LIVING LEADERSHIP:
EXPLORING THE LEADERSHIP VALUES AND PRACTICES
OF INDEPENDENT-SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN ONTARIO

By

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
Department of Leadership, Higher, and Adult Education,
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

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Abstract

The relationship between what leaders do and what they believe is a topic of increasing interest in educational administration. Despite the considerable work already done, gaps in knowledge about leadership practices and values still exist, especially with regard to independent schools. This study explored how seven independent-school principals in Ontario, Canada, understood and talked about their leadership practices and values. It also investigated alignments and tensions between the practices and values espoused by the principals and those of their schools.

Data were derived from 60-90 minute interviews, consisting of both semi-structured and open-ended questions, conducted twice with each principal. Previous experiences were found to be influential on the principals’ actions and beliefs. Variety and confusion were noted in their remarks about values, and connections were drawn between their knowledge of their schools’ values, their thoughts on value alignment, and their roles in shaping their schools’ value statements. Values figured prominently in their practice, and tensions between values and practices arose from some of the elements that define independent schools. Using a variety of rhetorical strategies, the principals revealed complexities and paradoxes inherent in their roles.
This report adds to the limited knowledge base concerning independent-school leadership in Canada, builds on existing research into leadership practices and values, addresses the need to know more about the contexts in which leadership is practised, and contributes to the conversation about leadership preparation and succession planning. Implications for practice include a greater emphasis on reflective practice, stronger support networks, and values-based training for independent-school leaders. Recommendations for further research include exploring the motivations behind leadership values, the language of leadership in different settings, and the values and practices of other constituents in independent schools.
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As I look back on this life-changing journey that began eight years ago, I am overwhelmed with appreciation and gratitude for the many special people who have helped me along the way.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

There are countless avenues for researchers to pursue in an effort to better understand the increasingly complex world of educational leadership. This study focuses on the experience and understanding of formal educational leadership in independent schools in Canada’s largest province; more specifically, it explores what the principals of these schools in Ontario do and what they believe. The choice to examine formal leadership in independent, rather than public, schools was informed not only by a dearth in the literature, but also by my past experiences, current contexts, and future goals. It was a choice that often required explanation and defense to both practitioners and researchers alike, in light of persistent and pervasive stereotypes about independent schools. Crawford (2012) refers to the “complex, adaptive, living organism of a school” (p. 616). As will be explored in the pages that follow, independent schools in Ontario are indeed such organisms, often criticized but rarely considered, wherein principals are living leadership in diverse and fascinating ways every day.

The remainder of this chapter offers a statement of the problem and rationale, a description of the purpose of the study, definitions of key terms, a brief background of the researcher, a description of the significance of the study, and an outline of the organizational structure of the thesis.

Statement of the Problem and Rationale

This study investigated the problem of how principals of independent schools in Ontario understand and articulate their leadership practices and values. Many scholars of educational administration have explored the topics of leadership practices and values. The classification system of leadership types proposed by Leithwood and Duke (1999) has played a significant role in how we regard leadership practices, as has the theory of leadership practice offered by Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004). In Ontario, Leithwood (2012) made a tremendous

These works, and many others, have added greatly to our understanding of what various principals do and how they do it; nevertheless, scholars have called attention to a great deal of work that remains to be done as we pursue a deeper understanding of leadership practices and values. Greenfield (1995) pointed out an unmet need to know about the personal qualities, actual day-to-day actions and behaviors that constitute leadership (p.74). Gronn and Ribbins (1996) highlighted the importance of studying individual leaders in their particular contexts, claiming that “context is the vehicle through which the agency of particular leaders may be empirically
understood” (p. 454). Along the same lines, Notman and Henry (2011) noted in their study of successful school leadership in New Zealand that “it is quite meaningless to study the leadership behaviors of principals without reference to the wider school contexts in which they operate” (p. 376). With regard to the study of leadership values, Begley (2001) has called for “a balanced appreciation of the relationships among personal values, professional values, organizational values, and social values” (p. 356). Richmon (2004) has noted the need to study how leaders come to understand values, as well as the power of values to influence action.

The recent work on leadership practices and values in Ontario has focused on administrators in public or Catholic schools (see Zupan, 2012; Pollock, Wang and Hauseman, 2015); there has been little, if any, attention paid to the independent-school context. In fact, as others have noted (see Shapiro, 1985, p. 37), very little is known about independent schools in Ontario in particular or in Canada in general. There are brief considerations of the historical development of private education in the country (MacKay & Firmin, 2008) and in the province (see Stamp, 1985), as well a few short histories of select institutions (Gossage, 1977; Johnson, 1984; Thomson & Lafortune, 1999) and associations (Russell, 1993). In 1985, Bernard Shapiro, the then-Director of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, was appointed “the sole Commissioner for the Commission on Private Schools in Ontario” (Shapiro, 1985, p. 1), with the term ‘private schools’ referring to “elementary and/or secondary schools not owned or operated by government bodies” (Shapiro, 1985, p. 4). The Commission set out to accomplish these four tasks:

a) document and comment upon the contribution of private schools in elementary and secondary education in Ontario;

b) identify and comment upon possible alternative forms of governance of private schools that provide elementary or secondary education, or both, and make
recommendations for changes in governance of such private schools in Ontario as the Commissioner considers appropriate;

c) comment upon whether, with responsible attendant obligations, public funding of private schools that provide elementary or secondary education, or both, would be desirable and compatible with the independent nature of such schools;

d) identify and comment upon existing and possible relationships between private schools and publicly supported school boards. (Shapiro, 1985, pp. 1-2)

In 1993, Bérard and Murphy conducted a survey-based study in order to learn more about the experience of practice teaching in Canada’s independent schools, and in 2004 Dawson completed an analysis of the leadership styles of ten female heads of independent girls’ schools in Canada. Recently, Allison, Hasan and Van Pelt (2015) offered the first national survey of independent schools in Canada, focusing on organizational characteristics, as derived from school-level data that was provided by provincial Ministries of Education, and including a variety of religiously-affiliated schools, specialty schools and schools in the association of Canadian Accredited Independent Schools. This report provides a ‘big-picture’ view of the distribution and variety of independent schools in Canada; the authors note that it also "prepares the way for more focused and detailed analysis" (Allison, Hasan & Van Pelt, 2015, p. 21).

Such analysis definitely seems necessary in light of the increasing popularity of independent schools in Canada, generally, and in Ontario, specifically. According to a recent study by the Fraser Institute, when compared with other Canadian provinces, “Ontario has the fourth highest level of enrolment in independent schools (5.6 percent), even though it provides no financial support for such schooling” (Van Pelt, Clemens, Brown, & Palacios, 2015, p. v). In Ontario, attendance at private schools, including independent schools, “has grown over recent decades from 1.9 percent of the student population in 1960 to 5.6 percent in 2006” (Van Pelt,
Allison, & Allison, 2007, p. 3). Of the 93 schools accredited by Canadian Accredited Independent Schools [CAIS], the national accrediting body for Canada’s independent schools, 89 are located in Canada and 38 of the 89 are located in Ontario (CAIS 2011d, para. 1). Closely affiliated with CAIS is The Conference of Independent Schools of Ontario [CIS Ontario], a membership association rather than an accrediting body, for independent schools in Ontario. CIS Ontario includes 47 member schools (CIS Ontario 2013a, para. 1) – nine more than CAIS.

One aspect of independent schools in Canada that seems to merit particular attention is the leadership of these institutions. Indeed, with its Next Step Program, the national accrediting body for independent schools seems increasingly interested in better understanding and developing leadership (see Canadian Accredited Independent Schools, 2016b). At the provincial level, a similar interest seems evident: the provincial association for independent schools in Ontario recently partnered with one of the province’s leading universities to offer the first Principal’s Qualification Program with a focus on independent schools (York University, 2016). The interest shown by these provincial and national associations for independent schools in understanding and developing leadership reflects a similar nascent awareness in the scholarly community. For instance, Decoux and Holdaway (1999) explored some of the defining aspects of leadership in Alberta’s independent schools.

And so, with the emerging interest in the independent-school principalship in Canada, independent schools becoming increasingly popular on the menu of educational choice, and both national and provincial independent-school associations moving to understand and develop leadership in formal ways, the time seems right to address some of the obvious gaps in knowledge that exist regarding formal leadership in independent schools in Canada. This study is unique in that it is not part of a larger conversation about school improvement, as many studies of leadership in public schools have been; instead, it is part of the conversation about the
relationship between values and practices, a topic of increasing interest for educational researchers (see Begley & Leithwood, 1990; Gold, Evans, Earley, Halpin, & Collarbone, 2003; Warwas, 2015). The contexts in which independent-school principals lead also make this study unique; as educational institutions distinct from both public and private schools, independent schools are often stereotyped, but rarely understood in terms of lived experience.

**Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study was to understand and describe how principals of independent schools in Ontario understand and describe their leadership values and practices. A secondary purpose was to interpret the connections, disconnections and tensions between these principals’ leadership values, practices and stated school values. Ultimately, this study builds on the work that has been done by other scholars on leadership practices and values, addresses the gaps in knowledge identified in those areas of study, provides insight into the little-known world of independent schools in Canada by giving voice to the principals of a few such schools in Ontario, and contributes to the larger conversation about leadership succession planning.

The study addresses the following research question and sub-questions:

**How do principals of independent schools in Ontario understand and talk about their leadership values and practices?**

1) How do they describe their leadership practices?

2) What do they perceive to be their leadership values?

3) What alignments and/or tensions appear to exist between their leadership values, practices and stated school values?

**Definition of Key Terms**

Three key terms in this dissertation merit clarification. The terms *independent schools* and *private schools* are often confused and debated (see Allison, Hasan & Van Pelt, 2015, p. 1).
Herein, the term independent schools will be used and it refers to those schools in Ontario that are non-profit educational institutions that either belong to the Conference of Independent Schools of Ontario [CIS] and/or are accredited by the association of Canadian Accredited Independent Schools [CAIS], are governed by Boards of Governors, are distinct from public schools but potentially subject to provincial policies, offer education for students from kindergarten to grade 12, and are supported by a combination of tuition fees, donations, and, in some cases, endowments. More information about independent schools is provided in the relevant section of the Literature Review in Chapter 2. The term principal is used in the analysis to denote the most-senior leader in an independent school hired by and responsible to the school’s Board of Governors; this term is the modern equivalent of headmaster or headmistress at most independent schools in Ontario, and is synonymous with Head of School or Head, the terms that were often used by participants. Finally, the term values will be used instead of ethics or morals, because this study explored the preferences and beliefs of the principals, rather than their understandings of ‘right’ versus ‘wrong’. The term values is also used most commonly in the literature about values and educational administration, and by the foremost experts, such as Hodgkinson (1970, 1978, 1991, 1996, 1999), Willower (1992, 1994, 1999) and Begley (1996, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2006, 2008). The term values is broadly defined and operationalized as beliefs in particular ways of behaving, so that desirable end results are reached. A more detailed discussion of the term values can be found in both the relevant section of the Literature Review in Chapter 2 and the section of Chapter 3 that is devoted to the Theoretical Framework.

Background of the Researcher

I came to my career in education by a rather circuitous route. After completing my Honours Bachelor of Arts (History and English) and Master of Arts (History) degrees at the University of Toronto, I began my doctoral studies at the Centre for Medieval Studies.
(University of Toronto) in 2000, following the plan I had laid out for myself back in my first year at my public high school: attain my Ph.D. in history and become a professor. As I worked through my coursework, completed my French, Italian and Latin language requirements, and prepared for my Major Field examination, I began taking on more and more responsibilities as a Teaching Assistant; in two separate courses, I led weekly tutorial sessions, provided individual assistance, and assessed student work. I was even fortunate enough to assist the then-Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science and one of the most respected professors at the Ontario Institute of Education in the design of one of these courses, an interdisciplinary undergraduate seminar that explored the role of the university in society.

In the summer of 2003, I travelled to Ferrara, Italy, to explore the possibilities for research in my area of interest, the development of universities in northern Italy. While examining a medieval manuscript in a library there one day, I was prompted to reconsider the future direction of my career as the result of a brief but meaningful conversation with the librarian. After careful contemplation, I realized that my interest had shifted from spending time in libraries with manuscripts in order to learn about the past, to spending time in classrooms with students and teachers in order to better understand the present and, perhaps, even help shape the future. As a result, I chose to leave the Ph.D. program at the Centre for Medieval Studies to pursue my teaching degree.

In 2005, I earned my Bachelor of Education (Intermediate-Senior) degree from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, having completed two very rewarding placements at two very different schools: one large urban public school and one large urban independent school. In 2007, I left a full-time teaching position in one of the largest public education boards in the province for a full-time teaching position in one of the leading single-gender independent schools in the province. I was intrigued by several aspects of
independent schools, including their smaller sizes, sense of community, high levels of student engagement, and seemingly wide range of opportunities for both students and teachers.

