignment; (v) the benefit of capacity building; and, (vi) accountability were all considered as key characteristics of system alignment. Pertinent information that did not fit these pre-determined code headings was gathered and labelled as its own topic so as not to be overlooked or disregarded when sorting for common trends.

Once the initial coding had been completed, the coded data underwent a thematic analysis to ascertain the dominant perceptions, patterns, and beliefs that emerged from the interview content. At this stage, I looked for balance and alignment of topics or themes across all four participants, for gaps and disconnection in the responses given, and for new perspectives that emerged from the data collected. These trends along with any areas lacking information formed the basis for any clarifying questions required to be asked during a potential follow-up interview with each participant. The responses from the trend verification follow-up were also layered onto the results from all the individual interviews. Conclusions were then drawn about the collective understandings of the interviewees, the ways in which they applied reflective practice in their daily roles, and the alignment of this knowledge with supportive leadership practices in their division.

A quantitative analysis was also completed on the data to provide an additional layer of objective comparison among the trends of each topic, between the responses given by each participant, and the participants as a group compared to the research questions asked. The impacts of COVID-19 on the daily practice of participants as well as any influence of the proposed plan by government to transform Manitoba education were also able to be included in the quantitative analysis. The following chapter will recap the data collection process, the steps completed in the data analysis, and also discuss the relevant findings of this research study.

Chapter 4 – Results and Findings

Summary of Data Collection Process

Upon approval of the thesis proposal in February, I contacted the first of the four identified school divisions to ascertain interest in and to obtain consent to participate in the study. The Superintendent from that division responded very quickly with both a verbal agreement as well as a signed consent form. The Superintendent of the division assisted with communication to the school leaders in the division in March 2020, which resulted in the agreement of a Principal to participate in the study. Almost simultaneously, the province closed schools to students, and all educational personnel across the province began recreating the delivery of instruction to an entirely remote learning model due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Together with the divisional and school leader participants, it was decided that completing an interview at that time would not be possible, but thankfully their interest still remained once things became more settled. As the principal researcher, I was not entirely sure how the interviews could have been completed considering the existing workload, pending changes, and continual uncertainty in the face of pandemic response planning.

I worked along with the identified senior system administrator and the identified school level administrator through to the end of the 2019-2020 school year and had hopes of connecting again in September 2020, once the next school year began. Unfortunately, Manitoba Education did not share the learning guidelines nor safety protocols with divisions until the first week of August 2020. In turn, this meant that I, the identified senior system administrator, and the identified school level administrator as educational leaders would need to continue on with long days, constant change, frequent fear or anxiety, as well as ongoing communication of ever-changing expectations to staff and families of our respective communities. Throughout this

turmoil, we remained in contact and the first interview with the school administrator was scheduled for and completed in November 2020. The second interview with the senior system administrator was scheduled twice but had to be postponed due to the changing demands that the pandemic was placing on the educational system. In February 2021, the second interview was completed. The final challenge was finding teachers at the school who would be willing and able to participate in an interview while under the great stress of teaching in pandemic times. During the province's Spring Break at the end of March 2021 and beginning of April 2021, and with the assistance of travel restrictions as well as public health restrictions, two teachers on a staff of nine teachers found time to complete interviews.

All but one interview was done using Office 365 Teams so that they could be done virtually in an interactive and audio-visual way. One teacher participant requested the ability to simply record their own answers citing time restraints as well as their own metacognitive processing style as the reason. The request was granted, did not jeopardize the integrity of the data, and also gave cause for me to reflect on whether the design was indeed inclusive to the varying communication styles of possible participants.

Verbatim transcriptions of all interviews were completed shortly after the conclusion of each recorded session. The video recording of each interview was also able to be shared with each participant by posting it into the meeting software's chat feature of the scheduled session. This is actually a feature that I would consider using in non-pandemic times as only myself and the participant could view the video and it lent an additional layer of robustness to participant feedback as a post-interview process. Participants were quick to review and respond to the completed transcripts with no changes to either the content, nor to their willingness to continue on in the study. I was also able to share the trending themes of each interview with each

participant in order to clarify both understanding and intent as captured throughout the conversation. In each case, the participant indicated that they thought I had accurately identified key trends in the conversation and also appreciated the opportunity to further reflect on the overall themes identified in their responses. Three of the four participants actually commented on how much they actually engaged in self-reflection while answering the interview questions; more so than they themselves had anticipated.

Data Analysis Summary

Once the data was collected from all participants, I undertook a qualitative analysis of the transcriptions in order to identify phrases, comments, and references to the salient features of reflective practices as outlined in the Literature Review found in Chapter 2. Throughout this process, the participants' responses were also reviewed to flush out common themes that differed from any of those identified in the Literature Review. The parts of each transcript that matched a given topic or theme were copied verbatim from the transcript and organized together under that overarching topic or theme. This allowed for a closer qualitative analysis to take place within each given topic.

While completing the qualitative analysis of the data provided in the interview transcripts, it became clear that the chosen division was indeed engaging in all key areas of the designated characteristics. There was no shortage of content in any particular area, and the work then became a question of pulling out the dominant trend in each area. The goal of this section was to highlight those trends topic by topic to give a sense of the kind of work being done in each given area. It also became apparent that some type of quantitative weighted analysis should take place in order to objectively assess the value of the given topics from the perspective of the

divisional participants based on the frequency of the references made and examples in that particular topic area.

A summary of the qualitative analysis of the data generated through this research study included sorting the comments, phrases and ideas from the interview transcripts into the topics or themes identified in each research question, reviewing for and identifying any emergent new topics or themes, and then searching each topic or theme area for trends in responses. A summary of the quantitative analysis involved tabulating the frequency of comments or phrases within each topic or theme, ranking the topics or themes according to frequency both by individual and by the whole group, and also reorganizing the ranked frequencies into research questions sections. This use of multiple perspectives and differing lenses provided a thorough and robust way to discern conclusions in this research study.

What are the understandings that teachers, administrators, and school system leaders have with regards to reflective practices? To assist with answering this first of the three research questions, I selected all references in the transcript text that directly or indirectly named any type of reflection in the participants' answers or described reflective actions as taking place when they gave examples of personal experiences in their responses. The intent of these initial passes through the transcripts was to identify clear and concrete articulations or examples of identified reflective practice by each participant. It became evident and obvious in all four interviews that each participant was actually engaged in self-reflection during the interview process itself. As such, I also grouped the reflective or rhetorical questions that a participant asked them self while verbally sorting through their own responsive thoughts within the interview context. It was interesting to note this activity naturally occurring with each person who undertook the process of responding to the interview questions.

To what extent are these understandings turned into practice at the classroom, school and division levels? To assist with answering this second of the three research questions, the next series of qualitative analyses was completed by grouping any and all references in the transcript text that aligned with each of the six salient features of reflective practice. The identified key features of reflective practice discussed in this research study are: (i) dissonance as a driver of reflection; (ii) the importance of reflective practice being inquiry-based; (iii) shifting beliefs; (iv) the need for vulnerability and trust as a precursor for successful reflection; (v) the value of a collaborative culture; and, (vi) the value of formalizing the visibility of the reflective process. Pulling out the use of protocols as a seventh category became an important addition to the feature list as the responses referencing protocols spanned all other features and also appeared very frequently in the answers being provided by the participants. It is interesting to note that all seven features were addressed to varying degrees in the responses given, examples shared, and actions undertaken by each participant. It is also noteworthy to highlight that this second research question addressing practical application use is where the bulk of the responses given landed through the process of sorting into themes. This could indicate either more comfort with or experience in the realm of practical application versus the skill or desire to explain theoretical understandings.

How well aligned are these understandings and practices implemented within that school division? To assist with answering this third and final research question, I read through each transcript to independently search for references made to each of the six systemic leadership themes. The key characteristics of: (i) shared vision; (ii) consistency of and commitment to philosophical beliefs; (iii) the allocation of necessary resources; (iv) the importance of system alignment; (v) the benefit of capacity building; and, (vi) accountability were all identified as

main topics or key themes when organizing the comments and phrases found under the umbrella of system alignment.

Lastly, through the process of reviewing, coding, and sorting the transcript content, three additional themes emerged as frequent and relevant items to further analyze. These three themes were identified by grouping common statements that did not fit into the existing categories but were noticeably plentiful throughout the data collected.

First, the references that each participant made to research-based practices or to educational researchers themselves was quite prevalent across all contributors as well as over multiple questions. As such, examples or statements given which pointed back to a research base of evidence formed an additional category in which to group cited transcript excerpts for further analysis. Second, commentary that alludes to the authenticity and the importance of relational interactions within the school and across the division were shared by each participant in subtler yet prevalent ways. A frequency count of comments here was not included in the quantitative analysis as the comments noted were less frequently made but were laden with powerful emotion when conveyed by each person. So while they may not measure in quantitative stature, they stood out by the way in which they were spoken, and thus merit mention as an additional area of value. Third, this research would not be an accurate representation of the current societal state without some indication of the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the lives of educators as well as the way in which they both perform and reflect upon the daily work of teaching under these drastically different circumstances.

Results

In order to best share the results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses completed in this study, the presentation of data will be done by research question topics or themes, as a

comparative whole, and by participant responses. By doing so, it is my intention to organize the results and findings in such a way that connections can easily be made back to the three research questions posed at the outset of the study.

Research Question #1

Under the first research question, the objective was to discover whether practitioners in one rural Manitoba school division are able to articulate a clear and explicit understanding of reflective practice as a professional growth strategy. At the outset of the interview process, each participant had already been provided with my definition of reflective practice as shared in the written interview questions. The preamble to the interview itself also included a verbal repetition of my definition prior to asking the first of the questions. My definition for the purposes of this study is reflective practice shall be characterized as dedicated or designed time for thought and/or for dialogue which is focused on the impact of purposeful actions then implemented by educators.

The analysis of the response content began using the filter of clearly defined references to reflection-in action, reflection-on-action, reflection-for-action, descriptive reflection, comparative reflection, critical reflection, self-reflection, metacognition, tacit knowing, and/or intuitive thinking. While reading through the transcripts, each instance of clearly identified reflection was colour-coded to distinguish it as belonging to a particular category. The participants did not make many direct links to naming a particular type of reflection in their answers but they displayed a tacit understanding of the concept through the types of professional conversations examples that they shared in those responses. The use of probing prompts throughout the interview and the follow-up summary of trends did not elicit any further direct connection between their example processes and what type of reflection was to be occurring as a

result of the engaged activity. For example, participants' comments included "if we are not reflecting, then we have no idea of the impact we are having"; "when people are watching you teach and they're reflecting and learning, and you're reflecting and learning"; "to pause and reflect on what worked and what didn't work there and what are you going to try next"; or "the ability to change and grow from what I am learning". Comments such as these portray a general sense of dedicated thought about the impact of actions, but leave further questions about the level of design behind the thought process or the concretely identified purpose of the thinking.

Suppositions about the intended purpose of the reflective activities shared by the participants could be made when reviewing the comments made, but concrete connections to purposeful design choices could not be made. Within this division, time is provided at all levels for planning, collaborating, reviewing and readjusting instructional approaches. Examples of the use of frameworks to guide thought, conversation, and actions in group and individual settings were shared by participants. The frequency of opportunities to participate in thoughtful reflection are offered at regular, planned, and predictable intervals. Leaders both model metacognitive strategies and also participate in collective learning alongside other educators in their systems. Both teachers commented how "being forced to look and think about that has been very helpful" and how "I don't even notice that I am doing it" were evidence of positive results from leaders implementing reflective protocols with staff.

The most interesting observation when critically listening for an explicit understanding of reflective practices, was both the sheer volume of questions that candidates were asking themselves out loud throughout the interview as well as the pauses for thought right in the midst of each actual response. Within each interview, participants would ask themselves questions to probe or prompt their own thinking. They would continue on answering but then engage

themselves in reflective thought from time to time by asking a reflective question as part of their own answer. When reviewing the content of these self-directed questions, all four participants presented the same pattern or trend in the critique of their own answers. Each would wonder and seek to know why something was being done or needed to be done in a given way. They would then ponder as to whether it was working to achieve what they wanted to achieve. And lastly, the notion of what needed to be changed to improve or make things better for the learners invariably crept into the thinking. One of the teacher responses had them asking them self “How do you balance what you wanted to see happen versus what’s actually happening?”; and all four people uttered some version of wanting to know if what they were doing made any difference to the learning taking place.

Research Question #2

The second research question endeavoured to take an in depth view of the types of purposeful reflective practices that are occurring within the identified school division. The areas to be analyzed in this section are (i) dissonance as a driver; (ii) an inquiry-based approach; (iii) shifting belief patterns; (iv) vulnerability and trust; (v) a collaborative culture; (vi) formalized visibility; and, (vii) the use of protocols. The inherent practicality of the items in the second research question seemed to elicit plentiful and passionate responses from educators.

Dissonance as a driver. As stated in Chapter 2, the literature surrounding reflective practice flags the starting point of reflection as a place of dissonance, or a disturbing recognition that there is an urgent need to change or improve a situation. Coyle (2018) states that the hard work for groups “involves many moments of high-candor feedback, uncomfortable truth-telling, when they confront a gap between where the group is, and where it ought to be” (p.55). Participants interviewed in the study showed a willingness to embrace dissonance when they

refer to it in a way that “it also pushes you to pursue something that you were willing to just bury because it didn’t go the way you thought it would”; or “I am reaching out in the areas maybe I’m not comfortable in; stepping outside my comfort zone”; or “learning lies in that space where you don’t quite have it”. The selected staff interviewed in this school division expressed a willingness to improve, to learn, to struggle and to be comfortable with discomfort. There was a desire to have someone challenge their own thinking, appreciating critical feedback and understanding professional improvement as the goal behind its use.

Inquiry-based approach. According to the literature reviewed, reflective practices should be rooted in a stance of inquiry, approached with an open-mind, and undertaken using a growth mindset. Evidence from the four interviews pointed to staff at different levels in this division having a willingness to explore their practice, to ask questions, and to accept not knowing all the answers. The interview results suggested a desire to really want to know what the big questions are and look to answer those questions from a stance of fluidity and with an “evergreen approach”. Phrases found in the transcripts which connect to this concept of being inquiry-based are “curiosity is key; how do you want to find out the answer to this”; as well as “I really move into that place of curiosity to wonder why is that not working, and what’s really going on there”; and “if we just keep doing more of the same, we are not going to get any different result, so how can we do this in a better way”. When a learner is willing to wholeheartedly engage in a problem-solving exercise by openly applying an inquiry framework, following the implications unearthed, and then actively listening to the situation’s back-talk, Schön (1983) calls this an inquiry-based approach.

Shifting belief patterns. With regard to shifting one’s own beliefs, educators need to have a method by which to surface and address their own operating system of thought because

belief systems will not change all on their own. Larrivee (2000) states that “through self-reflection, teachers can learn to see beyond the filters of their past and the blinders of their expectations” (p. 299). In this division, the superintendent shared that “it is about what I do and don’t do and what changes I should make” and “how can I go back to it and reflect on it when I am in a different head space”. The principal highlighted the same sentiment by stating that “if you are doing the same thing over and over again and it’s not getting you results; you’ve got to stop”. The teachers also identified the need to shift their own thinking by saying “instructional practice really has to be flexible and change every year, every week, potentially every day”; “we can’t be stagnant and we should always be looking for better”; we need the “ability to open our minds to a different way of thinking” and “I’m always willing and wanting to improve my teaching”. The material in the interview transcripts indicate engagement in the work of making visible changes and working towards doing things differently. The trend of looking for better methods, being improvement focused, and having a growth mindset come through as a predominant one in this topic when analyzing the commentary and data provided in this particular area.

Vulnerability and trust. When speaking with the identified people in the chosen school division, there was little evidence to indicate a fear of failure on the part of any participant, which helps lead them to an authentic ability to want to try new things. Each person conveyed a willingness to listen to others, to share with others, to eliminate intimidation, improve accessibility to opportunities, and promote respectful collaboration amongst peers. Within the transcript data, there was an expressed interest in creating places and using methods that not only make it safe for all to contribute but also make each participant feel that their contribution is valued. Sentiments spoken include “making sure everyone feels safe and that they can enter

wherever they are at”, or “one of the driving things in our teachers is being open to what others are thinking and being respectful”, or “we want everyone to walk away feeling like they’re...that they have value and can make a difference”. Referring back to the literature review, we know that where there is enough trust built up to allow for vulnerability, being able to scrutinize practice with competence and commitment is a sustainable venture. When referencing the buy-in from staff on prescribed initiatives, the principal interviewed indicated the value of trust by saying “if you do it with an ethic of care, people are going to be responsive to you”. The Superintendent also displayed vulnerability by asking “can I find people that I can reach out to, who feel like they can be honest with me and give me feedback” in reference to the type of honest culture and open environment in which people would like to participate.

Collaborative culture. Examining the data from participant interviews for evidence of a collaborative culture being in place unearthed some straight-forward endorsements such as “you can’t go wrong with some good collaboration”; “it’s easy to be collegial in conversation with people and collaborate on different things”; and “I would have never learned as much if we weren’t coming together in a collaborative way”. The above general phrases are backed up with examples of collaborative practices described in the interviews as being in place and actively used by participants. Principals’ meetings are chaired by the principals and they see the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent as fellow participants. Instructional coaches work to improve the understanding and application of instructional practices with the Superintendent’s team, the Principals’ group, and all classroom teachers. Sending teams of learners to attend professional development sessions occurs to increase the likelihood of continued collaborative work being sustained beyond the session date. Co-teaching and co-facilitating is an embedded and expected practice at all levels in the division. Multiple examples of the Superintendent’s

team, administrators, coaches and teachers co-planning, co-constructing, and co-delivering instruction in various combinations were provided by all participants in the responses to the interview questions. Finally, it is a school and divisional initiative to work together in collective teams to assess student work and code student progress on class profiles. These all portray quite well the ideal described by Hattie & Zierer (2018) where “educational expertise is a product of exchange and cooperation” and the “lone wolves can be successful, but they can be even more successful if they work together with others” (p. 25).

Formalized visibility. Another main tenet of engaging in the work of being a reflective practitioner rests in the process of how it is formalized, either through verbal interactions, written words, or using other tracking protocols. Divisionally, there is an expectation here that every educator completes a professional growth plan and submits the plan in writing annually to their immediate supervisor. Professional dialogue centred around the content of the growth plan occurs with direct supervisors at designated intervals. Modelling of growth conversations, of instructional planning processes, and of side-by-side learning experiences takes place with regular frequency at the school and in the division. On some levels, making one’s thinking visible is quite simply asking oneself questions out loud and in front of others. Throughout the course of the four interviews, there were at least fifty-seven direct questions that participants asked of themselves out loud during their own interview. There were also some indirect questioning occurrences noted through voice inflection, affirming phrase endings, and even lengthy pauses mid-sentence to presumably gather one’s own thoughts. The Superintendent remarked how “your questions actually really caused me to reflect on my own practice” and proposed the possibility of posing questions such as these as a planned and designed method for colleagues making their thinking visible to one another.

Use of Protocols. The final and seventh topic to be explored within the second research question is the construct of protocols being used as a tool to facilitate improved reflective practices. Katz & Ain Dack (2013) outline protocols as structured sets of guidelines used to help facilitate both effective and efficient communication or problem solving for groups of educators. Selkrig & Keamy (2015) add that protocols are also purposeful and deliberate ways in which collegial discussions may be undertaken together. Within the interviews, comments about the use of protocols were made more often than in any other pre-determined category that was identified through the literature review as being a key topic in each research question. A comment from the Superintendent reads “protocols, I never used to use them, but now I use them all the time” provides an excellent summary of both intent and follow-through. The Principal provides concrete rationale for their use with “the research has already done the work for us; just go use those practices”. The teachers indicate support for the use of protocols with “I do value time with my co-workers when it is structured” and with “I do like that we use different types of protocols in all our staff meetings and really in all the work we do together”. Protocols named during the interviews include regular learning times and structures, regular meeting times and structures, adherence to the critical friend practice and process guidelines, training and clear expectations with collaborative assessment practices like the Manitoba Rural Learning Consortium (mRLC) math project, reading assessments, and classroom profile work, residency work with adaptive schools, learning sprints, and problems of practice, as well as co-teaching models. It is through the discussion centred on the use of protocols that the reliance on research-based strategies emerged as an additional area worthy of further analysis.

Research Question #3

The third and final research question aims to assess the coherence and alignment that exists between the roles in the chosen division. The transcripts from all four interview candidates were coded, grouped, and analyzed according to the prevalence of the following six elements: (i) shared vision, (ii) common philosophical beliefs, (iii) necessary resources, (iv) system-wide support (v) capacity building opportunities and, (vi) accountability. The authenticity and the importance of relational interactions within the school and across the division emerged as an additional theme and would be best placed into this third section which addresses overall coherence of the system as a whole.

Shared vision. With regard to the importance of shared vision, Katz & Ain Dack (2013) tell us that the efforts of educators are indeed well-placed by focusing on something as controllable and impactful as time spent communicating a clearly articulated, explained, and understood vision. One of the teachers affirms this precise idea when referring to opening day practices by noting “that scheduled time saying this is what happens in our school is very important”. The Principal interviewed points to the importance of the school plan because “it actually builds a foundation for us to have common conversation and common understanding”. The Superintendent identified that “we need to do a better job of articulating” the divisional vision and found a need to “come back to why we are doing this, so that they see how things are connected”. Based on the data collected and analyzed, I came to the conclusion that this division does a good job ‘walking the walk’ but not necessarily ‘talking the talk’. The mechanisms, structures, practices, and protocols are lived but are not always documented or shared purposefully as referenced by the participants. The vision appears to be more implied and indirect and could be more explicit and communicated more directly with all staff.

Common Philosophical Beliefs. As previously indicated in the Literature Review, with the sheer volume of tasks, initiatives, or competing interests that are present in schools, a leader's ability to filter the priorities and keep the focus upon the common beliefs held by the system is a principle feature of system alignment. Valuing mechanisms that promote consistent and common philosophies when engaging in reflective thought, is key to improved instructional practices. All four participants referenced that there are goals coming from the province, the division, the school and also each individual, yet not one person said what the content of the goal at any level might actually be. In fact, one teacher made mention of "some goal that has been set by us, by the Principal, by the division, or by the province" and then carried on to speak of how challenging it is to meet these goals set by all these different entities. Interestingly, all participants quite quickly talked about the work of Hattie as being central to their beliefs about the best approach to improving educational practice. No participants articulated how Hattie's work on high-yield instructional strategies with significant effect sizes connected to, assisted with, or solidified the core beliefs of the division or the school. The links made to practices and protocols seemed to come more easily than the philosophical interplay between beliefs and actions. The Superintendent addressed the importance of consistent beliefs across the system but also asked a self-directed question about how these beliefs become "embedded and then something that will be sustained and will change the way we do things". The Superintendent was reflecting on whether or not the beliefs of the leadership team were filtering down to all staff in the system and wondering how to measure or track sustainable change to reflective practice in the division.