Since 2007, in various capacities, I have had the privilege of teaching and learning with hundreds of remarkable students in the Middle and Senior School divisions. I have also had the opportunity to collaborate with many dedicated and inspiring colleagues, found and nurture new programs, and acquire extensive professional knowledge and a wide range of practical skills. Student leadership is a focal point at the school; over the years, I have served as both an advisor for student leaders and a facilitator for the school’s Ethical Leadership program.

In 2008, I began to contemplate the possibility of a future leadership position in an independent school. That same year, my principal invited me to participate in The Heads Network’s (formerly NAPSG) Leadership Seminar and begin my studies for the CAIS Diploma in Independent School Leadership. From 2008 to 2010, I expanded my knowledge of leadership in independent schools by completing ten different modules in the Diploma Program, including Academic Administration, Management, Learning and Teaching, and Sustainable Leadership. In 2009, again with my principal’s encouragement and support, I accepted a place in the flex-time Ph.D. degree program in Educational Administration at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in the University of Toronto. I had no idea at the time how profoundly this learning experience would affect me. Teaching full-time at an independent school and working flex-time on a degree about educational leadership has been simultaneously exhilarating and exhausting. Many of the assignments I completed as part of my course work for this degree focused on aspects of leadership in the independent-school environment; as a result, I have often felt both ‘within’ and ‘without’, alternating between stances ranging from defensive to curious to critical.

Indeed, my personal and professional contexts have had a definite effect on my research and this thesis. My status as an educator within the independent sector made gaining access to
independent schools as a researcher relatively easy; the sample, sampling and recruitment for this study are described in more detail in Chapter 3. Since I have not merely a familiarity with independent schools, but an acute awareness of and rare insight into their characteristics, benefits and challenges, based on experience, observation and training amassed within the last decade, I was able to establish a certain ease in conversation with participants and make sense of the data in ways that a researcher unfamiliar with the daily workings of independent schools may not have been able to do. For instance, I was attuned to commentary about governance and tuition-based funding. In the processes of analysis and writing, the biases I have about independent schools proved to be a source of strength rather than weakness; this issue is considered in more detail in the limitations of the study as outlined in Chapter 6. As I look ahead to the future, seeking a senior leadership position at an independent school and/or involvement in leadership preparation for independent-school educators, I am grateful I have had such a remarkable opportunity to explore the wider context in which I currently teach and learn, having followed a long and winding road to reach this point.

**Significance of the Study**

This study addresses several needs in the field of educational administration that will prove valuable to both researchers and practitioners. By providing some of Ontario's independent-school principals with the opportunity to describe their daily practices and core values, this study addresses the need identified by Greenfield (1995) to know more about the personal qualities of leaders, as well as everyday leadership actions and behaviours (p. 74). By exploring how the principals identify, talk about and enact their values, it also sheds light on how leaders come to understand values and how values influence action, areas of need identified by Richmon (2004). In response to the work of Gronn and Ribbins (1996), Notman and Henry (2011) and Begley (2001), this study presents independent-school leaders in the unique contexts
in which they lead, and considers the alignment and tension between values, practices and stated school values. It provides the specific analysis of independent schools in Canada called for by Allison, Hasan and Van Pelt (2015), adds to the recent work done on leadership practices and values in Ontario's public and Catholic schools (see Zupan, 2012; Pollock, Wang and Hauseman, 2015), and opens the door to future comparative studies of leadership. The principals of the schools in this study may provide important insights that could be explored in the contexts of independent schools of other provinces. By giving voice to principals of both single-gender and co-educational independent schools, this study reaches beyond the insights provided in Dawson's (2004) analysis of leadership in independent girls' schools in Canada. The principals' own words form the foundation of this study and careful attention is paid not only to what the principals say, but also to how they say it; as such, this study adds to the work of scholars like Gronn (1983), Bogotch and Roy (1994) and Lowenhaupt (2014) and suggests the value of examining talk about leadership.

For the participants, this study may provide meaningful insights and inspiration that will shape their actions and thoughts as they continue to lead their schools. For independent-school educators who are considering becoming principals, this study may provide a deeper understanding of leadership at that level and, in turn, influence their decisions. For those involved in conversations about leadership succession planning (see Hargreaves, 2005) and those who train future leaders of independent schools, this study may prove particularly instructive, as they work on designing content and learning experiences that will best meet the complex needs of future leaders in independent schools. Finally, for parents who are considering independent schools as alternatives to public schools (see Van Pelt, 2007; Holmes, 2008), this study may inform school choice, as it illuminates the little-known world of independent education in Ontario.
Plan of Thesis

This thesis is organized into six chapters. Chapter One includes a statement of the problem and rationale, the purpose of the study, definitions of key terms, a description of the researcher's background, a description of the significance of the study, and an outline of its organizational structure. Chapter Two offers the literature review that sets the context for the study; this review is divided into sections concerning independent schools, leadership, leadership practices, leadership values, and the language of leadership. In Chapter Three, various components of the study's research methodology are described, including: the theoretical framework; the conceptual framework; the sample, sampling and recruitment method; the research instruments; the collection, transcription and analysis of data; and ethical considerations. Chapter Four presents the key findings of the study in terms of the participants’ personal reflections on independent-school principalship, while Chapter Five presents those key findings that relate to the public dimensions of independent-school principalship. Although the principals' own words form the foundation for both Chapter Four and Chapter Five, their contributions are considered in connection with the relevant literature, so that the study’s findings and analysis are integrated. Chapter Six brings the study to a close with conclusions in relation to the central research questions, a consideration of the limitations of the study, implications for practice, and suggestions for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Literature concerning independent schools, leadership, leadership practices, leadership values, and the language of leadership informs this study. The first section of this chapter considers the defining elements and historical development of independent schools in Canada, and describes the national and provincial independent-school associations. The second section examines the difficulty of definition associated with the term *leadership* and explores the ongoing debate about *leadership* versus *management*. The third section focuses on leadership practices, beginning with a description of six approaches to leadership and then taking a closer look at managerial, instructional, distributed, moral, authentic and transformational leadership, before concluding with a brief overview of the Ontario Leadership Framework. The fourth section explores and evaluates literature concerning leadership values, with a particular focus on definitions and models, as well as the connection between values and practices. The fifth and final section considers the importance of studying the language of leadership and provides definitions of terms pertinent to this study.

**Independent Schools**

There is considerable variety in independent education in Canada. Boys’ schools, girls’ schools and co-educational schools are all options, with an increasing number of institutions shifting to a co-educational model in recent years (see Maxwell and Maxwell 1995a), although Gossage (1977) notes that “private co-education in Canada is not a recent development” (p. 23). Drawing a clear connection to privilege, Gossage (1977) notes that the location pattern of Canada’s independent schools “follows national patterns of population and prosperity” (p. 2), with Ontario, “the heartland of Big Business and the Establishment” (p. 2), claiming “the lion’s share” (p. 2). Allison, Hasan and Van Pelt (2015) have recently corroborated this claim about location pattern by noting that “[f]ully half of Canada’s independent schools (954, or 49.3
percent) were located in Ontario” (p. 5). This first section of the literature review explores the world of independent education, with particular attention to Canada and Ontario, in terms of the defining elements of independent schools, their historical development, and the national and provincial associations to which they belong.

**Defining elements.** According to Kane (1992), “all independent schools share six basic characteristics: self-governance, self-support, self-defined curriculum, self-selected students, self-selected faculty, and small size” (p. 7). Since they were found to be particularly important elements in the data collected for this study, in the subsections that follow, the funding, purpose and values, governance, and student experience of independent schools are considered.

**Funding.** Funding, or rather lack of funding, is the first defining element of independent schools. Gossage (1977) describes Canada’s independent schools as “privately supported, non-profit institutions” (p. 1). In their recent survey of independent schools in Canada, Allison, Hasan and Van Pelt (2015) offered a more detailed description by explaining that “[i]ndependent schools may be partially supported by government funds and will be subject to public policies and official regulations, but they rely more or less extensively on fees paid by parents, fundraising efforts, and philanthropic generosity” (p. 2). MacKay and Firmin (2008) clarify that “[p]rivate schools in Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland receive no government funding” (p. 69). Indeed, in 1985, the Report of the Commission on Private Schools in Ontario included this statement about funding for Ontario’s independent schools: “The Commission does not…believe that such schools have a right to public funding in any way commensurate with that provided to the Province’s [sic] public schools” (Shapiro, 1985, p. 51). Substantial tuition fees have now become a defining characteristic of Canada’s independent schools; Powell (1990) claims that “[t]uition, student fees, and charitable giving constitute well over 90% of the annual income of independent day
schools” (p. 116), which means that they “must serve individual clients instead of serving social
functions paid for a multiplicity of local, state [or provincial], and federal revenue sources” (p. 116). Kane (1992) points out that this reliance on tuition fees creates yet another undeniable reality for independent schools: “Independent schools must satisfy their clients, and they are obliged to demonstrated successful outcomes” (pp. 8-9).

**Purpose and values.** Independent schools’ adherence to particular purposes and values also marks them as distinct. Powell (1990) describes all independent schools as purposeful educational communities with stated purposes that “embrace both objectives and the means by which those objectives are pursued” (p. 117). Allison, Hasan and Van Pelt (2015) provide a similar insight into independent schools in Canada, noting that “[i]ndependent schools are established and sustained to realize an educational purpose valued by founders and supporters which is generally not otherwise available to them” (p. 2). In her description of Canada’s independent schools, Gossage (1977) claims that the overall objective of Canada’s independent schools is “to train those already privileged by virtue of talent or birth to social responsibility” (p. 6). Maxwell and Maxwell (1995b) concur, making the distinction that “[t]he idea of a morally responsible community where people are responsible to each other as well as sharing a responsibility to the larger society based on *noblesse oblige* may be stronger in the girls' schools than the boys” (p. 317, emphasis in the original).

Gossage (1977) claims that independent schools pursued the goal of moral and social responsibility by making “a conscientious effort to perpetuate and instill a particular code of ethics and set of values” (p. 4). Allison, Hasan and Van Pelt (2015) recently echoed this claim by asserting that “[i]ndependent schools are first and foremost purposeful investments in defining sets of values” (p. 2). Although the particular values espoused by each independent school may be different, currently, CAIS (20011e) identifies six common values for its 93
member schools, 89 of which are located in Canada: Student-Centred, Leadership, Excellence, Collaboration, Relevance, and National & Global Perspective (para. 3). Looking at independent schools’ stated adherence to values in terms of social class in the late 1970s, Gossage (1977) suggested that the values of Canada’s independent schools “are a truer reflection of those who teach there than of those who send their children there” (Gossage, 1977, p. 5). This analysis seems particularly accurate today for CAIS’ stated values of ‘Student-Centred’, ‘Excellence’, ‘Collaboration’ and ‘National and Global Perspective’, as all of these terms come from the world of education and teacher-training, not the realms of the aristocracy.

**Governance.** Perhaps the most distinctive, but least understood, element of independent schools is governance. Recently, Baker, Campbell and Ostroff (2016) asserted that “effective independent school governance is critical to the sustainability of each individual school” (p. 575). According to Powell (1990), the fact that independent schools are “fully self-sustaining and self-governing entities” (p. 113) makes them “among the most private of the private schools” (p. 114). Allison, Hasan and Van Pelt (2015) describe Canadian independent schools as being “established and governed independently, usually by non-profit boards of governors accountable to parents and/or school supporters in response to the varying preferences that parents and communities have for the education of their children” (p. 2). Gossage (1977) further explains that “[t]he fate of the school rests essentially with its Board of Governors, trustees or directors, a body whose duty it is to set financial and educational policy and whose members are recruited almost exclusively from the ranks of former students, parents, and friends of the school” (p. 3). The Board of Governors is also responsible for appointing the principal, “who will carry out school policy to the satisfaction of the Board and who can, in turn, harness the support of the staff, the parents, the Old Boys or Girls, the students, and the community at large” (Gossage, 1977, p. 3).
Interest in the study of independent-school governance is increasing. Although recent work has focused on schools in Australia (McCormick, Barnett, Alavi & Newcombe, 2006), England (James, Jones, Connolly, Brammer, Fertig, & James, 2012; Poultney, 2013; Thody & Punter, 2000), and the United States (Baker, Campbell, & Ostroff, 2016), it still proves very valuable for our understanding of independent-school governance, especially in light of the strong British tradition on which many of Canada’s independent schools are built. In her study of a small independent school in England, Poultney (2013) describes the responsibilities of the Board of Governors like this:

Governors are charged with leading and managing the affairs of the school such that it turns a profit (has effective business acumen), keeps apace with educational practice (understands the processes of school improvement and effectiveness), and has capacity to demonstrate in a practical sense the ‘value-addedness’ that fee-paying parents expect in terms of extra-curricular opportunities, social expertise and an all-round excellent education. (pp. 91-92)

Poultney (2013) explains that serving as a governor on the Board is voluntary, linked to a desire to support and care for the school, and not usually driven by a “pecuniary interest” (p. 92). Additionally, she notes that because these boards are relatively small, they “maximize the capacity and agency of their governors, by requiring them to undertake multiple roles as befits their professional expertise” (Poultney, 2013, p. 92). In their study of independent-school Boards in Australia, McCormick, Barnett, Alavi and Newcombe (2006) found that these were the most desirable traits for Board members:

expertise in areas that are important for the organization, knowledge of the operation and management of the organization and its external environment, ability to make and
influence decisions, willingness to commit to the task of governing and to devote time to effective decision making (p. 432).

Thody and Punter (2000) focused on the value of business expertise for governors of English secondary schools. They argued that “there are considerable benefits to be derived from business managers being co-opted onto school governing bodies” (Thody & Punter, 2000, p. 196), stemming from “the outsider role adopted by these governors, their objectivity, their strategic non-operational approach to governance and their clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management born of their professional seniority” (Thody & Punter, 2000, p. 196).

The Board of Governors is led by the Chair of the Board and this role is also beginning to garner attention from scholars. Particularly noteworthy is the remarkable contribution of James, Jones, Connolly, Brammer, Fertig and James (2012), who studied the role of the Chair of the Board of Governors in independent schools in the United Kingdom. James et al. (2012) describe the role of Chair as being “very significant, complex and demanding” (p. 7), adding that “when the role is performed fully, it is a substantial leadership and management activity (p. 16). They identify these nine aspects of the Chair’s role:

- being a governor; appointing the [principal]; working with the [principal]; acting as a change agent; active participation in the work of the school; organising the governing body; dealing with complaints; working with parents; and chairing the meetings of the full governing body. (James et al., 2012, p. 8)

Although this study focuses on the understanding and experience of independent-school principalship, keeping in mind all of the insights provided above about the Board of Governors is essential, since this is one especially important constituency with whom the principal interacts.
Student Experience. The final defining element of independent schools considered here is student experience. The literature reveals that student experience at independent schools is characterized by personal attention, care, an emphasis on academics, and opportunity. There is a direct link between the nature of the student experience at and the small size of independent schools. Kane (1992) notes that independent schools are “[t]ypically small” (p. 12) and “resist going beyond a specified size, regardless of the quality of the applicant pool or the number of candidates vying for admission” (p. 12). Gossage (1977) asserts that “one of the major advantages of the independent school is its size” (p. 15), further explaining that “[m]ost are small enough for the teachers and students to know (if not to like) one another on an individual basis” (p. 15). Powell (1990) similarly notes that independent schools’ “small size, small scale, and low attrition help minimize the distance between teachers and students” (p. 124). In their survey-based study of the possibility for more practice teaching at independent schools in Canada, Bérard and Murphy (1993) corroborated this claim with the finding that “the independent school administrators believe[d] that their schools afford[ed] student teachers the opportunity to get to know their students better, both in terms of their personal and academic histories and as members of a learning community” (p. 24). Powell (1990) claims that independent schools are characterized by “an unapologetic emphasis on academic learning, including more homework and higher standards” (p. 112). He also notes that independent schools “are also concerned with the personal development of their children; that is, they care about happiness, self-esteem, and the formation of sound moral character” (Powell, 1990, p. 117). Such concern is made possible by the small size of the schools. Kane (1992) highlights one final way that size affects student experience: “Smaller schools also allow for increased student participation in extracurricular activities – athletics, clubs, student government, dramatic productions – which give students opportunities for leadership” (p. 12).
Historical development. Although the history of independent schools in Canada does not extend as far back as that in the United States (see Kane, 1992), and Canada really has no ‘elite’ boarding schools (see Thomson & Lafortune, 1999) like those found in the United States (see Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009), there is, nevertheless, quite a rich past to explore. Some Canadian independent schools trace their origins back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (see Johnson, 1984; Gossage, 1977). In what was then Upper Canada, but is now known as Ontario, the earliest legislation concerning independent schools was the Education Act of 1807, which “made provision for government grants to encourage the founding of schools of Anglican character for the wealthy class” (MacKay & Firmin, 2008, p. 61). This Act effectively restricted formal education “to the wealthy by locating the (grammar) schools in towns thereby requiring students to board and pay high tuition fees” (MacKay & Firmin, 2008, p. 61). These schools offered what we would know as secondary education; MacKay and Firmin (2008) note that under the Education Act of 1807, “[n]o provision was made for elementary education through common schools” (p. 61). That came nine years later, in 1816, with the Common Schools Act that “proposed common schools for all children” (MacKay & Firmin, 2008, p. 61). Importantly, “grammar schools, whose origins stemmed from the 1807 legislation, were not affected by [the Common Schools] act and continued in their original format” (MacKay & Firmin, 2008, p. 63). Gossage (1977) claims that “[a]lthough all independent schools [in Canada] are technically non-denominational, at least half of them were founded as church-affiliated schools” (p. 3). MacKay and Firmin (2008) further explain that “[t]he Anglican Church provided the basis for the educational system in Upper Canada and most of the teachers were Anglican clergy” (p. 60). Gossage (1977) notes that “roughly two-thirds” (p. 4) of Canada’s independent schools in existence by the late 1970s were Anglican, or what she calls, using a critical lens of power and privilege, “the religion of the well-to-do and influential” (Gossage,
Shapiro (1985) explains that as the nineteenth century progressed, “[t]he denominational, academic, and single-sex focus for which the private schools [in Ontario] were often established was, in many cases, replaced by a function that was somewhat more social-elitist in nature” (p. 4). Along the same lines, MacKay and Firmin (2008) explain that “[m]any Anglican schools provided an elitist type of education, often classical in orientation, designed for the ‘sons of gentlemen’” (pp. 60-61).

The twentieth century saw some important changes for independent schools in Canada. Gossage (1977) reveals the following:

While it is true that most private schools established in Canada before 1900 were patterned and cut from British cloth, in the new century these same schools, and the new private venture schools, grew increasingly Canadian in character, retaining only a few tattered remnants of nineteenth-century British tradition to remind them of their origins and heritage. (p. 175)

Stamp (1985) also comments on this changing identity, noting that the early-twentieth-century private venture schools in Ontario “exhibited a little less old-country influence and more awareness of the North American environment in which they were located” (p. 199). Also seen at this time was a great proliferation of independent schools in urban areas. Gossage (1977) estimates that “[a]fter 1900, for every school established in a small town or country setting, two or three opened in a city” (p. 176). Stamp (1985) suggests that one reason for the growth of independent schools in Ontario in the early twentieth century was because “[t]hey seemed to speak to a new generation of rising urban professional and commercial families” (p. 199).

Shapiro (1985) continues the story in Ontario like this:

the combined effects of the great depression of the 1930s, the Second World War, increased tuition costs, and new programmes in the public secondary schools were such
that the future of Ontario private schools appeared, in some respects, less promising at the midpoint of the [twentieth] century. (p.5)

Perhaps in an effort to combat these various forces working against independent schools, in the early 1950s, the term ‘independent school’, instead of ‘private school’, was adopted by the two formal associations of independent schools in Canada (see Gossage, 1977, p.1); according to Gossage (1977), “despite its egalitarian ring, [the term ‘independent school’] has done little to change a persistent image of aristocracy” (pp. 1-2). It would be more than thirty years until the same terminology change was called for in Ontario’s government documents (see Shapiro, 1985, p. 43). According to Shapiro (1985), the “mid-century decline [of private schools in Ontario] was a passing phase” (p. 5). Stamp (1985) claims that in the 1960s and 1970s, the well-established independent schools in Ontario “retained a certain popularity through their age-old emphasis on small classes and dedicated teachers, plus the implied social advantages of children rubbing shoulders with others from privileged backgrounds” (p. 203). Since then, independent schools have continued to grow and thrive in the province and the country at large.

**National and provincial organizations.** According to Gossage (1977), “[t]he formal association of these independent schools dates back to the 1930s, with the founding of the Canadian Headmistresses’ Association in 1931 and its male counterpart, the Canadian Headmasters’ Association, four years later” (p. 1). In 1979, the Headmasters’ and Headmistresses’ organizations of Canada joined together to form the Canadian Association of Independent Schools (see Russell, 1993, p. 51-66). Now known as Canadian Accredited Independent Schools [CAIS], this organization is the national accrediting body for all independent schools in Canada. The CAIS accreditation process involves an Internal Review, a peer-review observation by a Visiting Committee and review by the CAIS Board (CAIS 2011c). According to CAIS, accreditation offers many benefits for schools, including “provid[ing] school
leaders with validation of current programs and services and suggested planning for future
growth and development” (CAIS 2011b, para.3). In the following remark, Allison, Hasan and
Van Pelt (2015) describe membership in CAIS as something of a ‘status symbol’:

independent schools that are likely to be viewed as matching the popular stereotype of the
traditional preparatory school may be reasonably expected to exhibit more objectively
rooted distinguishing features, including membership in organizations which embody one
or more features of the popular image, such as the Canadian Accredited Independent
Schools (CAIS) association. (p. 16)

Not all independent schools choose to be accredited by CAIS. In Ontario, there are
currently nine schools not accredited by CAIS but granted membership in the Conference of
Independent Schools of Ontario [CIS Ontario] (see CIS Ontario 2013c), the formal association
for independent schools in the province. CIS Ontario “maintains a strong voice for quality
independent school education and emerging issues in pedagogy, as well as acts as a catalyst for
collaborative efforts among [its] member schools” (CIS Ontario 2013a, para. 3). In order to
become a member of CIS Ontario, a school must submit a formal application detailing its
financial stability, academic program and governance standards; a CIS Ontario Review
Committee then reviews the application and visits the school to see if it meets the membership
association’s standards in terms of reputation and engagement (CIS Ontario 2013b).

The image of Canadian independent schools that emerges from the literature is thus a
complex one. Most prevalent in the urban areas of Canada’s largest and most affluent province,
these accredited and varied institutions operate as non-profit businesses, relying on substantial
fees from a wealthy and potentially demanding clientele. Often founded in connection with
religious institutions, they function with particular purposes and values in mind, offering students
an experience defined by a focus on academics, personal attention, care and opportunity. The
non-profit boards of governors that govern independent schools hold incredible power and responsibility for various aspects of the school, including the appointment of the principal.

**Leadership**

The great volume of articles and books written about educational leadership attest that scholars and educators alike regard leadership as an important concept to study and understand. CAIS (2011f) asserts the importance of educational leadership by stating that it is “crucial to the effective implementation of a school’s strategic goals and to maintain excellence throughout a school’s operations, inside the classroom and beyond” (para. 1). While the importance of leadership is not in question, its definition certainly is.

**Difficulty of definition.** In the field of educational administration, one common definition of ‘leadership’ does not exist. In 1990, Deal and Peterson called leadership a “slippery concept” (p. 12). More recently, Smith, Montagno and Kuzmenko (2004) noted that “there is still no comprehensive understanding of what leadership is” (p. 80). Ryan (2005) put it like this: “[a]t bottom, leadership is a contested term” (p. 22). Yukl (1994) has noted that “[l]ike all constructs in the social sciences, the definition of leadership is arbitrary and very subjective” (p. 4).

According to Ryan (2005) “[t]he dominant perspective sees leadership as residing in individuals” (p. 22). Drawing on theories of organization and management from the world of business, this perspective describes a ‘leader’ as one who “assume[s] power over others by virtue of [his or her] personal qualities or [his or her] organizational position” (Ryan, 2005, p. 23). Gronn (2003) puts it like this: “Leadership, per the agency of individual leaders, tends to be positioned at the front or input end of the explanatory template normally used to account for the flow of action” (p. 278). According to this vision that champions the individual, it is the task of a leader “to use [his or her] power to motivate employees to work as hard as they can to achieve
narrow organizational] goals, which generally – but not always – are designed to support the status quo” (Ryan, 2005, p. 24). Echoing this idea, Yukl (2012) asserts that “[t]he essence of leadership in organizations is influencing and facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (p. 66). Mascall (2007) agrees, calling “the ability to influence others” (p. 52) the defining quality of leadership.

Potentially confused with - but quite distinct from - this dominant perspective of leadership residing in the individual is Ogawa and Bossert’s (1995) view of leadership as an organizational quality. They claim the following:

Leadership flows through the networks of roles that comprise organizations. The medium of leadership and the currency of leadership lie in the personal resources of people. And, leadership shapes the systems that produce patterns of interaction and the meanings that other participants attach to organizational events. (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995, p. 225)

The emphasis here on ‘the personal resources of people’ aligns with Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond’s (2004) description of educational leadership as “the identification, acquisition, allocation, co-ordination, and use of the social, material, and cultural resources necessary to establish the conditions for the possibility of teaching and learning” (p. 11). Also focusing on the importance of people, Gronn (2009) has suggested that “the unit of leadership analysis be thought of as a configuration or pattern of relationships” (p. 390), meaning that “in any organization in which there may be evidence of persons and units leading, that configuration is simply one of ‘leadership’, unqualified and unembellished” (p. 390).