Necessary resources. Looking critically at the resources in place and the way in which teachers utilize the time they have together is the next lens through which the collected data was

analyzed. The predominant front runner in this area came through strongly, as referenced by all participants multiple times throughout the interview, as professional learning opportunities. The availability of, access to, and support for attending professional learning sessions of any kind was given as an answer numerous times. Every person interviewed touted that requests for professional development opportunities were rarely denied by supervisors and were in fact emphatically supported by school and divisional leaders as follows; “they work really hard to meet those requests” and “if you want to learn and you ask, it will be granted”. Not far off from the top draw of finding time and money to support external learning opportunities is this division’s work in the area of in-house learning experiences. Participants all cited the provision of an annual Summer Institute and shared that it is a welcomed, valuable and accepted practice divisionally. Expertise is also brought into the division and shared with all educators using a systemic PD planning model. Those interviewed indicated that all staff attended divisional PD and were able to dialogue with or collaborate with colleagues in any school about the common learning because they had all participated. Work with Faye Brownlie, Bruce Wellman, Steven Katz and the Manitoba Rural Learning Consortium (mRLC) are some examples given by participants. Thirdly, the division has created a culture of expectation when it comes to co-teaching and the use of instructional coaches as referenced by the Superintendent and the Principal. They each spoke of how staff are expected to engage in the learning and not simply invited to participate. Practices being prescribed and not optional was evident in the response of all four staff interviewed. The Superintendent, the Principal, and both teachers had participated in co-teaching with colleagues and all four had also been part of hands-on learning experiences led by their local instructional coaches.

System-wide support. According to the literature, the types of reflective practices happening at the classroom level must also be occurring at the school leader and at the division or system level, with slightly different learning targets for them to be considered a system-wide practice. The participant division has approached a number of things from a system-wide perspective and has flattened the hierarchical structure in their approach. Those interviewed shared that baseline PD has been provided to all levels of the division so that everyone has a common understanding and application of best practices. System-wide instructional strategies include Reading Apprenticeship, teaching and learning sprint work, and numeracy work on sequencing and pacing with the mRLC are a few examples of large-scale PD delivered to all staff. There are learning goals developed at the divisional, school, and individual level which are in turn supported by half-day PD sessions throughout the school year in order to keep those goals as relevant as possible. Each educator in the division is also expected to complete a professional learning portfolio which is shared and tracked annually. There appears to be little doubt voiced by any person interviewed as to the expectations or the value of these identified practices, which lead me to believe that system-wide initiatives are a well-known and well-implemented element.

Capacity building opportunities. When it comes to capacity building in this division, I found the evidence in the interview transcripts so compelling that sharing a series of direct quotes from the transcripts is the best way to convey the investment in, empowerment of, value for, and recognition of nurturing personal and collective expertise found present in the commentary of the selected staff from this division. From the voices of the participants: “I am empowering them in their learning through the process; they walk away and feel like they can do it”; “ I think they feel that they have an investment”; “everyone in the business wants you to be better at it and feel good about what you do”; “whatever we think is important to us and our

students, we are supported”; “to value those that think on their own first before forcing that collaborative work until we feel ready”; “teachers need to know this, they need to understand big ideas and they need to be able to do these things”; and finally with a reflective question asking “how do you facilitate conversations where everybody feels that they can be a valued member?”. Along with these powerful words and phrases, the transcripts held examples of concrete opportunities for people to lead, to facilitate, and to experience learning. There is a clear focus on promoting the attendance of teams of people at learning sessions so that the growth opportunity continues well beyond the session itself. The Superintendent and Principal both spoke about reaching back and revisiting the learning provided, and both teachers indicated that they valued being able to carry on with the learning with their team back at school. And participation in residency work at the classroom level is an embraced and an embedded approach to collective learning. These conditions mirror quite closely what Wheatley (2009) frames when she identifies “the conditions that bring out our best – we’re focused on something we really care about; we work intensely together, inventing solutions as needed; we take all kinds of risks; we communicate constantly” (p. 130).

Accountability. The final topic to examine as part of the third research question is the idea of accountability with regard to the monitoring and meeting of organizational goals. In keeping with Leithwood et al (2004) the transcripts contained evidence that attention was paid to two-way accountability between different levels of the system. And following the thinking of Fox, Dodman, & Holincheck (2019), the interview data also contained comments valuing how professionals are actually looking for reviews from peers and continually engaging in rigorous cycles of self-reflection when assessing their own performance. The existence of equitable, non-hierarchical, professional dialogue factored heavily into the analysis procedure. Several

comments in the transcripts indicated an open style of listening to one another and giving feedback regardless of levels of recognized authority, and as one teacher indicated the divisional and school leaders “always listen when something is not working”. Both the Superintendent and Principal had also formed networks of trusted colleagues that included people over whom they had direct authority. This, combined with the teacher comments about the approachability of these leaders, lead me to believe that staff in this division have the ability to hold one another accountable regardless of title or stature in the organization. An expansion of the research to include a greater number of participants would be necessary to making this statement a more wide-spread or all-encompassing conclusion.

Once again, there is merit to this research drawing attention to the practices of collaborative assessment of student work, an entrenched culture of co-teaching, and a focus on improvement when faced with growth opportunities. In terms of common assessment processes, colleagues, coaches, and administrators “come into our room and they do these assessments with us, then we look at the student’s work together”. This process is cited often by participants and is shared without stressful tones or anxiety about opening the classroom door to others. Similarly, having a colleague co-teach or co-facilitate is shared by the school-based participants to be a regular part of the school day. It is not unusual to have any combination of senior administrator, administrator, coach, or colleague working with each other in order to share expertise and encourage expanded growth. A comment from the Principal in reference to the need for clear targets and expectations states that “if you don’t ever get told that or be held accountable to change that, you won’t”. The Superintendent responding in the interview with an example of how rationale was shared with the principals’ group was “we do know something; we know this will help you in the end, but we have to push you into it first”. This is evidence that honest and

critical feedback is also a customary part of the system-wide accountability structure from the perspective of those staff in this division providing their feedback for this study. The following section will look at a comparative analysis of the feedback as a whole comparing the topics to one another and comparing the research questions to one another.

Comparative Analysis of All Areas

This second way of organizing the data was completed to examine how frequently certain topics or themes surfaced through the course of each interview and then also through all four interviews together. The contents of each transcription was marked using colour-coded tabs to separate the commentary, references made, and examples shared in each particular topic area. The number of tabs of each distinct colour was tabulated and is represented in Table 1.

Table 1: Raw number of times a comment, phrase or idea appeared in the transcript

Topic/Theme	Superintendent	Principal	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Total
(a) Reflection Identified	16	31	14	4	65
(b) Embedded Questions	21	14	13	9	57
(c) Dissonance	8	9	9	8	34
(d) Inquiry-Based	17	8	20	2	47
(e) Vulnerability and Trust	22	5	12	8	47
(f) Collaborative Culture	21	14	21	6	62
(g) Shifting Beliefs	22	4	10	3	39
(h) Visibility	13	14	5	3	35
(i) Protocols	19	25	18	12	74
(j) Shared Vision	6	7	9	5	27
(k) Common Beliefs	5	1	1	3	10
(l) Resources	10	12	18	12	52
(m) System-Wide	12	5	6	2	25
(n) Capacity Building	16	21	14	10	61
(o) Accountability	13	18	12	6	49
(p) Research-Based	27	24	25	7	83
(q) Covid-Related	17	6	6	7	36

The qualitative engagement reported in all feature areas did not offer a clear delineation of the weight placed on each item, so I undertook a quantitative look at the number of distinct and different times concepts from a designated area were highlighted by the interviewee. The higher the number, the more often that topic appeared in the transcript data. As noted in Table 1, the raw number of times a comment, phrase, or idea appeared in the transcript is represented as sorted into each identified category.

In Table 1, elements (a) and (b) represent data relevant to the first research question and will remain shaded green through all further tables, elements (c) through to (i) inclusive represent data relevant to the second research question and will remain shaded orange through all further tables, elements (j) through (o) inclusive represent data relevant to the third research question and will remain shaded yellow through all further tables, and elements (p) and (q) represent emergent data topics or themes that were not previously identified in the initial research design and will remain shaded blue through all further tables. The letters and colours remain attached to each topic or theme throughout all upcoming tables in order to maintain consistency and to assist with identifying the associated research question as the data is reorganized for a variety of differing viewpoints.

Using the above data to discern the perceived importance or value of each topic or theme, the chart has been re-organized in Table 2 to represent the rank order based upon the overall total collective frequency of occurrence. Once again, the colours associated with each research question have been kept with each topic or theme to visually assist the reader with sorting or categorizing the re-ordered data.

Table 2: Rank order of topic/theme based upon collective frequency of occurrence

Topic/Theme	Superintendent	Principal	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Total	Rank
(p) Research-Based	27	24	25	7	83	1
(i) Protocols	19	25	18	12	74	2
(a) Reflection Identified	16	31	14	4	65	3
(f) Collaborative Culture	21	14	21	6	62	4
(n) Capacity Building	16	21	14	10	61	5
(b) Embedded Questions	21	14	13	9	57	6
(l) Resources	10	12	18	12	52	7
(o) Accountability	13	18	12	6	49	8
(d) Inquiry-Based	17	8	20	2	47	9
(e) Vulnerability and Trust	22	5	12	8	47	9
(g) Shifting Beliefs	22	4	10	3	39	11
(q) Covid-Related	17	6	6	7	36	12
(h) Visibility	13	14	5	3	35	13
(c) Dissonance	8	9	9	8	34	14
(j) Shared Vision	6	7	9	5	27	15
(m) System-Wide	12	5	6	2	25	16
(k) Common Beliefs	5	1	1	3	10	17

Through this re-ordered perspective, it can be observed that the most frequently mentioned topics throughout the interviews considered as a group were (i) the reference back to research-based practices, (ii) the use of protocols to facilitate reflective practices, (iii) the ability to identify and understand the meaning of reflection, (iv) the development of a collaborative culture, and (v) the ability to build capacity within the system itself. It is equally interesting to note that the bottom three topics or themes entail communicating a shared vision, identifying system-wide initiatives or practices, and the commitment to common philosophical beliefs. It is uncertain whether the lower frequency of occurrences could indicate a gap in knowledge, a deeply embedded ideal of the system, poorly worded questions, or simply a low interest topic of the person being interviewed.

One further layer was examined by comparing the top five topics or themes of each individual participant's data. This drills deeper into the detail of any trends from an angle that is not based upon overall frequency, but one of thematic prevalence across all participants. As shown in the shaded cells of Table 3(a), three further items emerge as having been included more frequently in the dialogue with individual participants. These topics or themes are (i) the need for vulnerability and trust to be present, (ii) evidence of self-reflection as seen in the reflective questions embedded in transcripts, and (iii) the importance of providing resource supports to educators.

Table 3(a): Highest ranking topics/themes by participant

Rank	Superintendent	Principal	Teacher 1	Teacher 2
1	***Research-Based	*Reflection Identified	***Research-Based	***Protocols
2	*Shifting Beliefs	***Protocols	**Collaborative Culture	**Resources
3	**Vulnerability and Trust	***Research-Based	*Inquiry-Based	**Capacity Building
4	**Embedded Questions	**Capacity Building	***Protocols	**Embedded Questions
5	**Collaborative Culture	*Accountability	**Resources	*Dissonance
5				**Vulnerability and Trust

*** Indicates a top 5 ranking on 3 of 4 participant lists.
 ** Indicates a top 5 ranking on 2 of 4 participant lists.
 * Indicates a top 5 ranking on only one participant list.

Table 3(b) is included to highlight the top five ranked topics or themes when overall frequency is used and helps to show that all unshaded topics with either three or two stars also made the overall top five ranking.

Table 3(b): Highest ranking topics with all participants combined

Rank	Whole Group
1	***Research-Based
2	***Protocols
3	*Reflection Identified
4	**Collaborative Culture
5	**Capacity Building

Individual Participant Analysis

As a final layer to observe and consider in the analysis of the transcript data, I included a look at each individual participant's topics or themes in rank order as well as by research question affiliation. When sorting the number of distinct times that the Superintendent spoke about each topic, the ranking as seen in Table 4(a) emerged. When re-organizing the exact same data back into groups according to each research question, as shown in Table 4(b), it became simpler to visualize and quantify which research question was receiving the most air time by the Superintendent. The lower the composite score, the higher it ranked for the identified participant.

Table 4(a): Topics/themes ranked for Superintendent

<u>Topic/Theme</u>	<u>Superintendent</u>	<u>Rank</u>
(p) Research-Based	27	1
(g) Shifting Beliefs	22	2
(e) Vulnerability and Trust	22	2
(b) Embedded Question	21	4
(f) Collaborative Culture	21	4
(i) Protocols	19	6
(d) Inquiry-Based	17	7
(q) Covid-Related	17	7
(a) Reflection Identified	16	9
(n) Capacity Building	16	9
(h) Visibility	13	11
(o) Accountability	13	11
(m) System-Wide	12	12
(l) Resources	10	13
(c) Dissonance	8	14
(j) Shared Vision	6	15
(k) Common Beliefs	5	16

Table 4(b): Composite score by research question for Superintendent

Topic/Theme	Superintendent	Rank	Composite Score
(a) Reflection Identified	16	9	6.5
(b) Embedded Question	21	4	
(c) Dissonance	8	14	6.5
(d) Inquiry-Based	17	7	
(e) Vulnerability and Trust	22	2	
(f) Collaborative Culture	21	4	
(g) Shifting Beliefs	22	2	
(h) Visibility	13	11	
(i) Protocols	19	6	
(j) Shared Vision	6	15	12.7
(k) Common Beliefs	5	16	
(l) Resources	10	13	
(m) System-Wide	12	12	
(n) Capacity Building	16	9	
(o) Accountability	13	11	
(p) Research-Based	27	1	
(q) Covid-Related	17	7	4.0

The composite score was obtained by adding the ranks in each question area and dividing by the number of topics or themes in that question section. The aim of these last two perspectives was to be able to view each individual's entire list in order of frequency of responses, but to also identify which of the three research questions in this study represents the area of most comfort or ease based upon the amount of commentary provided on that question area. This conclusion is based upon the premise that people tend to talk more about items or topics with which they are at ease or comfortable.

The responses given by the Principal are seen by rank in Table 5(a), with the reorganization of those ranks into research question areas presented in Table 5(b).

Table 5(a): Topics/themes ranked for Principal

Topic/Theme	Principal	Rank
(a) Reflection Identified	31	1
(i) Protocols	25	2
(p) Research-Based	24	3
(n) Capacity Building	21	4
(o) Accountability	18	5
(b) Embedded Question	14	6
(f) Collaborative Culture	14	6
(h) Visibility	14	6
(l) Resources	12	9
(c) Dissonance	9	10
(d) Inquiry-Based	8	11
(j) Shared Vision	7	12
(q) Covid-Related	6	13
(e) Vulnerability and Trust	5	14
(m) System-Wide	5	14
(g) Shifting Beliefs	4	16
(k) Common Beliefs	1	17

Table 5(b): Composite score by research question for Principal

Topic/Theme	Principal	Rank	Composite Score
(a) Reflection Identified	31	1	3.5
(b) Embedded Question	14	6	
(c) Dissonance	9	10	9.3
(d) Inquiry-Based	8	11	
(e) Vulnerability and Trust	5	14	
(f) Collaborative Culture	14	6	
(g) Shifting Beliefs	4	16	
(h) Visibility	14	6	
(i) Protocols	25	2	
(j) Shared Vision	7	12	10.2
(k) Common Beliefs	1	17	
(l) Resources	12	9	
(m) System-Wide	5	14	
(n) Capacity Building	21	4	
(o) Accountability	18	5	10.2
(p) Research-Based	24	3	8
(q) Covid-Related	6	13	

It is interesting to note that the composite scores of both the divisional leader and the school leader show that the research question whose topics or themes address alignment, ranks as the least frequently mentioned area. The higher the number in the composite score, the lower the number of times that the topic or theme appeared or was addressed by each candidate as revealed in their interview transcripts. The data from both teachers follows in Tables 6(a) and 6(b) for the first teacher and in Tables 7(a) and 7(b) for the second teacher. Layering the composite scores from the teachers alongside those of the participants in formal leadership roles also helped decipher if there were common patterns in the amount of time or level of focus given to each research question.

Table 6(a): Topics/themes ranked for Teacher 1

<u>Topic/Theme</u>	<u>Teacher 1</u>	<u>Rank</u>
(p) Research-Based	25	1
(f) Collaborative Culture	21	2
(d) Inquiry-Based	20	3
(i) Protocols	18	4
(l) Resources	18	4
(a) Reflection Identified	14	6
(n) Capacity Building	14	6
(b) Embedded Question	13	8
(e) Vulnerability and Trust	12	9
(o) Accountability	12	9
(g) Shifting Beliefs	10	11
(c) Dissonance	9	12
(j) Shared Vision	9	12
(m) System-Wide	6	14
(q) Covid-Related	6	14
(h) Visibility	5	16
(k) Common Beliefs	1	17

Table 6(b): Composite score by research question for Teacher 1

<u>Topic/Theme</u>	<u>Teacher 1</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Composite Score</u>
(a) Reflection Identified	14	6	7.0
(b) Embedded Question	13	8	
(c) Dissonance	9	12	8.1
(d) Inquiry-Based	20	3	
(e) Vulnerability and Trust	12	9	
(f) Collaborative Culture	21	2	
(g) Shifting Beliefs	10	11	
(h) Visibility	5	16	
(i) Protocols	18	4	
(j) Shared Vision	9	12	10.3
(k) Common Beliefs	1	17	
(l) Resources	18	4	
(m) System-Wide	6	14	
(n) Capacity Building	14	6	
(o) Accountability	12	9	
(p) Research-Based	25	1	
(q) Covid-Related	6	14	7.5

Table 7(a): Topics/themes ranked for Teacher 2

<u>Topic/Theme</u>	<u>Teacher 2</u>	<u>Rank</u>
(i) Protocols	12	1
(l) Resources	12	1
(n) Capacity Building	10	3
(b) Embedded Question	9	4
(c) Dissonance	8	5
(e) Vulnerability and Trust	8	5
(p) Research-Based	7	7
(q) Covid-Related	7	7
(f) Collaborative Culture	6	9
(o) Accountability	6	9
(j) Shared Vision	5	11
(a) Reflection Identified	4	12
(g) Shifting Beliefs	3	13
(h) Visibility	3	13
(d) Inquiry-Based	2	15
(m) System-Wide	2	15
(k) Common Beliefs	0	17

Table 7(b): Composite score by research question for Teacher 2

<u>Topic/Theme</u>	<u>Teacher 2</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Composite Score</u>
(a) Reflection Identified	4	12	8.0
(b) Embedded Question	9	4	
(c) Dissonance	8	5	8.7
(d) Inquiry-Based	2	15	
(e) Vulnerability and Trust	8	5	
(f) Collaborative Culture	6	9	
(g) Shifting Beliefs	3	13	
(h) Visibility	3	13	
(i) Protocols	12	1	
(j) Shared Vision	5	11	9.3
(k) Common Beliefs	0	17	
(l) Resources	12	1	
(m) System-Wide	2	15	
(n) Capacity Building	10	3	
(o) Accountability	6	9	
(p) Research-Based	7	7	7.0
(q) Covid-Related	7	7	

By looking at the composite scores as compared to one another, a pattern arose that affirmed the emergence of items (p) responses linked back to research and (q) mention of the impact of Covid-19 on typical practices. References within the transcripts that indicated practices occurring from a stance of being research-based were higher ranked by all four participants than the pandemic influence on practices in the section that is not linked to any of the pre-determined research questions. All four participants also had a similar order when reviewing their composite scores grouped by their understanding of reflective practice, their application of reflective practice, the alignment of reflective practice throughout the system as well as the impact that COVID-19 had on their typical routines and practices. The first research question on understanding ranked first, the second research question on application ranked second, and the

third research question on alignment ranked third. As shown in Table 8, the slight difference in ordering occurred only when considering the fourth section which includes the newly emerging topics of being research driven or pandemic influenced.

Table 8: Combined composite scores and rankings by research question

Research Question	Superintendent	Principal	Teacher 1	Teacher 2
1) Understanding	2nd (6.5)	1st (3.5)	1st (7.0)	2nd (8.0)
2) Application	2nd (6.5)	3rd (9.3)	3rd (8.1)	3rd (8.7)
3) Alignment	3rd (12.7)	4th (10.2)	4th (10.3)	4th (9.3)
4) Emergent Items	1st (4.0)	2nd (8.0)	2nd (7.5)	1st (7.0)

Findings

Through the process of analyzing the interview data in both a qualitative and quantitative way, several key findings were revealed. First of all, the prevalence of the pandemic disrupting the everyday practice of the participants was not overwhelming other than the difficulty of finding time for school and divisional staff to actually take part in the interview process. The impact of COVID-19 was portrayed as being felt more heavily by the divisional leader, then the school leader, with very few references made by the teachers. Secondly, there was also a level of relational trust apparent between staff in this division. The teachers not only knew the names of divisional instructional coaches, of the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent, but had knowledge of the support they provided to their administrator and to the system itself. There was a great deal of admiration for the roles that the divisional and school leader played, but also for the way in which they fulfilled those roles. Every person spoken to felt very supported, very valued, and very involved in both their own work as well as their collective work with others in the system.

Two very interesting trends that took place across all the interviews were the modelling of reflection-in-action during each interview, along with the reference to research-based

instructional practices by all participants. Every one of the interviewees engaged actively in self-directed or rhetorical questioning whilst sharing their responses during the interview process. The pattern of reflective thought for each of them found them asking questions of themselves as if to clarify their own thinking in a verbal way. The questions they asked followed a pattern of inquiry by wondering ‘Why do it that way?’, ‘Was it happening as planned?’, and ‘Was the work making improvements?’. There was also an extraordinary number of times that the participants referred to an educational researcher or a research-based practice throughout the course of their interview. Direct references to the work of Faye Brownlie, John Hattie, Bruce Wellman, Jennifer Katz, Regie Routman, and Simon Breakspear emerged throughout all four transcripts. Educational practices being discussed included Reading Apprenticeship, Learning Sprints, sequencing and pacing work in mathematics, the British Columbia assessment rubrics, co-teaching, and collaborative assessment work. These two emergent and unplanned themes were refreshing to hear and promising in terms of strong pedagogy being an important feature in this division.

Identified themes that were noticeable strengths in the division were the deeply embedded use of protocols and the system-wide support of professional development for any and all who wished. Participants being able to identify particular protocols being used, to articulate the rationale for their use, and to indicate the benefit that comes from designed structures for professional conversations was enlightening. The thirst for being able to both provide and participate in a way that maximizes effective and efficient dialogue was plainly evident. This desire to be productive together combined with the expansive support for professional learning creates a positive and impactful learning environment. Every participant answered without hesitation that the division through its leaders would find a way to support whatever learning that

was asked for or required by staff. From finding money, to finding substitutes, to working alongside, and sending teams of people to learning opportunities, it was evident that professional learning is absolutely a core priority in this division. The support of professional growth opportunities engages and empowers teachers to be more closely invested in the work of the division.