Looking at leadership in terms of power and social justice, Ryan (2005) suggests by way of definition that, “[u]ltimately, leadership is about power – who gets to decide what for whom” (p. 22) and “about how we govern and are governed in our organizations and communities, and
about what kind of world we want these governance practices to uphold” (p. 24). This emphasis on governance brings to mind Bolman and Deal’s (1994a) conception of leadership as being “essentially political” (p. 82) and rife with conflict, but conflict that should be seen as “a positive means of moving toward cohesion and integration” (p. 83).

Several scholars discuss leadership in terms of problem-solving. Sergiovanni (2005) offers this important distinction:

Conventional wisdom tells us that leadership is about finding solutions to problems that people face. In reality, leadership is more about helping people understand the problems they face, helping them manage these problems, and even helping them learn to live with them. (p. 122)

Still commenting on problems but looking to the future, Fullan (2001) sees leadership as “not mobilizing others to solve problems we already know how to solve, but to help them confront problems that have never yet been successfully addressed” (p. 3), in line with Heifetz and Linsky (2004) who claim that leadership is about dealing with problems “that the experts cannot solve” (p. 35). Fullan (2001) offers this as further explanation:

leadership, if it is to be effective, has to (1) have an explicit “making-a-difference” sense of purpose, (2) use strategies that mobilize many people to tackle tough problems, (3) be held accountable by measured and debatable indicators of success, and (4) be ultimately assessed by the extent to which it awakens people’s intrinsic commitment, which is none other than the mobilizing of everyone’s sense of moral purpose. (pp. 20-21)

Elsewhere, Fullan (2003) explores the idea of leadership with a moral purpose in more detail. The understanding of leadership that informs this study thus draws on the many different definitions of leadership explored above with an emphasis on power, people, politics, and problem-solving.
Leadership versus management. The relationship between leadership and management is a topic of great debate in literature about educational administration (see Bolman & Deal, 1994a; Deal & Peterson, 1994; Leithwood, 2006; Mertkan, 2014; Ribbins, 1999; Spillane, 2009). Viewing educational leadership in terms of organizational theory, Bolman and Deal (1992) identify four frames of educational leadership: structural, human resource, political and symbolic. Providing a prescription for successful educational leadership, they assert that “the ability to use multiple frames is critical to principals’ effectiveness as both manager and leader” (Bolman & Deal, 1992, p. 328). In a book that uses two fictional characters, a narrative style, and real-world examples, Bolman and Deal (2002) explore what the four frames look like in practice. In their study of the principal’s contribution to school effectiveness from 1980-1995, Hallinger and Heck (1998) assert the importance of the human resource frame identified by Bolman and Deal (1992), and argue that a major component of leadership is producing changes in people (p. 175). Elsewhere, Bolman and Deal (1994a) distinguish between leadership and management by noting that “we look to leadership when our institutions no longer serve their intended purposes” (p. 79) while “[m]anagers, on the other hand, focus their attention on tinkering with the current system to make it work better” (p. 79). Leithwood (2006) echoes this distinction by noting that “[s]tability is the goal of what is often called ‘management’” (p. 180), while “[i]mprovement is the goal of leadership” (p. 180).

In an effort to reframe school management and leadership, Spillane (2009) argues that “[b]y fixating on leadership, we pay inadequate attention to the importance of management” (p. 70). Spillane (2009) further asserts that “[w]e need to pay attention to how the work of leading and managing is task- and subject-specific, and we need to attend to how responsibility is divided or duplicated among team members by activity” (p. 72). Gronn (2003) claims that “authority is a defining attribute of management, although not leadership” (p. 275), because
authority “is concerned with the governance of conduct through such vehicles as legislative frameworks, regulations, rules, conventions” (p. 276). Perhaps in an effort to bridge the divide between management and leadership, Deal and Peterson (1994) called for “principals who are bifocal, who can combine managerial tasks with symbolic sensitivity and passion, who are simultaneously efficient managers and effective leaders” (pg. xii, emphasis in the original). In the Ontario Leadership Framework, Leithwood (2012) similarly adopted “an integrative perspective on these concepts because the tasks typically associated with both concepts make potentially important contributions to the achievement of organizational goals” (p. 6).

**Leadership Practices**

In their analysis of leadership practice, Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004) suggest that if we are ever to understand leadership in schools, we must “consider an account of the how of leadership, grounded in the day-to-day practice of school leaders” (p. 4). In this section of the literature review six particular approaches to leadership are listed, followed by closer considerations of managerial, instructional, distributed, and moral leadership. The section concludes with a brief introduction to the Ontario Leadership Framework.

**Six approaches to leadership.** Very influential on scholars’ understanding of leadership practice are the six types of leadership identified by Leithwood and Duke (1999). From a review of literature on leadership published in *Educational Administration Quarterly, Journal of School Leadership, Journal of Educational Administration and Educational Management and Administration* from approximately 1988-1999, they developed a classification system consisting of instructional leadership, transformational leadership, moral leadership, participative leadership, managerial leadership and contingent leadership. Leithwood and Duke (1999) argue that these six approaches to leadership “offer eclectic and overlapping perspective on what should be the focus of leaders’ attention and how leadership manifests itself in practice” (p. 55).
With reference to ‘how leadership manifests itself in practice’ and the inclusion of the word ‘should’ Leithwood and Duke thus provide a classification system that is both descriptive of and prescriptive for practice. Given their particular relevance to the analysis of findings for this study, managerial leadership, instructional leadership, distributed leadership, moral, authentic and transformational leadership will now be considered in more detail.

**A closer look at managerial leadership.** Schools are bureaucratic organizations. According to Hoy and Miskel (1996), “[a]lmost all modern organizations, including schools, have the characteristics [of bureaucracy] enumerated by Weber [in 1947]: a division of labor and specialization, an impersonal orientation, a hierarchy of authority, rules and regulations, and a career orientation” (p. 47). If the school is the organization, then the principal is the manager of the organization, responsible for maintaining efficiency through division of labour and specialization (classes, divisions and departments), making fair and rational decisions (about curriculum, scheduling, staffing etc.), supervising subordinates (i.e. teachers), enforcing rules and regulations (for both students and staff), and making decisions about teachers’ promotion, demotion and dismissal.

These are only the tasks involved in administering the formal system; as the manager of the school, the principal must also administer the informal system. The informal system of an organization is “a system of interpersonal relations that forms spontaneously within all formal organizations” (Hoy and Miskel, 1996, p. 53). As Hoy and Miskel (1996) point out, the informal system, or “grapevine”, of a school “is not an enemy to be eliminated or suppressed; on the contrary, it can be a useful vehicle for improving efficiency” (p. 57). They suggest that “[t]he knowledgeable and flexible administrator uses the grapevine, thus avoiding the bureaucratic frustration of those who only play it by the book” (Hoy and Miskel, 1996, p. 57).
All of the responsibilities associated with managing the informal and formal systems of a school represent managerial leadership, which “focuses on the functions, tasks, or behaviors of the leader and assumes that if these functions are carried out competently the work of others in the organization will be facilitated” (Leithwood & Duke, 1999, p. 53, emphasis in the original). The goal of managerial leadership is “efficient completion of clearly specified tasks by employees” (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999, p. 20). In a school setting, these “tasks” include instruction, evaluation and supervision of children. The principal uses both “positional power” and “formal policies and procedures” to achieve the efficient completion of tasks (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999, p. 17). A school calendar, daily schedule and supervision roster are all examples of such formal policies and procedures. In their study of five high school principals that used the structured observation technique, Martin and Willower (1981) found that principals’ work was primarily managerial, characterized by these six elements: volume and pace; variety, brevity and fragmentation; verbal media preference; preference for live action; the contact network; and, blend of rights and duties (see pp. 79-82).

Recently, Kelchtermans, Piot and Ballet (2011) pointed out that the “dominant managerial discourse makes it hard for principals to acknowledge that the emotionality they experience in their job is an inherent part of it” (p. 95). They further noted that, “[j]ust as for teachers, the principal’s job is not merely a technical matter of managerial skills, technical knowledge and effective strategic action” (Kelchtermans, Piot, & Ballet, 201, p. 96). These ideas are important to keep in mind for the analysis of the findings of this study.

**A closer look at instructional leadership.** The boundary between managerial and instructional leadership seems somewhat fluid. Hallinger and Murphy identify “managing the instructional program” as one of three broad categories of administrative leadership practice and “supervising instruction” as one of 21 more specific leadership functions (as summarized in
Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999, p. 8). Leithwood and Duke (1999) define instructional leadership as an approach in which leaders in formal administrative roles focus “on the behaviors of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of students” (p. 47, emphasis in the original). Thus, the “immediate purpose [of instructional leadership] is to enhance the effectiveness of teachers’ classroom practices” (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999, p. 20).

The sources of influence for instructional leadership are “[t]ypically, positional power and (invariably) expert knowledge about teaching and learning processes” (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999, p. 17). Hallinger and Murphy (2012) similarly note that “[i]nstructional leadership is a practice-based rather than a theory-driven construct” (p. 6). If experience creates expertise then, as experienced teachers, principals have the “expert knowledge” to offer advice to teachers on instructional issues.

Salo, Nylund and Stjernstrøm (2015) note that “[b]oth the concept and the models of instructional leadership originate from research on effective schools in the 1980s” (p. 491). According to Hallinger (1992) “the instructional leadership model adopted by policy makers during the 1980s, like many earlier innovations, was never truly implemented by many American principals” (p. 44). In the following remark, Salo, Nylund and Stjernstrøm (2015) explain that the understanding of instructional leadership has changed over time: “[t]oday it includes leadership practices aimed at enhancing teachers’ professional learning and growth…and various mediating educational and organizational practices…by which principals are to support successful teaching practices and share the responsibilities of instruction” (p. 491). They further note that “[i]nterest in transformative, distributed and shared leadership seems to have transformed the conceptualizations of instructional leadership” (Salo, Nylund & Stjernstrøm, 2015, p. 492).

Hallinger and Murphy (2012) offer a similar insight about the change in instructional leadership by noting, “[t]oday, we view instructional leadership as an influence process through which leaders
identify a direction for the school, motivate staff, and coordinate school and classroom-based strategies aimed at improvements in teaching learning” (p. 7); they call leadership for learning instructional leadership’s modern “alter ego” (Hallinger & Murphy, 2012, p. 7) and argue that “[l]eadership for learning should be focused on capacity development as well” (Hallinger & Murphy, 2012, p. 16). In their study of principals’ understanding and implementation of instructional leadership in Norway, Sweden and Finland, Salo, Nylund and Stjernstrøm (2015) offer a renewed understanding of instructional leadership as “a complex process of co-production” (p. 502) that consists of these eight dimensions: “[a]nchoring in teaching-learning practices in the classroom…[r]eliance on and affirmation of teachers’ professionalism…[i]nvolve and commitment…[c]larity and structure in preparation and implementation…[c]ontinuous communication and feedback…[s]upportive social structures…[e]xpertise in guidance…[t]ime as a resource and a horizon” (p. 498).

In their study of rural teaching principals in Alberta and Manitoba, Newton and Wallin (2013) point out an important detail in the dominant thinking about instructional leadership: “[l]iterature on the instructional leadership practices of principals suggests that principals must put teaching and learning at the core of their leadership efforts…. [h]owever, this same body of literature presupposes that principals hold fulltime administrative appointments” (p. 56). In other words, most of what has been written about instructional leadership does not suggest that the principal still teaches in a classroom setting; rather, it depicts the principal as a former teacher, and therefore former expert on classroom teaching, whose current primary focus is the administrative aspects of the job. This raises a question: can a principal who doesn’t teach in a classroom remain an expert on classroom instruction?

Some scholars have questioned the translation of instructional leadership from theory to practice. Hallinger (1992) asserts that “the reality of the principal as instructional leader
continues to lag well behind the rhetoric and that less has changed in the practice of the principalship than optimistic observers might wish” (p. 44). Salo, Nylund and Stjernstrøm (2015) similarly contend that “the practice of instructional leadership has remained somewhat of a black box” (p. 491). Others, like Newton and Wallin (2013), see great potential in retaining and revising the notion of instructional leadership: “the position of teaching principal is far from untenable, and the promise inherent in the teaching principalship for a robust form of instructional leadership makes this role worthy of further attention by researchers and policy makers” (p. 70).

**A closer look at distributed leadership.** Of the six types of leadership Leithwood and Duke (1999) used to describe and prescribe leadership practice, distributed leadership places particular emphasis on what leaders do and how they do it. Distributed leadership has attracted significant attention in the scholarly community (see Crawford, 2012; Flessa, 2009; Gronn, 2008, 2009; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, & Hopkins, 2007; Spillane, 2005, 2006, 2009; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004), with explorations of *shared* and *participative* leadership all falling under this umbrella (see Leithwood & Duke, 1999; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Mascall, Leithwood, Straus & Sacks, 2008; Mascall & Rolheiser, 2007).