A challenge for the chosen division lies in the explicit communication of a shared vision to all internal stakeholders of the system. The actual goals and direction did not ever surface throughout the interviews, but the practices of the people interviewed seemed to be in alignment. It is uncertain whether the knowledge and understanding of the specific goals were in place, or if the common and consistent actions were being implemented within the absence of an identified and articulated purpose. Interestingly, when the three research questions were ranked in order of their collective frequency, the notion of understanding and application of reflective practices were placed ahead of alignment for all participants. This would be an area worthy of further exploration by the division in order to accurately assess the existing mechanisms in place for both communicating and engaging in the work of their divisional vision in a frequent and focused manner.

As a final finding, from the outside looking in, I would say that this is a division where the goal is indeed improved teacher practice along with improved student learning. The examples, comments, and practices shared had the ideal of getting better at their core. The reflective questions being asked out loud by the interviewees almost always pointed to figuring out an improved way of doing something so that increased success could be had by the audience of learners. For the teachers, their audience was their students and their peers. For the Principal, that audience was the teachers, the students and their peers, and for the Superintendent, it was the

principals, the teachers, the students and their peers. And no matter which staff group or type of learning was undertaken, this is a division that works collaboratively, fearlessly, and without power or authority impeding the process for those doing the learning one alongside another.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary and Conclusions

The summary of this research study will look to answer each of the research questions that were posed at the outset. The first of the questions is: What are the understandings that teachers, administrators, and school system leaders have with regard to reflective practices? Through the work of this research, it can be concluded that teachers, administrators and school system leaders in this rural school division have a demonstrated understanding of reflective practices. They are able to choose reflective activities, to participate in those activities, and even understand the benefits and challenges to being a reflective practitioner. There was a noticeable absence of the use of precise terminology when referring to particular reflective activities, but the presence of, active engagement in, and provision of examples portraying reflective thought were documented in the analysis of the interview materials. All four interview participants were highly engaged and cooperative through the interview process. The answers they shared were thoughtful, relevant, and authentic. All remarked that the interview process itself was an excellent chance to revisit their own reflective practice mindset and they affirmed a renewed intent to purposefully reintroduce some prior practices in their daily professional work.

The second of the research questions is: To what extent are these understandings turned into practice at the classroom, school, and division level? Each of the pre-identified key practices of reflection were evident in all four interview transcripts to varying degrees for each participant. While the practices were evident, the target audiences were definitely different. The Superintendent worked at fostering embedded practices at the divisional level, the Principal at the school level, and the teachers at the classroom level. This layered approach observed showed ownership in one's own role as well as an absence of blame or judgment towards the work of

others in their respective roles. There was not a shortage of examples, experiences, or activities that fit each of the topics or themes identified before any interviewing began. So the challenge then became sorting, reviewing, and analyzing each of the areas for dominant trends and for frequency of occurrence. Additional emergent themes also surfaced which offered an additional layer of robustness to the data being collected, coded, and interpreted. Certain topics were referenced more often across all questions, while others were not as prevalent. The Superintendent remained predominantly focused upon improving the educational practices of the school administrators in the division, the Principal remained rooted in building the capacity of all staff in the school, and the teachers were dialed in to student success as their central aim. The rationale behind this pattern would be an interesting subject for further study.

The third and final research question is: How well aligned are these understandings and practices implemented within that school division? Answering this research question is somewhat more complex than the other two. The frequency with which the participants spoke about the elements identified as key indicators of alignment were the least popular list of topics for all four participants. Yet, all four still had references, examples, and responses that fit into all the pre-identified key categories. That the order of preference or popularity of the three questions was in alignment for all people also speaks to a level of patterned thought and behavior as witnessed in the content of all interview transcripts. As Fullan and Quinn (2016) indicate, coherence of a system is really “something that works and that can be mastered by any leader or group that puts in the time to learn how the main elements fit in their own situation” (p. 11). The concepts listed under the umbrella of alignment are also more complex and philosophical in nature, so may have been more difficult to include or even articulate clearly by the school-level participants. The Superintendent shared responses at the division or system level, clearly situated

in the appropriate role. All other participants not only knew the difference between the work being done at various levels, but also respected the work of others and completed the necessary work in their own roles. This represents a strong sense of system alignment.

Implications

The work of this study has several implications for myself, the participant division, and for pedagogical practice in general. For myself, the implications of this research include further professional reflection about the practices in my own division as compared to the literature but also compared to the patterns, trends, and practices occurring in a comparable rural school division or divisions. Questions that participants were asking themselves became questions that I too wanted to ask and answer for my own division's educational system. Throughout the entire process of working with the interview candidates, analyzing the data, revisiting the trends, and coming to conclusions with regard to my findings, I craved both affirmation that my own work as a Superintendent was in line with that of others, and I also desired external observation to identify where possible gaps may exist in the chosen educational initiatives and reflective practices being implemented and undertaken in my own school division. Creating a productive educational environment and continuously engaging in the promotion of high quality instructional practices for teachers is the work that drives my own work daily.

For the division that chose to take part in the study, the question of what they will do with the information obtained becomes an important one. There was an expressed interest in hearing about the findings, but the action that will accompany the sharing of this research with the divisional staff who participated remains to be seen. Each participant did comment upon the amount of reflecting that they did both before, during, and even after the interview. The Superintendent also commented on how beneficial the asking and answering of these educational

questions was, and then wondered aloud why educators did not do more conversations exactly like this. Perhaps the divisional leadership or school leadership will incorporate some reflective questioning practices as an additional layer in their sites moving forward. An interesting study to follow-up with might be looking at the impact of this research process on the selected staff of this division as a result of their participation in the current study.

In the realm of strong pedagogical practices, the implication of using designed and purposeful times for professional reflections is a very real possibility. In the existing climate of navigating a pandemic, teachers' access to PD opportunities outside their own "bubble" has diminished. The COVID-19 pandemic drastically hindered my ability to complete this research work in the timeliest way possible. The ability to arrange a common time for myself and the participants to have a professional conversation was extremely difficult. Divisional administrators, school administrators, and teachers were spending time prepping for a new way of learning, battling the uncertainty of whether their instructional choices were working for students, and navigating an environment where adherence to health protocols was the primary focus for most of the school year. Educators likened this year to first-year teaching with continual anxiety, a constant state of flux, and tiredness from keeping one step ahead of the learners most days. The value of the time spent in the actual interview was treasured by all participants as the thirst for educational dialogue was strong and being quenched by engaging in the research study process.

Also, in navigating fiscal austerity measures from the provincial government of the day, access to costly or numerous PD opportunities are diminished. As such, using appropriately chosen protocols and allocating dedicated time to engage in reflection activities with colleagues becomes an extremely viable professional development model for educators in this province. As

a post-pandemic strategy, embedding the use of reflective practice as a means to grow professionally has many merits. Engagement in purposefully designed reflection empowers teachers to not only own their individual learning journeys, but to also progress the learning of their profession as a whole. Focused, frequent, relevant, and designed opportunities to explore, to inquire, to learn and to grow as collective groups of professionals could be an engaging and beneficial way to improve teaching practices and student learning across the greater provincial education system. With strong understanding, application, and commitment from school, division, and provincial leadership, the potential to work collaboratively for the benefit of all students not only exists, but could cause thriving success on student learning outcomes.

Lastly, in the face of looming legislative changes for the education system, there is a distinct opportunity to harness the power of reflective conversations to enrich the collaborative uptake of stakeholders in this province. Manitoba Education continues to indicate that they would like to consult and collaborate with stakeholders, yet they lack either the particular skill or knowledge of how to do that well or the ability and authority to follow through with their intention in a highly political environment. The use of protocols to facilitate true engagement in reflective conversations with various groups would go miles in terms of people not only hearing about the work planned and their proposed involvement in it, but actually being involved in the conversation and planning process itself. Engaging in true reflective practice would promote much stronger understandings of multiple perspectives and offer an improved chance at meeting the needs of multiple educational stakeholders.

Instead of going through the motions or just checking off the box when meeting with different stakeholder groups, there could be very meaningful and relevant input provided to the governing officials. If the proper tools, intent, and processes were used to authentically engage

educators in the improvement planning stage of the proposed educational system transformation, educationally beneficial and sustainable change could be a reality. For this to occur, all interested parties would need to tuck aside personal or professional agendas, commit to looking at systemic benefits, and engage in respectful, inclusive conversations.

The Minister of Education as well as the civil servants working for Manitoba Education, would need to shift their aim further away from political gain, public favour, and would also need to become much more open to asking for and receiving diverse input. Appointments to committees and the receipt of feedback would need to stray away from choosing like-minded people so that group-think affirmations could become less prevalent. Building trusting and authentic relationships with professional groups and their members is paramount to the success of a large-scale education system.

Senior administrators in school divisions would need to become even more collaborative with one another in order to achieve a greater good for all. The notion of a flattened-hierarchy would need to be embraced so that the learning, facilitating, and sharing of knowledge becomes open and accessible to all leaders regardless of tenure, size, and/or location of their school division. Once again, trust and vulnerability are key elements, as would be the use of prescribed protocols for both learning and communicating activities. Equitable access to and participation in the learning conversation would need to be an area of focus for this group.

Teachers as individuals and as a professional organization would need to commit to, plan for, and engage in a continuous learning model with regard to quality instructional practices. Both the need for and the ability to be comfortable with discomfort, to broaden their own growth-mindset, and to push one another to improve teaching practices is critical to increased

student success. Teachers working with peers to frequently and repeatedly assess, reflect, plan, and act would be important first steps to educational change.

Finally, universities would need to have a role in the ongoing professional growth of educators and administrators. The needs of any large-scale education system are going to change over time and the needs of teachers at different stages or in different roles is going to change over time. A mechanism for continual learning or growth in a prescribed way that improves professional accountability is notably absent from our provincial education system. Having partnerships between school divisions and universities so that all educators can remain up-to-date with relevant, research-based practices by engaging in a designed learning model would better individuals and the profession as a whole.

Reflective practice across a greater arena than one school division has the potential to bring all educators in a vast system onto the same learning page. Understanding the types of reflection available, applying reflective practice in educational settings, and aligning the use of reflective practice across the province represents an educational change with access, relevance and benefits from all stakeholder viewpoints. Having all parties truly engage in the greater betterment of an educational system without personal agendas remains the greatest barrier to the authentic implementation of reflective practice in many environments.

Limitations

A limitation of this research study includes the fact that there is only one principal researcher, which leaves the interpretation of the data entirely in the perspective of one person. When completing the sorting and analysis of the data, the subjectivity of my own understandings, biases, or perspectives may have impacted the end result of the research. Part of the rationale for including classroom teachers, school administrators, and divisional

administrators was to include the thinking outside of my own perspective as a Superintendent. Viewing the data through the lens of being a Superintendent may have slanted my perspective more towards a divisional stance or may have shifted my thinking further towards the classroom impacts in order to compensate for my positionality that is further away from classroom instruction.

The fact that the research was done in only one rural school division limits the ability to compare data, trends, and practices across multiple large systems. The school that was chosen to be included was also a small school with only one administrator, nine teachers, and two grade levels. This limited the selection of participants to a smaller initial pool, and also may have positively or negatively impacted the results by having a lone administrator to choose from in the school itself. The mindset of teachers who all teach the same two grades may also be more narrow than a more diverse range of grades and subjects being taught by participant teachers. Finally, the fact that the only entry point to the research study was by consenting to an interactive and verbal interview may have excluded other types of communicators as well as other sources of data from the process. One of the participants requested the option of pre-recording their responses, which caused me to question the inclusivity of the design itself.