Spillane (2005, 2006, 2009) has contributed most significantly to our understanding of distributed leadership, especially with his work as Principal Investigator for The Distributed Leadership Study at Northwestern University (see Northwestern University 2010). Others have adopted the protocols of this research organization (see Grubb & Flessa, 2006). According to Spillane (2005), “[d]istributed leadership is first and foremost about leadership practice rather than leaders or their roles, functions, routines, and structures” (p. 144). In discussions of distributed leadership, “leadership practice is viewed as a product of the interactions of school
leaders, followers, and their situation” (Spillane, 2005, p. 144, emphasis in the original).

Additionally, “from a distributed perspective, leadership practice that results from interactions among leaders, followers, and their situation is critical” (Spillane, 2005, p. 145, emphasis in the original). Thus, in this form of leadership, “authority and influence are available potentially to any legitimate stakeholder in the school based on their expert knowledge, their democratic right to choose and/or their critical role in implementing decisions” (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999, p. 12). The micropolitics and conflicts within the organization therefore take on greater importance (see Flessa, 2009). Distributed leadership is also connected to organizational change, capacity building, and professional learning communities (see Harris et al, 2007); however, “[d]istributing leadership does not automatically result in organizational improvement [because] [m]uch depends on the way in which leadership is distributed, how it is distributed and for what purpose” (Harris et al, 2007, p. 45).

In terms of the usefulness of distributed leadership as a conception of leadership, opinions are divided. Spillane (2009) claims that “[w]hile allowing for the occasional hero or heroine in school leadership, our distributed frame presses us to reach beyond the principal to pay attention to other designated leaders” (p. 71). Crawford (2012) similarly asserts that “a key benefit of the discussions around distribution is that it has allowed scholars to recognize the importance of activities performed by different groupings of people in organizations” (p. 616) and “made students of leadership question how these relationships of interdependence might be categorized” (p. 616). Gronn (2009) is not as convinced, arguing that “notwithstanding the contribution made by studies of distributed leadership in advancing situated knowledge, a distributed perspective provides part of the picture of practice but by no means the entirety of it” (p. 383). He offers this additional criticism of the work done on distributed leadership:
despite their reaction to individualist approaches to leadership, solo leaders continue to figure prominently in accounts that purport to be distributed and…distributed leadership apologists have not adequately clarified the role and contribution of individuals as continuing sources of organizational influence within a distributed framework. (Gronn, 2009, p. 383)

Gronn (2009) calls for a change in terminology, suggesting that “a term such as hybrid would be a more accurate description of situational practice that includes both individual leaders and holistic leadership units working in tandem than distributed, because the notion of hybrid signals a mixture of types” (p. 384). Kelchtermans, Piot and Ballet (2011) concur, explaining that they “subscribe to the argument that leadership as an organisational function is broader than the position and role of the principal and that it is ‘distributed’ over or among members of the organization” (p. 94), but “also take the stance that the role and position of the principal is still a very relevant and important one in the school system” (Kelchtermans, Piot, & Ballet, 2011, p. 94).

**A closer look at moral leadership.** Moral leadership includes “normative, political/democratic, and symbolic concepts of leadership” (Leithwood and Duke, 1999, p. 50). Particularly relevant for this study is the normative concept of moral leadership. Those who adopt or support moral leadership “argue that values are a central part of all leadership and administrative practice” (Leithwood and Duke, 1999, p. 50). Indeed, Leithwood and Duke (1999) define moral leadership as an approach in which “[t]he focus…is on the values and ethics of the leader, so authority and influence are to be derived from defensible conceptions of what is right or good” (p. 50, emphasis in the original). Scholars interested in normative aspects of moral leadership are chiefly concerned with “the nature of the values used by leaders in their decision making and how conflicts among values can be resolved” (Leithwood and Duke, 1999,
In their analysis of moral leadership, Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999) note that as a moral leader, the principal supports particular “systems of moral values to which organizational members are encouraged to adhere” (p. 17). What those particular systems of values are will, of course, depend on a variety of both contextual and personal variables. The immediate goals of this form of leadership include both “[i]ncreased sensitivity to the rightness of decisions” and “increased decisional participation among stakeholders” (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999, p. 20).

Sergiovanni (1992, 2001, 2005) has made considerable contributions to our understanding of moral leadership. He claims that “[l]eadership as moral action is a struggle to do the right thing according to a sense of values and what it means to be a human being” (Sergiovanni, 2005, p. 115). Sergiovanni (2001) envisions successful educational leadership as a coming together of three distinct but closely connected dimensions: the heart, head and hand of leadership (p. 343). By ‘heart’, Sergiovanni (2001) means “what a person believes, values, dreams about, and is committed to” (p. 343); by ‘head’, “the theories of practice each of us has developed over time and our ability to reflect on the situations we face in light of these theories” (p. 343); and by ‘hand’, “the actions we take, the decisions we make, the leadership and management behaviors we use as our strategies become institutionalized in the form of school programs, policies, and procedures” (p. 343).

Similar ideas are explored elsewhere in terms of spirited leadership (see Bolman & Deal, 1994b), the moral imperative of leadership (see Fullan, 2003), and an ethic of care (see Marshall, Patterson, Rogers, & Steele, 1996). Rutherford (2005), a former Head of a Canadian independent school, also looks at leadership from a distinctly moral perspective when he argues that “[l]eaders’ actions are infused by their values…. [which] then inform their behaviours, which in turn shape their practices and produce results” (p. 55). Indeed, he insists that “[t]he moral
compass of a school points in the direction set by its leader” (Rutherford, 2005, p. 55). At its core, moral leadership highlights the close relationship between leadership practices and values. Given the identification of independent schools as ‘morally responsible communities’ (see Maxwell & Maxwell, 1995b) and the focus of this study on leadership practices and values, it is thus a very important leadership approach to understand.

**A closer look at authentic and transformational leadership.** Closely connected to moral leadership is the concept of authentic leadership. Avolio and Gardner (2005) call authentic leadership a “root construct” that “forms the basis for what then constitutes other forms of positive leadership” (p. 328); additionally, they note that “[a]uthentic leadership can incorporate transformational, charismatic, servant, spiritual or other forms of positive leadership” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 329). Duignan (2014), a leading expert on the topic, echoes this claim in part when he notes that “Greenleaf [the scholar most associated with servant leadership] anticipated some of the key characteristics of authenticity” (p. 156).

Begley (2001) calls authentic leadership “living the examined life as Socrates advised” (p. 364). Elsewhere, he describes it as “the outcome of self-knowledge, sensitivity to the orientation of others, and a technical sophistication that leads to a synergy of leadership action” (Begley 2006, p. 571). This emphasis on self-knowledge is common in other works about authentic leadership. For instance, according to Avolio and Gardner (2005), “authentic leadership requires heightened levels of self-awareness” (p. 324). Reflection is deemed the tool necessary to achieve self-awareness and authenticity. Begley (2006) says that authentic leadership is “grounded in the understanding or interpretation of observed or experienced valuation processes” (p. 574), where valuation processes are understood as influences on cognitive processes, guides to action and strategic tools (see pp. 574-575). Duignan and Bhindi (1997) assert that “[i]n order to become an authentic leader, it is important to know where one stands on important moral and professional issues and then act accordingly” (p.
Similarly, Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May and Walumbwa (2005) propose that authentic leadership begins with “how individuals interpret accumulated life experiences, and continues with their on-going interpretation of trigger events over time” (p. 348).

Duignan and Bhindi (1997) claim that “[a]uthenticity is not only a quality of the leader but it is also a product of relationships and interrelationships” (Duignan and Bhindi, 1997, p. 201). Duignan (2014) reinforces this idea with the following remark: “While a focus on self and being true to self are essential for an understanding of authenticity in leadership, it should always be mediated through relationships in the complex world in which we all live” (p. 157). Avolio and Gardner (2005) agree, noting that, along with other processes, “positive social exchanges go a long way toward explaining how authentic leaders influence followers, i.e. the leadership component of authentic leadership” (p. 326).

Duignan and Bhindi (1997) provide perhaps the most comprehensive definition of authentic leadership with this comment:

Authentic leadership links assumptions, beliefs about, and actions related to, authentic self, relationships, learning, governance and organization, through significant human values, to leadership and management practices that are ethically and morally uplifting. (p. 208)

In a later work, Duignan (2014) offered this clarification: “Authenticity, therefore, involves reflecting on self, life and relationships but it requires us to respond to pressures and problems by taking effective action in the real world of work and life” (p. 158). With its emphasis on the importance of the self, values, reflection and relationships in the real world of work, authentic leadership is especially relevant to this study in which independent-school principals were asked to reflect on their own leadership values and practices.
Authentic leadership is often linked to transformational leadership, a topic of great interest in the field of educational administration (see Leithwood, Jantzi, & Fernandez 1994; Nash & Bangert, 2014; Smith, Montagno & Kuzmenko, 2004). Although Avolio and Gardner (2005) acknowledge this link (see p. 329), they also make a careful distinction between transformational and authentic leadership with this description:

[A]uthentic leaders are anchored by their own deep sense of self; they know where they stand on important issues, values and beliefs. With that base they stay their course and convey to others, oftentimes through actions, not just words, what they represent in terms of principles, values and ethics. Transformational leaders may also have this deep sense of self….or they may be able to transform others and organizations, through a powerful, positive vision, an intellectually stimulating idea, attention to uplifting the needs of followers and by having a clear sense of purpose. (p. 329-330)

According to Leithwood and Duke (1999), transformational leadership focuses on “the commitments and capacities of organizational members” (p. 48, emphasis in the original). By using words like “capacities” and “organizational members”, this description suggests that managerial and transformational leadership also overlap, a connection already noted by scholars (see Hallinger, 1992). As a transformational leader, the principal is responsible not just for the efficiency and supervision of the ‘workers’ in the school, but also for the level of their skills and task commitment. Indeed, “[t]ransformational leadership aspires, more generally, to increase members’ efforts on behalf of the organization, as well as to develop more skilled practice” (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999, p. 20). The means by which principals increase efforts and develop skilled practice are “motivational processes that elevate organizational members’ aspirations for their work and inspire higher levels of commitment to the organization and its purposes” (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999, p. 17). Here the word “motivational” implies
a certain amount of care, concern and interest on the part of the principal. The principal takes on a supporting role for the teachers, which may require an unspecified amount of time and energy to fill.

In their study of transformational leadership and teacher commitment, Leithwood, Jantzi and Fernandez (1994) outlined these seven dimensions of transformational leadership: “identifying and articulating a vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, providing individualized support, intellectual stimulation, providing an appropriate model, high performance expectations, and contingent reward” (p. 81). In their comparative analysis of transformational and servant leadership, Smith, Montagno and Kuzmenko (2004) claimed that, “[t]ransformational leadership occurs when a leader inspires followers to share a vision, empowering them to achieve the vision, and provides the resource necessary for developing their personal potential” (p. 80). Additionally, they noted that this type of leadership “contain[s] four behavioral components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration” (Smith, Montagno & Kuzmenko, 2004, p. 81) and that these four behaviours lead to “role modeling, high ethical standards, concern for the needs of others, communication of expectations, shared visions, innovations, risk taking, and questioning of practices and systems” (Smith, Montagno & Kuzmenko, 2004, p. 87). They found that transformational leadership was “more suitable for a dynamic external environment, where employees are empowered with greater responsibility and encouraged to innovate, take initiative and risk” (Smith, Montagno & Kuzmenko, 2004, p. 89).

The Ontario Leadership Framework. According to Crawford (2012), “As the 1990s progressed, the literature began to groan with interest in varying types of leadership and how this might (or might not) relate to practice” (p. 611). Leithwood (2012) developed the Ontario Leadership Framework [OLF] as a way of capturing the desirable competencies and practices for
principals and vice-principals in the province of Ontario. First set out in 2006 and revised in 2012, the OLF “identifies the practices of successful school and system leaders, as well as the organizational practices of successful schools and districts” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 1). Leithwood (2012) explains the connection between the OLF and previous work on approaches to leadership like this:

the OLF does reflect most of the practices found in current models of both “instructional” and “transformational” leadership. Using a term that is becoming common in the educational leadership literature, it is an “integrated” model, although a more fully developed one than appears in the literature to date. This integrated model aims to capture the relatively direct efforts of successful leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their schools (the primary focus of instructional leadership models), as well as their efforts to create organizational conditions which enable and support those improvement efforts (the primary focus of transformational leadership models). (p. 12)

In the OLF, Leithwood (2012) outlines leadership practices not leadership competencies, meaning by practice “a bundle of activities exercised by a person or group of persons which reflect the particular circumstances in which they find themselves and with some shared outcome(s) in mind” (p. 5). He claims that while the work on competencies, drawn from the field of management development, focuses on the characteristics of the individual, work on practices can reach beyond, to acknowledge these four elements:

- The situated and social context in which leadership is exercised;
- The central nature of relationships in leadership work;
- The importance of leaders responding flexibly to the situations, events and challenges which present themselves in order to accomplish important goals;
The shared nature of leadership work in virtually all organizations. (Leithwood, 2012, p. 5)

Leithwood (2012) further asserts that “[c]onceptualizing leadership as a set of practices reflects both the adaptive qualities and expert problem-solving processes emphasized in some previous accounts of effective leadership” (p. 5). With its echoes of the ideas of instructional and transformational leadership (a type of leadership closely connected to moral leadership), as well as its emphasis on context, relationships, responsiveness and shared work, the OLF thus incorporates much of the previous thinking about approaches to leadership and serves as a very useful guide for this study of leadership in independent schools in Ontario.

Leadership Values

Recently, Crawford (2012) has noted that “values are still central to any discussion of leadership, and underpin most of the discussions about the kind of leadership that are most appropriate for schools today” (p. 612). In this section of the literature review, definitions and models from leading scholars are considered, as well as the relationship between leadership values and practices.

to denote an emphasis on beliefs and preferences, rather than on understandings of ‘right’ versus ‘wrong’. Although a detailed consideration of the philosophical outlooks underlying the terminology is beyond the scope of this literature review, it should be noted that the term values is aligned with relativism and subjectivism, rather than absolutism or objectivism. According to Campbell (1992), in relativist and subjectivist perspectives, “[j]udgements regarding truth, goodness, and rightness…are contingent upon numerous social variables pertinent only to the individual, group or situation at hand” (p. 117).

Parkes and Thomas (2007) assert that “there is no one universal definition of values” (p. 208) and they offer a helpful figure that attempts to capture some of the definitions in the relevant literature (see Parkes & Thomas, 2007, p. 209). One of the first scholars to influence our thinking about values was Rokeach (1979), a social psychologist, who described values as enduring beliefs that certain ways of behaving and end results are more desirable than others. Begley (1996) draws on Rokeach’s work for his analysis of values in educational administration, because he finds that Rokeach’s work “highlights the critical function of values in the making of choices” (p. 407). Begley (1999) defines values as “those conceptions of the desirable which motivate individuals and collective groups to act in particular ways to achieve particular ends” (p. 237). Campbell (1992) points out that “not all values reflect right and wrong; the difference between what is desired by some in specific contexts and what is right or desirable should not be obscured” (pp. 3-4).

Christopher Hodgkinson (1970, 1978, 1991, 1996, 1999) has made a tremendous contribution to our understanding of values and educational administration. Drawing on moral philosophy, Hodgkinson (1991) defines values as “concepts of the desirable with motivating force” (p. 101), where ‘desirable’ refers to “what is proper, ‘moral’, dutybound, or simply what ought to be” (p. 97, emphasis in the original). His complex analytical model of the value concept (see
Hodgkinson, 1991, p. 97, Figure 2), intended to “enable us to classify values and eventually establish some bases for the resolution of value conflicts” (Hodgkinson, 1991, p. 96), classifies different grounds for value judgments, labels values as either subrational, rational or transrational, and provides the psychological and philosophical correspondences for each of the three types of values. Begley (2000) says this about the importance of Hodgkinson’s model:

Hodgkinson's values typology, and the derivative models generated by his disciples, is still perhaps the most comprehensive of frameworks for examining values in administration in that it incorporates the rational values of consequences and consensus as well as subrational emotions and transrational ethics. (p. 246)

According to Hodgkinson (1991), “[v]alues are synonymous with meaning” (p. 101) and should be understood as “phenomenological entities intermediate between motives…and attitudes” (p. 102). Elsewhere, when distinguishing between values and attitudes, Hodgkinson (1970) concludes that “individual values, as opposed to mere attitudes, must change with ascent of the organizational ladder” (p. 55). Note Hodgkinson’s use of the word ‘must’ here; he is not merely suggesting that an educational leader’s values may change as he or she assumes higher positions of authority within a school, but that they should change.

Another giant in the field of leadership values is Donald Willower. Willower (1999) insists that “[a]n emphasis on valuation gives life to values, which are so often honored in a ritualistic way with verbal commitment rather than concrete attention, a real danger in organizations such as schools, whose goals are complex and neither easily attained nor measured” (p. 132). He argues that “[i]f ethical ideas are to have meaning for educational practice, they should have plausible connections to genuine problems of educational policy and conduct” (Willower, 1999, p. 136). Willower (1999) is critical of Hodgkinson’s idealist-subjectivist hierarchy of values for its reliance on absolute principles and possible connections with “closed-minded dogmatism” (p. 127).
Willower (1999) notes, very convincingly, that “[p]ositions that ground principles in experience, leaving them open to new evidence and logical argument, seem far less easy to use to support extremism of whatever sort” (p. 127).

**Relationship between leadership values and practices.** According to many scholars, leadership values and practices are inherently linked. Begley (2000) notes that “[v]alues and ethics are commonly understood as important influences on administrative practices in education” (p. 233). Willower (1992) justifies the connection between leadership practice and values with this remark: “Because a significant portion of the practice in educational administration requires rejecting some courses of action in favor of a preferred one, values are generally acknowledged to be central to the field” (p. 369). Seeing leadership in distinctly philosophical and moral terms, Hodgkinson (1999) argues that “administrators cannot help doing philosophy because administration is philosophy in action” (p. 139, emphasis in the original). Extending this definition, he calls educational administration “politics, that is, the creating, organizing, managing, monitoring, and resolving of value conflicts” (Hodgkinson, 1999, p. 141). Begley (2001) concurs with Hodgkinson, noting that “[a]ll leaders consciously or unconsciously employ values as guides in interpreting situations and suggesting appropriate administrative action” (p. 364). Begley (2001) sees educational administrators as “agents for the values of their society” (p. 353) and claims that their values can be derived “from both within the individual’s psychology as well as from the individual’s interaction with collective groups, organizations and societies” (Begley, 2001, p. 356).

In their study of elementary principals in Ontario, Begley and Leithwood (1990) set out “to clarify the nature of principals' values and examine their influence on administrative practice in relation to other potential influences in the local school context” (p. 338). They found that “values as defined by Hodgkinson were significant influences on the initial decision to adopt
computers as a [sic] educational innovation” (Begley and Leithwood, 1990, p. 347). Gold, Evans, Earley, Halpin, and Collarbone (2003) studied leaders of schools in England and found that “[t]heir leadership was clearly values-driven” (p. 136), documenting in the case studies they developed “insights into how some of these values and beliefs were demonstrated through the words and deeds of school leaders” (p. 136). In her mixed-method study of German principals, Warwas (2015) found that “professional values – i.e. conceptions of desirable modes, means and ends in coping with the demands of one’s professional activity – modify contextual influences on leadership behaviour by informing the value holder about appropriate and expedient responses to contextual prerequisites” (p. 326).

While the work that has been done thus far on the relationship between values and practices has done much to illuminate this area of study, there is still much to be learned, especially in the context of Canadian independent schools.

Language of Leadership

According to Schechter and Firuz (2015), “Language is one of the most powerful means human beings use to present their identity and personality to those around them” (p. 369). In this section of the literature review, the importance of language in relation to educational leadership is explored and definitions of certain key terms relevant to this study are presented.

Importance of. Several scholars have shown an interest in studying the language of leadership (see Bogotch & Roy, 1994; Bredeson 1985; Gronn, 1983; Kelchtermans, Piot, & Ballet 2011; Lowenhaupt, 2014; Newberry & Richardson, 2015; Schechter & Firuz, 2015). They have drawn attention to various reasons why it is important to examine what leaders say as well as what they do. One of the first to study the language, or ‘talk’, of school administrators, was Gronn (1983), who made this claim:
Talk becomes necessary and is powerful in two senses: first, talk does things for the speaker, making known his or her version of something to others that must be attended to; second, talk gets others to do things, not only to take note or account of what it said, but to be influenced by what it said. (p.17)

According to Lowenhaupt (2014), “Language is not simply an accessory or aid to practice, but a core and defining component of the leadership and management practice that unfolds in schools” (p. 447). In her study of the language used by one principal of an urban school, Lowenhaupt (2014) shows “how analysis of the form, content, and audience can reveal talk as action in school leadership” (p. 461). Newberry and Richardson (2015) assert that “[l]eaders who seek meaningful change will need to take time to examine not only what those involved say, but also underlying meanings that are often revealed in metaphor” (p. 438). Some investigations into the language of leadership have focused on principals’ talk with colleagues during formal meetings (Lowenhaupt, 2014), while others have explored the use of language in the halls, in the principal’s office and in the staff room (Gronn, 1983). In their study of the discourse of one particular principal of a multiracial school in the southeastern United States, Bogotch and Roy (1994) set out “to describe how language shapes and is shaped by relationships between individuals within a school context” (p. 234).

Metaphors have received particular attention from scholars of educational administration. Regarding the relationship between metaphors and the study of educational administration, Bredeson (1985) claims that “[m]etaphors are useful linguistic structures that have helped theorists and practitioners generate ideas, concepts, models and theories for describing, examining, and understanding phenomena in education” (p. 29). In his study of three secondary and two elementary principals, Bredeson (1985) concluded that metaphors of maintenance, survival and vision dominated the principals’ perspectives. Murphy and Beck (1994) used the
following six metaphors to “paint a portrait of the type of administrator needed in tomorrow’s schools” (p. 9): “Principal as Servant” (p. 9); “Principal as Person in Community” (p. 10); “Principal as Moral Agent” (p. 11); “Principal as Organizational Architect” (p. 12); “Principal as Social Advocate and Activist” (p. 12); and “Principal as Educator” (p. 13). In their analysis of studies of Flemish primary schools, Kelchtermans, Piot and Ballet (2011) focused on the metaphor of the gatekeeper to better understand the principal’s role. Recently, Newberry and Richardson (2015) explored “the ways that participants in a public school/university partnership experienced collaboration through exploration of language they used in discourse about their experiences” (p. 422); more specifically, they set out to “determine how metaphor use suggests the manner in which participants were positioning themselves and others in cross-institutional collaboration efforts” (p. 426). They found “metaphors clustered into groups having to do with (1) team analogies, (2) figurative space, and (3) levels of required action” (Newberry & Richardson, 2015, p. 430). In their study of how mentor principals in Israel interpreted the mentoring process using metaphors, Schechter and Firuz (2015) found that principals used metaphors related to the themes of “exposure and mirroring, modelling, giving, empowering and supporting” (p. 372).

**Definitions.** Given their importance in the analysis of the findings of this study, certain terms associated with the language of leadership merit definition here. The phrase ‘rhetorical strategy’ will be used in the analysis. Rhetoric, as conceived of by Aristotle, is “the faculty for observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (Leff, 2000, p. 244). In our modern world, rhetoric is used in various contexts. Leff (2000) notes that, “In its every day manifestations rhetoric does small jobs using all the verbal and cognitive tools that are available” (p. 251). Consideration will also be given to the use of different grammatical persons. In the subsequent analysis, the term ‘second person’ indicates the use of you, or your if used in the
possessive form, as opposed to I or my, which indicate the first person. Traditionally, using the second person allows the speaker to directly engage his or her audience, inviting them to relate to and perhaps identify with what is being said (for a discussion of the use of second person in writing, see Parker, 2011/2012, p. 173). Attention will also be paid to the use of different grammatical moods, in particular the imperative and hortative. The imperative mood is used “to command, enjoin, implore or entreat” (Shea, Scanlon, & Aufses, 2008, p. 58). Rather than commanding action, the hortative mood is marked by use of the word ‘let’ and “exhorts, advises, calls to action” (Shea, Scanlon, & Aufses, 2008, p. 58). Some consideration of tone features in the analysis. A speaker uses tone to convey his or her attitude toward both the subject under discussion and the audience to whom the speaker’s remarks are addressed (Shea, Scanlon, & Aufses, 2008, p. 1013). When the term ‘repetition’ is used, it denotes a rhetorical strategy traditionally used to create coherence, provide emphasis, and enhance the impact of the speaker’s message (Nida, 1990, pp. 41, 42, 45). Finally, several different figures of speech will be considered, including rhetorical questions, hypophora, similes and metaphors. A rhetorical question is a “figure of speech in the form of a question posed for rhetorical effect rather than for the purpose of getting an answer” (Shea, Scanlon, & Aufses, 2008, p. 59). Often confused with the rhetorical question is hypophora, the rhetorical strategy of “raising a question and going on to answer it” (Blair, 2012, p. 153). A simile is a “figure of speech that uses ‘like’ or ‘as’ to compare two things” (Shea, Scanlon, & Aufses, 2008, p. 1012), while a metaphor can be defined as a figure of speech “through which one thing is spoken of as though it were something else, thus making an implicit comparison” (Shea, Scanlon, & Aufses, 2008, p. 1011). All of these definitions and descriptions shape the analysis of findings in this thesis.
Conclusion

There are several key ideas that emerge from this literature review to inform our understanding of how independent-school principals in Ontario experience and understand leadership. The literature concerning independent schools helps clarify the wider contexts in which the principals lead. Ontario is home to the majority of independent schools in Canada, so the provincial context sets the stage for both competition and cooperation. The historical development of independent schools in Ontario is inextricably linked with wealth and privilege; today, these elements live on in the schools’ tuition-based funding, adherence to particular purposes and values often tied to their founding groups, and ultimate aims of cultivating morally and socially responsible young people. Thus, the shadow of the past looms large over the principals, as do the expectations of the clientele they serve. Independent-school principals lead organizations that make several promises to parents and students, including personal attention, care, high academic standards, and a wide range of opportunities within and beyond the classroom. Governance by a non-profit board of governors that not only wields a tremendous amount of power, but is also accountable to parents, alumni and the wider community makes one wonder about the authority and autonomy enjoyed by independent-school principals. Although national and provincial organizations provide independent-school principals in Ontario with means of connecting with other leaders, the prestige that comes with membership in these groups also brings with it risk and scrutiny. Overall, both problems and possibilities seem inherent in the broader contexts in which Ontario’s independent-school principals lead.