Recommendations for Future Research

Upon completion of this research study, several possibilities for future research surfaced. It would be interesting to expand the study so more schools in a division would be included, enriching the ability to look for trends in the topics or themes from one school to the next. This may also provide a more in depth look at the impact of different leaders in the same division. Secondly, the same research could be completed in an urban setting to look at similarities and differences between a rural setting and an urban one. A third possible approach for future

consideration might be a repeat of this same work in the same environment after a certain period of time has passed. Completing a reflective conversation cycle with the same people in a designed way over time could unearth some valuable new findings. Another possibility for future consideration might be to explore not only the understanding, application and alignment of reflective practices, but the purpose and rationale behind their use. Digging more deeply into the ‘why’ when it comes to reflection would be a critical layer to the work of best implementing reflective practices in educational systems. Lastly, making a connection between the use of reflective practices on the attainment of instructional goals would be an important link to establish. Correlating the impact of professional reflection with student achievement would prove to be very beneficial work to explore in terms of existing research as well as to undertake as new or additional research studies.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Letter of Invitation for Divisional Participation in the Study (E-mail)



March 2020

Dear Colleague,

I am currently pursuing my Master's degree in the area of Educational Administration at the University of Manitoba. As a requirement of my program, I am conducting a small study into the process of professional reflection being practiced by Manitoba educators in one rural school division. I am interested in gaining insight into the understanding of, the application of, and the alignment of reflective practices in a rural Manitoba school division. My study is called: "Professional Reflective Practices of Teachers and Leadership Alignment in a Rural Manitoba School Division". The information gathered and analyzed is for my Master's thesis. The data and findings will be used as part of my thesis research. The findings will be shared with the participating division, school, and teachers, and the published document will be accessible to the public.

In order to conduct my research, I am looking to recruit Superintendents who are currently working towards improved instructional practices in their school divisions. I would look to interview the study candidates between now and the end of May in a location that is private and suitably convenient to both parties. A web-based communication tool can be used if the interview is to be done from a considerable distance. I anticipate that each interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Participants will be asked to spend up to an additional hour or two to review the transcript of their own interview prior to it being included in the study.

I am requesting your support and asking you to consider being a participant in this study. Should you be interest in participating, I would ask that you complete the attached Informed Consent Form and return it to me as soon as possible. There is further clarifying information within the Informed Consent Form that may help you make your decision about participating. If you are chosen to be a participant, you will receive an interview guide with a preamble as well as the discussion questions in advance of our time together.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns, questions, or complaints about this project, you may contact me or my research supervisor Dr. Jon Young at Jon.Young@umanitoba.ca. You may also contact the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 1-204-474-7122 or by e-mail at humanethics@umanitoba.ca.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Cathy Tymko

tymkoc@myumanitoba.ca

APPENDIX B: Superintendent Informed Consent Form



Research Project Title:

Professional Reflective Practices of Teachers and Leadership Alignment in a Rural Manitoba School Division

Researcher:

Catherine Tymko

tymkoc@myumanitoba.ca



Research Supervisor:

Dr. Jon Young

Jon.Young@umanitoba.ca



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

I am a graduate student at the University of Manitoba working towards the completion of my Master's degree in the area of Educational Administration. As part of my thesis work, I am conducting a small qualitative research study on the process of professional reflection being practiced by Manitoba educators in one rural school division. I am interested in gaining insight into the understanding of, the application of, and the alignment of reflective practices in a rural Manitoba school division. I am interested in interviewing Superintendents who are responsible for the work of improving instructional practice for teachers in their division. Additionally, I am interested in interviewing select administrators and teachers in the same division. Participation for the Superintendent consists of one 60 to 90-minute interview which will be audio recorded as well permission to contact the schools in your division. As a participant, you will also be asked to review the printed transcript of your conversation with me, which may take up to another hour or two of your time. Participants will receive a follow-up phone call to clarify trends and findings prior to any final conclusions being drafted or included in the study or final thesis document.

I do not anticipate any risk beyond the level of the normal routine of your daily life, however, you may find it difficult to commit the time in your schedule after agreeing to participate. Participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to leave the study at any time without penalty or consequences simply by letting me know by phone or by e-mail. You will be asked a series of questions about your own and the reflective practices of teachers in your division. You will receive a copy of the preamble and the questions in an interview guide prior to our interview session together. You may choose not to answer all the questions and still have your given responses included in the study. If you choose to withdraw from the study at any time, all data, including audio recordings, printed transcripts and notes will be immediately destroyed.

The benefits of participating in the study include dedicated time for professional reflection for each interview candidate. The responses given may also assist you in reviewing your own focus on professional reflective practices. Your participation and responses will also help to identify common trends, dominant characteristics, and/or potential gaps with regards to the support of improving instructional practices within your division.

I will hold your interview individually in a quiet place at a date and time that is mutually agreed upon, if you can meet locally. A web-based communication tool will be used if the interview is to be done from a considerable distance. A follow up phone call interview will be required for fact checking or clarification purposes. I will audio record the interview using a handheld device and I will later transcribe what was said verbatim. I will also take written notes during the course of the interview. These notes will help me to recall the discussion and also serve as a back-up in case the recording malfunctions or is inaudible in any way. You may bring along your own notes to help you address key concepts you wish to contribute, but your notes will not be collected, used or kept by me as data for this study.

Confidentiality will be maintained through the use of anonymous and generic identifiers for all participants and pseudonyms for other identifying names, places or other identifiers that arise in the interview process. My research supervisor and I will be the only ones to see the data. The list of participants' names and any identifying data will be kept separate from the other data in a locked filing cabinet in my office. Digital data, both audio and text, will be either password protected or encrypted and stored on my laptop in my home. All data will be deleted in its entirety by shredding all paper information and deleting all electronic material from all storage areas. Data will be destroyed by December 31, 2020.

After each interview is transcribed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to read over for accuracy. You may make changes, delete commentary or make additional comments if desired, and then return it to me. Participants will have only two weeks in which to review the transcript, after which time, and a reminder e-mail will be sent, if I have not heard a response, then I will assume approval of the transcript sent.

The data collected from the interviews will be used strictly for the purpose of completing my thesis research. A summary of findings will be shared with you and each chosen participant in your division. You may indicate whether or not you wish to receive a summary and how you would like it to be sent at the bottom of this consent form. Findings will be compiled and shared with participants who indicated their interest by the end of August 2020. All confidential material will be kept on file until December 31, 2020 following the completion of my Master's thesis and degree. At the completion and defense of my Master's thesis, and prior to December 31, 2020, all data will be destroyed including the deletion of all electronic files and audio recordings as well as the shredding of all interview transcripts and other materials.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research study and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice, penalty, or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information as required throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records from this study to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

The research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 1-204-474-7122 or at humanethics@umanitoba.ca.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Name: (printed) _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (printed) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

_____ I wish to receive the transcript and summary by regular mail.

My mailing address is:

_____ I wish to receive the transcript and summary by e-mail.

My e-mail address is:

APPENDIX C: Letter of Invitation for Administrator Participation in the Study (E-mail)

March 2020

Dear Colleague,

I am currently pursuing my Master's degree in the area of Educational Administration at the University of Manitoba. As a requirement of my program, I am conducting a small study into the process of professional reflection being practiced by Manitoba educators in one rural school division. I am interested in gaining insight into the understanding of, the application of, and the alignment of reflective practices in a rural Manitoba school division. My study is called: "Professional Reflective Practices of Teachers and Leadership Alignment in a Rural Manitoba School Division". The information gathered and analyzed is for my Master's thesis. The data and findings will be used as part of my thesis research. The findings will be shared with the participating division, school, and teachers, and the published document will be accessible to the public.

In order to conduct my research, I am looking to recruit Principals or Assistant Principals who are currently working in school divisions where improved instructional practices are an identified priority or area of focus. I would look to interview the study candidates between now and the end of May in a location that is private and suitably convenient to both parties. A web-based communication tool can be used if the interview is to be done from a considerable distance. I anticipate that each interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Participants will be asked to spend up to an additional hour or two to review the transcript of their own interview prior to it being included in the study.

Your Superintendent has already given permission for the division to participate in the study, and as such, I am requesting your support and asking you to consider being a participant in this study as well. Should you be interested in participating, I would ask that you complete the attached Informed Consent Form and return it to me as soon as possible. There is further clarifying information within the Informed Consent Form that may help you make your decision about participating. If you are chosen to be a participant, you will receive an interview guide with a preamble as well as the discussion questions in advance of our time together.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns, questions, or complaints about this project, you may contact me or my research supervisor Dr. Jon Young at Jon.Young@umanitoba.ca. You may also contact the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 1-204-474-7122 or by e-mail at humanethics@umanitoba.ca.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Cathy Tymko

tymkoc@myumanitoba.ca

APPENDIX D: Administrator Informed Consent Form



Research Project Title:

Professional Reflective Practices of Teachers and Leadership Alignment in a Rural Manitoba School Division

Researcher:

Catherine Tymko

tymkoc@myumanitoba.ca



Research Supervisor:

Dr. Jon Young

Jon.Young@umanitoba.ca



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

I am a graduate student at the University of Manitoba working towards the completion of my Master's degree in the area of Educational Administration. As part of my thesis work, I am conducting a small qualitative research study on the process of professional reflection being practiced by Manitoba educators in one rural school division. I am interested in gaining insight into the understanding of, the application of, and the alignment of reflective practices in a rural Manitoba school division. I am interested in interviewing Superintendents who are responsible for the work of improving instructional practice for teachers in their division. Additionally, I am interested in interviewing select administrators and teachers in the same division. Participation for the Principal consists of one 60 to 90-minute interview which will be audio recorded as well as permission to contact all the teachers in your school in order to find four further participants. As a participant, you will also be asked to review the printed transcript of your conversation with me, which may take up to another hour or two of your time. Participants will receive a follow-up phone call to clarify trends and findings prior to any final conclusions being drafted or included in the study or final thesis document.

I do not anticipate any risk beyond the level of the normal routine of your daily life, however, you may find it difficult to commit the time in your schedule after agreeing to participate. Participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to leave the study at any time without penalty or consequences simply by letting me know by phone or by e-mail. You will be asked a series of questions about your own and the reflective practices of teachers in your division. You will receive a copy of the preamble and the questions in an interview guide prior to our interview session together. You may choose not to answer all the questions and still have your given responses included in the study. If you choose to withdraw from the study at any time, all data, including audio recordings, printed transcripts and notes will be immediately destroyed.

The benefits of participating in the study include dedicated time for professional reflection for each interview candidate. The responses given may also assist you in reviewing your own focus on professional reflective practices. Your participation and responses will also help to identify common trends, dominant characteristics, and/or potential gaps with regards to the support of improving instructional practices within your division.

I will hold your interview individually in a quiet place at a date and time that is mutually agreed upon, if you can meet locally. A web-based communication tool will be used if the interview is to be done from a considerable distance. A follow up phone call interview will be required for fact checking or clarification purposes. I will audio record the interview using a handheld device and I will later transcribe what was said verbatim. I will also take written notes during the course of the interview. These notes will help me to recall the discussion and also serve as a back-up in case the recording malfunctions or is inaudible in any way. You may bring along your own notes to help you address key concepts you wish to contribute, but your notes will not be collected, used or kept by me as data for this study.