The leadership literature reviewed in this chapter helps illuminate the fundamental concept of this study, with all of its associated debates and dichotomies. Leadership is a complex idea that eludes easy definition. Although the dominant perspective sees leadership as a quality residing in individuals who hold positional power, a competing vision depicts leadership
as an organizational quality linked to relationships. Various definitions of leadership emphasize the core components of power, people, politics and problem-solving. The persistent debate in the literature about leadership versus management sets up these two concepts in terms of stark contrasts: leadership is about making improvements and looking to the future, but management is about maintaining stability and focusing on current concerns. Only recently have some scholars (see Deal & Peterson, 1994; Leithwood, 2012) attempted to reconcile the notions of leadership and management. These attempts, as well as the earlier debate, along with the core components and different interpretations of leadership, are all important for this study, because they help us make sense of the way in which the principals talked about leadership in connection with their own leadership practices and values.

The literature concerning leadership practices plays a vital role in shaping the analysis of this study’s findings. Although Leithwood and Duke (1999) introduced their classification system of instructional, transformational, moral, participative, managerial and contingent leadership by noting that it offered an “overlapping perspective” (p. 55) on leadership practice, scholars have tended to consider these six approaches as distinct. Work on managerial leadership has described leadership as a task-oriented endeavour, with an emphasis on efficient decision-making and supervision, largely ignoring the emotional aspects of leadership. Studies of instructional leadership have tended to present a view of ‘principal as expert supervisor of the instructional program’; only recently has there been a noticeable shift to ‘principal as motivating guide for continuous improvement of teaching and learning’. Writings about distributed leadership have focused on leadership as vested in practices and interactions, rather than in individuals. Recently, there have been calls (see Gronn, 2009; Kelchtermans, Piot and Ballet, 2011) for a reconciliation of sorts between these seemingly contradictory notions, just like in the discussion about leadership versus management, as some scholars begin to question the
usefulness of the distributed perspective. In the study of moral leadership, the focus has been on the relationship between leaders’ human values, theories of practice, and actions. Closely connected to moral leadership is authentic leadership, with its emphasis on reflection, relationships, values and self-knowledge. Authentic leadership subsumes transformational leadership, which sees leaders bringing about positive change in organizations by motivating others with a shared vision and sense of purpose, but some scholars (see Avolio & Gardner, 2005) are careful to note that transformational leaders may or may not have the same degree of self-knowledge that authentic leaders have. In Ontario, the Ontario Leadership Framework offers an integrated model of leadership that draws on both transformational and instructional leadership. This framework also distinguishes between practices and competencies, and emphasizes the importance of context, relationships, leaders’ responsiveness, and shared work.

In general, it seems that after many years of separating leadership practices into distinct types, there is now a move in the scholarly community towards bringing them together in ways that recognize the complexity of enacting the enigmatic concept of leadership.

Like the literature about leadership practices, that concerning leadership values is essential to the analysis of this study’s findings. Confusion and uncertainty surround the terminology used in the field of leadership values; indeed, the term values, like leadership, lacks one common definition. The study of leadership values is rooted in philosophy; several scholars working in this tradition have made remarkable contributions to our understanding and classification of values. More recently, the focus has been on the connection between leadership values and practices, including the impact of values on decision-making and the resolution of value conflicts. Keeping in mind all of these ideas from the literature helps us better understand what the principals in this study had to say not only about their own leadership values, but also about tensions related to values and practices.
Finally, the literature concerning the language of leadership offers an important frame for the analysis of how principals in this study talked about their leadership values and practices. In this emerging area of interest in educational administration, scholars have explored the power of talk to influence others, the different settings in which leaders talk, the relationship between language and relationships, and the various ways in which leaders use metaphors to achieve different purposes and reveal deeper meanings. They have demonstrated a clear connection between the words leaders use and the actions they take; some (see Lowenhaupt, 2014) have even argued that language is practice. Their contributions inform the analysis of this study’s findings and lead to a deeper understanding of how the principals perceived themselves, their practices, their values, and even the contexts in which they lead.

Before using the literature that was explored in this chapter to analyze the findings of this study, it is first necessary to explain the study’s methodology; this is the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter describes the study’s research methodology, including its theoretical framework, conceptual framework, sample and sampling, research instruments, data analysis and ethical considerations.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is best understood by taking a closer look at these four words or phrases found in the central research question: *talk about, understand, leadership practices* and *leadership values*.

Since one of the primary goals of this study was to gain insight into how principals talk about leadership, it was logical to employ a qualitative approach. Taking into consideration the study’s small-scale nature, the fact that it aimed to explore experiences and perceptions which are more easily accessed through interviews rather than surveys, and the reality that most principals of independent schools have very hectic schedules that allow little time for the completion of surveys, I decided not to use any quantitative approaches. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2013), qualitative approaches to research “focus on phenomena that occur in natural settings – that is, in the ‘real world’” and “they involve capturing and studying the complexity of those phenomena” (p. 139). Qualitative researchers thus “recognize that the issue they are studying has many dimensions and layers, and they try to portray it in its multifaceted form” (Leedy and Ormrod, 2013, p. 139). The complex phenomenon on which this study was focused was how principals in the decidedly ‘real-world’ settings of independent schools in Ontario experience and understand leadership; Chapters Four and Five present the findings of the study in terms of the principals’ personal reflections on and public dimensions of their leadership. Merriam (2009) further notes that qualitative research is concerned with “understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what
meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p.5). This qualitative study pays particular attention to the language the principals used to describe their experiences and the meaning they assigned to them.

My thinking about how the principals talk about their leadership values and practices was influenced not only by my experience as a longtime teacher of rhetoric, but also by the work of several scholars who have drawn attention to the importance of language in the study of leadership, such as Gronn (1983), Bredeson (1985), Bogotch and Roy (1994), Kelchtermans, Piot, and Ballet (2011), Lowenhaupt (2014), Newberry and Richardson (2015), Schechter and Firuz (2015). Informed by these works and intending to focus on different elements of the principals’ talk, including their diction and use of figurative language, I approached the topic thinking not only about what the principals might have to say, but also about how they might say it.

Another primary goal of this study, as reflected in the central research question, was to gain insight into how principals understand their leadership values and practices. This emphasis on understanding places the study in what Peshkin (1993) calls the ‘interpretation’ category of analysis in qualitative research, with sub-categories of outcomes that “explain or create generalizations, develop new concepts, elaborate existing concepts, provide insights, clarify complexity, and develop theory” (p. 25). The analysis of findings in Chapters 4 and 5, as well as the conclusions offered in Chapter 6, certainly aim to explain defining elements of the independent-school principalship in general terms, to elaborate on the concepts of leadership practices and values, to provide insights that add to the understanding of independent-school leadership, and to clarify the complexity of the most-senior administrative role in independent schools. According to Merriam (2009), at its core, interpretative research “assumes that reality is socially constructed” (p.8) and that “there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single
event” (p. 8). The comparison and contrast of principals’ accounts offered in Chapters 4 and 5 helps highlight this idea of multiple, socially-constructed realities.

The interview questions for this study invited the principals to share their thought processes as they talked about their leadership practices and values (see Appendices F and G). This attention to the principals’ thinking was influenced by the work of several scholars (Begley, 1996; Devos & Bouckenooghe, 2009; Greenfield, 1995; Leithwood, 1995) on cognitive perspectives on leadership. According to Leithwood (1995), “[a] cognitive perspective conceptualizes school leaders as problem-finders and problem-solvers with varying levels of expertise” (p. 118). Of particular relevance for this study is Leithwood’s (1995) assertion that “leadership practices are a direct product of leaders’ Internal Processes which determine the leaders’ choices of overt behavior” (p. 117, emphasis in the original). Devos and Bouckenooghe (2009) similarly note that “insight into principal’s [sic] thinking processes will advance our understanding of how and why they take action” (p. 175) and conclude that “what principals think determines what they do” (p. 192). Although a cognitive perspective does not dominate this study, since, as Leithwood (1995) notes, “[s]uch inquiry demands a thorough grounding in the cognitive sciences” (p. 123) and I do not possess such background knowledge, some attention is paid to how the principals think about their practices and values.

My thinking about leadership practices has developed through various encounters with the relevant literature. When I explored the topic of a principal’s roles and responsibilities during a time of leadership transition, Ryan (2005) helped me connect the different views on leadership to the notion of leadership practices by noting that “[i]f the prevailing view is that leadership resides within individuals, then it will be individual people who will exercise their power to influence practice” (p. 22). My understanding of how educational leaders perceive their roles in bringing about change was furthered not only by the work of Fullan (2001, 2003,
2011), but also by that of Leithwood and Duke (1999), who helped me understand six particular ways of enacting leadership and introduced me to the idea that these different approaches “offer eclectic and overlapping perspective on...how leadership manifests itself in practice” (p. 55). At this same point, I encountered Getzels and Guba’s (1957) work concerning role theory, but I found Ryan’s (2007) concept of identity a far less limiting way to think about leadership practice and a way that resonated with my own observations as an educator. Finally, The Ontario Leadership Framework [OLF] (Leithwood 2012), a work with a provincial focus that was mentioned to me by both professors and school leaders, also proved to be very influential on my thinking. The OLF clarified for me the difference between practices and competencies, and emphasized the idea that leadership practices are groups of activities bounded by context.

This progression in my thinking about leadership practices was complemented by a similar development regarding leadership values. In reading Values and Educational Leadership, edited by Begley (1999), I was able to clarify some of the terms in this field of study, discern different perspectives, and gain a better understanding of the complex relationship between leadership and values. Noticing that both Duke and Leithwood were contributors to the volume, I was also able to see a connection between the study of leadership values and moral leadership, one of Leithwood and Duke’s (1999) six approaches to leadership, which, in turn, got me thinking more and more about possible links between what formal school leaders do and what they believe.

Begley’s (1999) definition of values as “those conceptions of the desirable which motivate individuals and collective groups to act in particular ways to achieve particular ends” (p. 237) manages to incorporate the ideas of Hodgkinson and Willower in a way that appeals more to practitioners rather than philosophers, and it proved to be particularly influential on my thinking about leadership values. Indeed, Begley (2008) himself notes the following:

Practitioners tend to be attracted to practicality and relevance. Philosophically based discussions about ethics and valuation processes by their nature often are not very appealing in terms of relevance because of the context-stripped manner in which they are often portrayed. (p. 33)

As I thought through the connection between values and practices, Begley’s (2001) assertion that “[a]ll leaders consciously or unconsciously employ values as guides in interpreting situations and suggesting appropriate administrative action” (p. 364) and his claim that a leader’s values can be derived “from both within the individual’s psychology as well as from the individual’s interaction with collective groups, organizations and societies” (p. 356) were instructive. Begley and Leithwood (1990) summarize the importance of thinking about values in connection with practices with this remark:

A theoretical perspective that accommodates the existence of values as influences on administrative practice….contributes to a more comprehensive description of the influences on principals’ administrative actions by adding the internal mental processes of the individual to the more familiar list of contextual and process factors usually addressed by research. (p. 338)

**Conceptual Framework**

Before beginning data collection, I was thinking about my topic in terms of the central component parts of leadership practices and leadership values, and curious about potential
relationships between these two parts, estimating that they may affect or be affected by one another, and that by understanding each one a deeper understanding of independent-school leadership in Ontario might be reached. Informed by the works of scholars as described above, I suggested that possible terms for data analysis of participants’ leadership practices might include such terms as *improving instruction* and *building relationships*, while possible terms for analysis of leadership values might include such terms as *respect* and *excellence*. The initial conceptual framework is provided below.