Confidentiality will be maintained through the use of anonymous and generic identifiers for all participants and pseudonyms for other identifying names, places or other identifiers that arise in the interview process. My research supervisor and I will be the only ones to see the data. The list of participants' names and any identifying data will be kept separate from the other data in a locked filing cabinet in my office. Digital data, both audio and text, will be either password protected or encrypted and stored on my laptop in my home. All data will be deleted in its entirety by shredding all paper information and deleting all electronic material from all storage areas. Data will be destroyed by December 31, 2020.

After each interview is transcribed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to read over for accuracy. You may make changes, delete commentary or make additional comments if desired, and then return it to me. Participants will have only two weeks in which to review the transcript, after which time, and a reminder e-mail will be sent, if I have not heard a response, then I will assume approval of the transcript sent.

The data collected from the interviews will be used strictly for the purpose of completing my thesis research. A summary of findings will be shared with you and each chosen participant in your division. You may indicate whether or not you wish to receive a summary and how you would like it to be sent at the bottom of this consent form. Findings will be compiled and shared with participants who indicated their interest by the end of August 2020. All confidential material will be kept on file until December 31, 2020 following the completion of my Master's thesis and degree. At the completion and defense of my Master's thesis, and prior to December 31, 2020, all data will be destroyed including the deletion of all electronic files and audio recordings as well as the shredding of all interview transcripts and other materials.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research study and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice, penalty, or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information as required throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records from this study to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

The research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 1-204-474-7122 or at humanethics@umanitoba.ca.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Name: (printed) _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (printed) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

_____ I wish to receive the transcript and summary by regular mail.

My mailing address is:

_____ I wish to receive the transcript and summary by e-mail.

My e-mail address is:

APPENDIX E: Letter of Invitation for Teacher Participation in the Study (E-mail)

March 2020

Dear Colleague,

I am currently pursuing my Master's degree in the area of Educational Administration at the University of Manitoba. As a requirement of my program, I am conducting a small study into the process of professional reflection being practiced by Manitoba educators in one rural school division. I am interested in gaining insight into the understanding of, the application of, and the alignment of reflective practices in a rural Manitoba school division. My study is called: "Professional Reflective Practices of Teachers and Leadership Alignment in a Rural Manitoba School Division". The information gathered and analyzed is for my Master's thesis. The data and findings will be used as part of my thesis research. The findings will be shared with the participating division, school, and teachers, and the published document will be accessible to the public.

In order to conduct my research, I am looking to recruit teachers who are currently working in school divisions where improved instructional practices are an identified priority or area of focus. I would look to interview the study candidates between now and the end of May in a location that is private and suitably convenient to both parties. A web-based communication tool can be used if the interview is to be done from a considerable distance. I anticipate that each interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Participants will be asked to spend up to an additional hour or two to review the transcript of their own interview prior to it being included in the study.

Your Superintendent and your Principal have already given permission for the division and the school to participate in the study, and as such, I am requesting your support and asking you to consider being a participant in this study as well. Should you be interest in participating, I would ask that you complete the attached Informed Consent Form and return it to me as soon as possible. There is further clarifying information within the Informed Consent Form that may help you make your decision about participating. If you are chosen to be a participant, you will receive an interview guide with a preamble as well as the discussion questions in advance of our time together.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns, questions, or complaints about this project, you may contact me or my research supervisor Dr. Jon Young at Jon.Young@umanitoba.ca. You may also contact the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 1-204-474-7122 or by e-mail at humanethics@umanitoba.ca.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Cathy Tymko

tymkoc@myumanitoba.ca

APPENDIX F: Teacher Informed Consent Form



Research Project Title:

Professional Reflective Practices of Teachers and Leadership Alignment in a Rural Manitoba School Division

Researcher:

Catherine Tymko

tymkoc@myumanitoba.ca

Research Supervisor:

Dr. Jon Young

Jon.Young@umanitoba.ca

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

I am a graduate student at the University of Manitoba working towards the completion of my Master's degree in the area of Educational Administration. As part of my thesis work, I am conducting a small qualitative research study on the process of professional reflection being practiced by Manitoba educators in one rural school division. I am interested in gaining insight into the understanding of, the application of, and the alignment of reflective practices in a rural Manitoba school division. I am interested in interviewing Superintendents who are responsible for the work of improving instructional practice for teachers in their division. Additionally, I am interested in interviewing select administrators and teachers in the same division. Participation for each teacher consists of one 60 to 90-minute individual interview which will be audio recorded. As a participant, you will also be asked to review the printed transcript of your conversation with me, which may take up to another hour or two of your time. Participants will receive a follow-up phone call to clarify trends and findings prior to any final conclusions being drafted or included in the study or final thesis document.

I do not anticipate any risk beyond the level of the normal routine of your daily life, however, you may find it difficult to commit the time in your schedule after agreeing to participate. Participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to leave the study at any time without penalty or consequences simply by letting me know by phone or by e-mail. You will be asked a series of questions about your own and the reflective practices of teachers in your division. You will receive a copy of the preamble and the questions in an interview guide prior to our interview session together. You may choose not to answer all the questions and still have your given responses included in the study. If you choose to withdraw from the study at any time, all data, including audio recordings, printed transcripts and notes will be immediately destroyed.

The benefits of participating in the study include dedicated time for professional reflection for each interview candidate. The responses given may also assist you in reviewing your own focus on professional reflective practices. Your participation and responses will also help to identify common trends, dominant characteristics, and/or potential gaps with regards to the support of improving instructional practices within your division.

I will hold your interview individually in a quiet place at a date and time that is mutually agreed upon, if you can meet locally. A web-based communication tool will be used if the interview is to be done from a considerable distance. A follow up phone call interview will be required for fact checking or clarification purposes. I will audio record the interview using a handheld device and I will later transcribe what was said verbatim. I will also take written notes during the course of the interview. These notes will help me to recall the discussion and also serve as a back-up in case the recording malfunctions or is inaudible in any way. You may bring along your own notes to help you address key concepts you wish to contribute, but your notes will not be collected, used or kept by me as data for this study.

Confidentiality will be maintained through the use of anonymous and generic identifiers for all participants and pseudonyms for other identifying names, places or other identifiers that arise in the interview process. My research supervisor and I will be the only ones to see the data. The list of participants' names and any identifying data will be kept separate from the other data in a locked filing cabinet in my office. Digital data, both audio and text, will be either password protected or encrypted and stored on my laptop in my home. All data will be deleted in its entirety by shredding all paper information and deleting all electronic material from all storage areas. Data will be destroyed by December 31, 2020.

After each interview is transcribed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to read over for accuracy. You may make changes, delete commentary or make additional comments if desired, and then return it to me. Participants will have only two weeks in which to review the transcript, after which time, and a reminder e-mail will be sent, if I have not heard a response, then I will assume approval of the transcript sent.

The data collected from the interviews will be used strictly for the purpose of completing my thesis research. A summary of findings will be shared with you and each chosen participant in your division. You may indicate whether or not you wish to receive a summary and how you would like it to be sent at the bottom of this consent form. Findings will be compiled and shared with participants who indicated their interest by the end of August 2020. All confidential material will be kept on file until December 31, 2020 following the completion of my Master's thesis and degree. At the completion and defense of my Master's thesis, and prior to December 31, 2020, all data will be destroyed including the deletion of all electronic files and audio recordings as well as the shredding of all interview transcripts and other materials.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research study and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice, penalty, or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information as required throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records from this study to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

The research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 1-204-474-7122 or at humanethics@umanitoba.ca.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Name: (printed) _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (printed) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

_____ I wish to receive the transcript and summary by regular mail.

My mailing address is:

_____ I wish to receive the transcript and summary by e-mail.

My e-mail address is:

APPENDIX G: Superintendent Interview Questions

Preamble:

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in the interview and ultimately this study. I would remind you that participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to leave the study at any time without penalty or consequences simply by letting me know.

A basic understanding of the concept of reflection was included with your Acceptance to the Study e-mail, but I will briefly reiterate that information to refresh our memories prior to starting the interview. For the purposes of this study, reflective practice shall be characterized as dedicated or designed time for thought and/or for dialogue which is focused on the impact of purposeful actions then implemented by educators.

I will be audio recording the interview using a handheld device and I will later transcribe what was said verbatim. I will also be taking written notes during the course of the interview. These notes will help me to recall the discussion and also serve as a back-up in case the recording malfunctions or is inaudible in any way. If you have made your own notes to help you address key concepts you wish to contribute, feel free to refer to them throughout the interview. I will not be collecting, using, or keeping them as data for this study.

A follow-up phone call will be required for fact checking or clarification purposes. Could you please verify the telephone number(s) and times at which it would be best to reach you?

If you are ready, I would like to begin.

- 1) Tell me about why you think improving instructional practices for teachers is important work. What role might professional reflection play in that work?
- 2) How would you characterize your own attitude(s) and behavior(s) with regard to the professional exchange of ideas with colleagues?
- 3) For what purpose and in what types of reflective practices do you yourself participate?
- 4) How often and with whom do you take part in a formal collaborative learning group?
What do you gain from this experience?
- 5) From your perspective, which of your actions as a system leader have the greatest positive impact on improving instructional practices and ultimately then student learning?
How do you know?
- 6) In what specific ways do you make your own thinking and learning visible to your colleagues? What do you perceive as the purpose of making your own learning visible?
- 7) In what ways do you as a divisional leader make the learning priorities explicit to the teachers in your division?
- 8) Tell me about the ways in which your division prepares instructional leaders to work with the teachers in schools?
- 9) Can you describe for me your optimal planning process when you are preparing to facilitate a learning session for the administrators in your division?
- 10) To what degree or in what manner does your school division engage in reflective practices such as the tracking of self-directed learning, accessing time with colleagues, working with an instructional coach or mentor, professional dialogue opportunities with an administrator, reflective journaling (either individual or shared), analyzing student work collectively, observing other professionals while they are teaching, co-constructing

lessons and/or learning goals, or inviting feedback opportunities? In what other types of professional reflection might the staff in your division participate?

11) In your opinion, what more could be done to be even more successful with regard to improved instructional practices?

12) Is there anything further that you would like to add before we conclude?

Thank you. That concludes the interview. I appreciate the time that you have given to me and the thoughtful preparation that was put into your answers. I will be transcribing this interview session verbatim and I will send you a copy of the transcript to read over for accuracy. You may make changes, delete commentary or make additional comments if desired, and then return it to me. You will have only two weeks in which to review the transcript, after which time, and a reminder e-mail will be sent, if I have not heard a response, then I will assume approval of the transcript sent. Again, I would remind you that participation is still completely voluntary and you may choose to leave the study at any time without penalty or consequences simply by letting me know by phone or by e-mail. I do hope that you continue but if you choose to withdraw from the study at any time, please know that all data, including audio recordings, printed transcripts and notes will be immediately destroyed.

If you have anything further that you would like to include prior to receiving your transcript, feel free to call me at [REDACTED] or send the information by e-mail to tymkoc@myumanitoba.ca.

Thank you again for participating today.

APPENDIX H: Administrator Interview Questions

Preamble:

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in the interview and ultimately this study. I would remind you that participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to leave the study at any time without penalty or consequences simply by letting me know.

A basic understanding of the concept of reflection was included with your Acceptance to the Study e-mail, but I will briefly reiterate that information to refresh our memories prior to starting the interview. For the purposes of this study, reflective practice shall be characterized as dedicated or designed time for thought and/or for dialogue which is focused on the impact of purposeful actions then implemented by educators.

I will be audio recording the interview using a handheld device and I will later transcribe what was said verbatim. I will also be taking written notes during the course of the interview. These notes will help me to recall the discussion and also serve as a back-up in case the recording malfunctions or is inaudible in any way. If you have made your own notes to help you address key concepts you wish to contribute, feel free to refer to them throughout the interview. I will not be collecting, using, or keeping them as data for this study.

A follow-up phone call will be required for fact checking or clarification purposes. Could you please verify the telephone number(s) and times at which it would be best to reach you?

If you are ready, I would like to begin.

- 1) Tell me about why you think improving instructional practices for teachers is important work. What role might professional reflection play in that work?
- 2) How would you characterize your own attitude(s) and behavior(s) with regard to the professional exchange of ideas with colleagues?
- 3) For what purpose and in what types of reflective practices do you yourself participate?
- 4) How often and with whom do you take part in a formal collaborative learning group?
What do you gain from this experience?
- 5) From your perspective, which of your actions as a school leader have the greatest positive impact on improving instructional practices and ultimately then student learning? How do you know?
- 6) In what specific ways do you make your own thinking and learning visible to your colleagues? What do you perceive as the purpose of making your own learning visible?
- 7) In what ways do you as a school administrator make the learning priorities explicit to the teachers in your school?
- 8) Tell me about the ways in which your division prepares instructional leaders like yourself to work with the teachers in schools?
- 9) Can you describe for me your optimal planning process when you are preparing to facilitate a learning session for the teachers in your school?
- 10) To what degree or in what manner does your school division support engagement in reflective practices such as the tracking of self-directed learning, accessing time with colleagues, working with an instructional coach or mentor, professional dialogue opportunities with an administrator, reflective journaling (either individual or shared), analyzing student work collectively, observing other professionals while they are

teaching, co-constructing lessons and/or learning goals, or inviting feedback opportunities? In what other types of professional reflection might you and/or your staff participate?

- 11) In your opinion, what more could be done to be even more successful with regard to improved instructional practices?
- 12) Is there anything further that you would like to add before we conclude?

Thank you. That concludes the interview. I appreciate the time that you have given to me and the thoughtful preparation that was put into your answers. I will be transcribing this interview session verbatim and I will send you a copy of the transcript to read over for accuracy. You may make changes, delete commentary or make additional comments if desired, and then return it to me. You will have only two weeks in which to review the transcript, after which time, and a reminder e-mail will be sent, if I have not heard a response, then I will assume approval of the transcript sent. Again, I would remind you that participation is still completely voluntary and you may choose to leave the study at any time without penalty or consequences simply by letting me know by phone or by e-mail. I do hope that you continue but if you choose to withdraw from the study at any time, please know that all data, including audio recordings, printed transcripts and notes will be immediately destroyed.

If you have anything further that you would like to include prior to receiving your transcript, feel free to call me at [REDACTED] or send the information by e-mail to tymkoc@myumanitoba.ca.

Thank you again for participating today.

APPENDIX I: Teacher Interview Questions

Preamble:

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in the interview and ultimately this study. I would remind you that participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to leave the study at any time without penalty or consequences simply by letting me know.

A basic understanding of the concept of reflection was included with your Acceptance to the Study e-mail, but I will briefly reiterate that information to refresh our memories prior to starting the interview. For the purposes of this study, reflective practice shall be characterized as dedicated or designed time for thought and/or for dialogue which is focused on the impact of purposeful actions then implemented by educators.

I will be audio recording the interview using a handheld device and I will later transcribe what was said verbatim. I will also be taking written notes during the course of the interview. These notes will help me to recall the discussion and also serve as a back-up in case the recording malfunctions or is inaudible in any way. If you have made your own notes to help you address key concepts you wish to contribute, feel free to refer to them throughout the interview. I will not be collecting, using, or keeping them as data for this study.

A follow-up phone call will be required for fact checking or clarification purposes. Could you please verify the telephone number(s) and times at which it would be best to reach you?

If you are ready, I would like to begin.

- 1) Tell me about why you think improving instructional practices for teachers is important work. What role might professional reflection play in that work?
- 2) How would you characterize your own attitude(s) and behavior(s) with regard to the professional exchange of ideas with colleagues?
- 3) For what purpose and in what types of reflective practices do you yourself participate?
- 4) How often and with whom do you take part in a formal collaborative learning group? What do you gain from this experience?
- 5) From your perspective, which of your actions as a teacher have the greatest positive impact on improving instructional practices and ultimately then student learning? How do you know?
- 6) In what specific ways do you make your own thinking and learning visible to your colleagues? What do you perceive as the purpose of making your own learning visible?
- 7) In what ways do you as a teacher make the professional learning priorities an active part of the daily life in your school?
- 8) Tell me about the ways in which your division and your administration prepare teachers like yourself to work effectively in classrooms and schools?
- 9) Can you describe for me your optimal planning process when you are preparing to facilitate a learning session for the students in your classroom?
- 10) To what degree or in what manner does your school division support engagement in reflective practices such as the tracking of self-directed learning, accessing time with colleagues, working with an instructional coach or mentor, professional dialogue opportunities with an administrator, reflective journaling (either individual or shared), analyzing student work collectively, observing other professionals while they are

teaching, co-constructing lessons and/or learning goals, or inviting feedback opportunities? In what other types of professional reflection might you and/or your colleagues participate?

- 11) In your opinion, what more could be done to be even more successful with regard to improved instructional practices?
- 12) Is there anything further that you would like to add before we conclude?

Thank you. That concludes the interview. I appreciate the time that you have given to me and the thoughtful preparation that was put into your answers. I will be transcribing this interview session verbatim and I will send you a copy of the transcript to read over for accuracy. You may make changes, delete commentary or make additional comments if desired, and then return it to me. You will have only two weeks in which to review the transcript, after which time, and a reminder e-mail will be sent, if I have not heard a response, then I will assume approval of the transcript sent. Again, I would remind you that participation is still completely voluntary and you may choose to leave the study at any time without penalty or consequences simply by letting me know by phone or by e-mail. I do hope that you continue but if you choose to withdraw from the study at any time, please know that all data, including audio recordings, printed transcripts and notes will be immediately destroyed.

If you have anything further that you would like to include prior to receiving your transcript, feel free to call me at [REDACTED] or send the information by e-mail to tymkoc@myumanitoba.ca.

Thank you again for participating today.

APPENDIX J: Acceptance to the Study E-mail (for Superintendents)

Dear _____

Thank you for participating in my research study “Professional Reflective Practices of Teachers and Leadership Alignment in a Rural Manitoba School Division” and for returning your signed Consent Form.

Prior to participating, it is practical and useful for you to have a basic understanding of the concept of reflection. For the purposes of this study, reflective practice shall be characterized as dedicated or designed time for thought and/or for dialogue which is focused on the impact of purposeful actions then implemented by educators.

Attached you will also find a copy of the Interview Guide which contains the questions that will be asked during our interview time together. You may choose not to answer all questions and still have your given responses included in the study. Please know that you may make notes to help you address key concepts you wish to contribute, but your notes will not be collected, used, or kept by me as data for this study.

I would like to arrange an interview date, time and location as soon as possible, and I will also need a current listing of all schools, including administrator contact information, for possible participation. Please feel free to contact me by telephone at [REDACTED] or by e-mail at tymkoc@myumanitoba.ca so that we may make all suitably convenient arrangements. Participation is still completely voluntary and you may choose to leave the study at any time without consequences simply by letting me know by phone or by e-mail.

I am looking forward to our conversation and hope that we can find some common time to discuss the existing practices for teacher learning in your division.

Cathy Tymko

APPENDIX K: Acceptance to the Study E-mail (for Administrators)

Dear _____

Thank you for participating in my research study “Professional Reflective Practices of Teachers and Leadership Alignment in a Rural Manitoba School Division” and for returning your signed Consent Form.

Prior to participating, it is practical and useful for you to have a basic understanding of the concept of reflection. For the purposes of this study, reflective practice shall be characterized as dedicated or designed time for thought and/or for dialogue which is focused on the impact of purposeful actions then implemented by educators.

Attached you will also find a copy of the Interview Guide which contains the questions that will be asked during our interview time together. You may choose not to answer all questions and still have your given responses included in the study. Please know that you may make notes to help you address key concepts you wish to contribute, but your notes will not be collected, used, or kept by me as data for this study.

I would like to arrange an interview date, time and location as soon as possible, and I will also need the names and contact information for all the teachers in your school in order to arrange their possible participation in this study. Please feel free to contact me by telephone at [REDACTED] or by e-mail at tymkoc@myumanitoba.ca so that we may make all suitably convenient arrangements. Participation is still completely voluntary and you may choose to leave the study at any time without consequences simply by letting me know by phone or by e-mail.

I am looking forward to our conversation and hope that we can find some common time to discuss the existing practices for teacher learning in your division.

Cathy Tymko

APPENDIX L: Acceptance to the Study E-mail (for Teachers)

Dear _____

Thank you for participating in my research study “Professional Reflective Practices of Teachers and Leadership Alignment in a Rural Manitoba School Division” and for returning your signed Consent Form.

Prior to participating, it is practical and useful for you to have a basic understanding of the concept of reflection. For the purposes of this study, reflective practice shall be characterized as dedicated or designed time for thought and/or for dialogue which is focused on the impact of purposeful actions then implemented by educators.

Attached you will also find a copy of the Interview Guide which contains the questions that will be asked during our interview time together. You may choose not to answer all questions and still have your given responses included in the study. Please know that you may make notes to help you address key concepts you wish to contribute, but your notes will not be collected, used, or kept by me as data for this study.

I would like to arrange an interview date, time and location as soon as possible. Please feel free to contact me by telephone at [REDACTED] or by e-mail at tymkoc@myumanitoba.ca so that we may make all suitably convenient arrangements. Participation is still completely voluntary and you may choose to leave the study at any time without consequences simply by letting me know by phone or by e-mail.

I am looking forward to our conversation and hope that we can find some common time to discuss the existing practices for teacher learning in your division.

Cathy Tymko

APPENDIX M: Participation Not Required and Thank You Message (E-mail)

Dear _____:

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research study “Professional Reflective Practices of Teachers and Leadership Alignment in a Rural Manitoba School Division” and for returning your signed Informed Consent Form. Unfortunately, I have already reached the maximum identified number of participants and will not be able to include you as a participant at this time. I am pleased to have received great interest in the study, but also find it difficult to turn down willing and knowledgeable candidates such as yourself. Should an opening become available during the study, I will most certainly be in contact with you to see if you would still be interested and available to participate.

Thanks again for taking the time to look over the material and for consideration of offering your expertise to the study.

Cathy Tymko

APPENDIX N: Invitation to Proofread Transcript of Interview (E-mail)

Dear _____:

Attached you will find the transcript of our interview which took place back on [insert date].

I would ask that you read through this transcript for accuracy of information. You may make changes, delete commentary or make additional comments if desired, and then return it to me.

Please return your approved or amended copy of the transcript to me by [insert date two weeks away]. If I have not heard any response by such time, I will send one reminder e-mail and then if I do not hear from you I will assume that you approve the content of the attached transcript.

If you are choosing to leave the study at this time, please respond indicating your withdrawal and all data, including audio recordings, printed transcripts and notes will be immediately destroyed.

I do look forward to your continued participation and any feedback you may have on the transcribed session.

Thank you for taking the additional time to read over this material.

Cathy Tymko

APPENDIX O: Transcript Review Reminder E-mail

Dear _____ :

On [insert date] I sent you a transcript of our interview which took place on [insert date].

Two weeks have now past and I have not heard a response from you with any changes to that transcript. As such, I will proceed to include your transcribed interview commentary as is in my research study.

Please respond immediately if there are indeed changes or further information that you would like to share.

Thank you again for your time and participation thus far.

Cathy Tymko