**Figure 1.** Initial conceptual framework
Once the data had been collected and analyzed, I realized that the conceptual framework for the study needed to change, in order to reflect the insights and themes that emerged from the data. In particular, the data revealed the importance of the principals’ talk, and their talk about both their leadership values and practices and those of the schools they lead, so the central component parts were revised to ‘talk about leadership and school practices’ and ‘talk about leadership and school values’. Terms for data analysis of leadership and school practices were revised to reflect those actually used by participants, such as being visible and making final decisions for leadership practices, and rituals and Board practices for school practices; interestingly, some of the terms suggested for leadership practices in the initial framework, such as building relationships, were confirmed in the data. Terms for data analysis of leadership and school values were revised to reflect the varied ways in which participants spoke about leadership values, including using such terms as honesty and people, and the most common school values mentioned, including terms like knowledge and community; some of the terms suggested for leadership values in the initial framework, such as respect, were found to be school values rather than participants’ leadership values. The estimated relationship between the two main component parts was confirmed, and both alignments and tensions were found when the participants spoke about leadership and school practices in relation to leadership and school values. The overall understanding that emerged from the data was revised to an ‘understanding of independent-school principalship in Ontario’, in order to differentiate the principalship from other forms of leadership in independent schools. Finally, the conceptual framework was revised to reflect the two distinct layers of understanding identified through the process of analysis: private reflections and public dimensions. The revised conceptual framework is provided below.
Figure 2. Revised conceptual framework
Sample, Sampling and Recruitment

In order to develop the rapport necessary to obtain in-depth interviews with independent-school principals about their leadership practices and values, I set out to work with a small sample of 6-9 principals in Ontario. According to CIS Ontario (2013c), there are 47 independent schools in the province of Ontario. Since it did not include the principal of the independent school where I work, the proposed sample size thus constituted approximately 13-20% of the total population.

I selected participants to be recruited according to specific criteria, including level of formal leadership, type of school, gender, length of experience and institutional affiliations. I sought out principals only, from a mix of single-gender and co-educational independent schools. Since all contact was to be made and all interviews to be completed in English, I limited participants to be recruited to principals of schools in which English was the language of instruction. In order to include principals of schools that offered instruction at a wide range of different grade levels, I sought out principals of schools that offer instruction from Kindergarten or grade 1 to grade 12. Since the focus of the study was on principals of independent schools in the province of Ontario, I required that all participant schools be members of the Conference of Independent Schools of Ontario, but not necessarily Canadian Accredited Independent Schools, the national membership organization. In order to obtain a wide range of responses and perceptions from participants, I aimed to recruit principals that represented both genders and different lengths of experience; however, since information about experience could not be gathered until the later interview stage of the research process, during the recruitment process I simply required participants to have been in their roles as principal for at least one year, in order to provide sufficient experiences upon which to reflect. Finally, in order to explore the study’s topic in a range of contexts, I aimed to include principals from schools that had a range of
institutional affiliations, but, due to potential issues of access, I limited my potential sample to principals of Christian, inter-denominational, non-faith-based or university-affiliated independent schools.

To determine my sample, I used purposeful snowball sampling, beginning with recommendations of schools from a trusted colleague and former principal of an independent school; I only asked this individual for the names of possible participant schools, not specific information about the principals of those schools. Once I obtained those recommendations of schools, I either contacted the school directly to obtain the principal’s school email address, or accessed that information through the school’s public website. At that point in the process, I began collecting, storing securely and keeping confidential some data about possible candidates for participation, using my criteria for selection; for example, I recorded in a simple Word table the possible candidate’s name, professional contact information, his or her level of leadership, his or her gender, and the type of school he or she leads, including the grades of instruction and institutional affiliation, if that information was indicated on the school website. Although I hoped that the participants of my study would represent various lengths of experience as administrators and teachers, this information was gathered during a later stage of the project, not during the recruitment process, and explored during the interviews. I also checked on the website for the Conference of Independent Schools whether or not the recommended school was a member school and then recorded that information in my secure and confidential Word table.

Using my University of Toronto email account, I then contacted possible participants via e-mail at their school e-mail addresses (see Appendix A for the E-mail Introduction), to inform them about my study, outline the criteria for selection, ask them to consider whether or not they meet the stated selection criteria, and ask if they were interested in meeting in person within the next 2 weeks to receive further information about the study (see Appendices E and E, Section A),
so that they could decide whether or not they wished to participate and complete the consent form (see Appendix E, Section A, Part 1). In this initial email communication, I also asked possible candidates for participation to indicate in their reply how long they had been in their current role at their school (see Appendix A for the Email Introduction); I then added this information to the Word table of data concerning possible candidates for participation and stored it securely and confidentially throughout the research process. If the principal indicated in his or her email reply that he or she was interested in learning more about the study and/or was interested in participating in it, I sent a follow-up e-mail response (Appendix B, Option 1). When we met in person, I explained orally the documents I was providing, asked each possible participant to review the documents carefully, and then asked him or her to contact me via e-mail within one week to ask any questions he or she may have had and to confirm or refuse participation in the study. If the possible participant confirmed his or her participation in an e-mail, I then sent a second follow-up e-mail response from my University of Toronto e-mail account (see Appendix C) in order to arrange a time to pick up the signed consent form and any hard copies of school documents, and offer several options for the date and time of Interview #1 of 2, which was scheduled for a time and place deemed mutually convenient for both the researcher and the participant.

I was prepared that if a participant recommended other principals for my study, I would only ask for the names and professional contact information available publically on the schools’ websites, rather than asking the participant to disclose any further information about others; it turned out that no participant offered such recommendations. I was also prepared that if a possible participant did not wish to participate in the study, I would send a follow-up email response (see Appendix B, Option 2) from my University of Toronto e-mail account to ask if he or she could recommend another independent-school principal for the study by providing only
the name of the principal and his or her professional contact information that is available
publically on the school’s website, rather than by providing any further information about others;
it turned out that I received no such replies and therefore did not need to send out the request for
recommendations. A total of 10 possible participants were contacted and 7 replies indicating an
interest in participation were received promptly; to the remaining 3 possible participants, I sent
an e-mail reminder (see Appendix D) from my University of Toronto e-mail account when I did
not hear back within 1 week of sending my initial e-mail introduction, but no replies to that e-
mail reminder were received. All contact with possible participants was conducted in English.

The final sample for this study was thus 7 participants, representing approximately 15%
of the total population. Although it may seem small, this sample size reflects the smaller size of
the independent education sector in comparison to the public education sector, was influenced by
issues of access to principals of independent schools, allowed for reasonable coverage of the
phenomenon of how principals in independent schools in Ontario experience and understand
leadership, and ensured manageability, since there are significant distances between many of the
independent schools in the province. The final sample consisted of 2 principals from girls’
schools, 2 principals from boys’ schools, and 3 principals from co-educational schools in both
urban and suburban locations, thereby achieving a relatively balanced distribution across single-
gender and co-educational institutions.

**Research Instruments**

My primary research instrument for this study was the interview. Merriam (2009) notes
the following about the use of the interview: “Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe
behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to
interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate” (p. 88). I
interviewed 7 principals from 7 independent schools in Ontario. I conducted 2 interviews of
approximately 60-90 minutes each with each principal. Using interview guides (see Appendices F and G), I asked a variety of semi-structured and open-ended questions. According to Merriam (2009), in semi-structured interviews, “either all of the questions are more flexibly worded or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions” (p. 90). Semi-structured questions in the interviews for this study addressed such topics as stated school values and professional background, while open-ended questions were used to gain an understanding of the principals’ leadership practices and values, and to formulate questions for later interviews. With the participants’ permission, all interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder; I also took handwritten notes during the interviews. Interviews were conducted at times and places deemed mutually convenient for the researcher and the participant; if a participant felt more comfortable meeting at an off-site location, away from his or her school, that request was accommodated.

In addition to interviews, I also gathered data from a variety of school documents, available publically from the Admissions or Advancement department of each participant’s school, or through the school’s website. Merriam (2009) notes that data from documents can “furnish descriptive information, verify emerging hypotheses, advance new categories and hypotheses, offer historical understanding, [and] track change and development” (p. 155). As I sought a deeper understanding of the school context in which the principals live and lead on a daily basis, I analyzed each school’s current prospectus, as well as publications, like school magazines, distributed to alumni, parents and faculty within the last two years. Careful attention was paid to the schools’ mission statements, whether available in print or on the school’s Web page. Any documents written by the principals themselves, whether for print or electronic publication, including publically-available blog entries, were also considered as potential sources of data, although I determined that I would not use direct quotations from any such sources, in order to keep the identity of participants confidential.
I chose not to use observations, even though they constitute a common source of data in qualitative studies, because the primary purpose of this study was to understand and describe how the principals understand and talk about leadership and themselves as leaders. Thus, their perception and description of their own practices was more relevant than the perception of their practices I might have achieved through observation. With its focus on the principals’ reflections and re-tellings, this study really did not call for first-hand observations of activities or events. Additionally, I anticipated potential issues of access when attempting to observe independent-school principals as they went about their daily activities.

**Data Collection**

There were four distinct phases of data collection for this study. In the first, before I met with each participant for the first interview, but after I obtained informed consent, I analyzed the school documents described above and made typed or hand-written notes about the schools’ mission statements, stated values and any reflections on practice written by the principals themselves. These notes about school documents helped me better understand the participants and their schools in advance of the interviews, but they were not used in the final report, since such details would not only risk participants’ anonymity, but also fail to meet the primary goal of the study, which was to provide insight into the leaders of independent schools, not their particular organizations. In the second phase of data collection, I met with each participant at a time and place deemed mutually convenient for both the researcher and the participant for a 60-minute interview, consisting of mostly semi-structured questions. Following this first interview, within approximately 2 weeks, I sent, via e-mail from my University of Toronto e-mail account, key quotations and any initial themes I saw emerging from the transcript. Then, in the third phase of data collection, within approximately 4 weeks of the first interview, I contacted each participant either in person, by phone or via email to provide him or her with the opportunity to
clarify his or her comments and discuss possible themes to be explored in the next interview. In
the fourth and final phase of data collection, which occurred approximately 8 weeks after the
first interview, I met with each participant for a second 60-90-minute interview, in which we
explored more open-ended questions concerning the leader’s experiences, perceptions and
thoughts. I used participants’ responses to certain questions in the first interview to formulate
questions for the second interview (see Appendix G for examples of questions from the second
interview guide).

Transcription and Analysis of Data

I transcribed all interviews verbatim using Microsoft Word and checked the transcripts
repeatedly against the digital voice recordings for accuracy. Due to the small size of this study, I
chose not to use programs like N-VIVO or Express Scribe in order to identify and label key
themes that emerged from the data; instead, I colour-coded emerging themes on the transcripts
using Microsoft Word.

Throughout the data analysis stage of the research, my goal was to identify and label key
themes that emerged from participants’ responses. My strategies for data analysis relied on
induction and comparison, as might be expected for a qualitative study. Indeed, Merriam (2009)
asserts that “all qualitative data analysis is primarily *inductive* and *comparative*” (p. 175,
emphasis in the original). Qualitative researchers who use inductive reasoning “observe a
sample and then draw conclusions about the population from which the sample has been taken”
(Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p. 19). My analysis was also informed by my knowledge of the
relevant literature. As I reviewed the data, I looked for key themes from the relevant literature
concerning leadership practices and associated sub-themes, and then did the same for key themes
relating to leadership values and associated sub-themes in order to make sense of how the
principals articulated their practices and values. I also employed the constant comparative
method, introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and described by Merriam (2009) as a process in which “[t]he researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview…and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set” (pp. 199-200). In order to understand how the leaders tell their stories of lived leadership experience, I paid particular attention to the words used by the participants. Such an approach is characteristic of discourse analysis, linguistic analysis or narrative analysis, in which “[e]mphasis is on the stories people tell and on how these stories are communicated – on the language used to tell the stories” (Merriam, 2009, p. 202). I noticed interesting patterns emerging with regard to the grammatical persons, moods, tones, repeated words, and figures of speech used by participants. As I reviewed the data over and over again, I began using bold font to highlight quotations in the transcripts I thought might be included in the final report as illustrative vignettes. Rather than ignoring them, I chose to use bold font to highlight quotations that disconfirmed a general pattern, so that I might include and analyze them in the final report; several such quotations are included in the findings.

Categorizing is an essential stage of data analysis. According to Merriam (2009), “Devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study’s purpose, the investigator’s orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves” (pp. 183-184). Although there are different approaches to categorizing data, “The most common situation is when the investigator comes up with terms, concepts, and categories that reflect what he or she sees in the data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 184); this was indeed the situation in which I found myself. At first, I used these five categories: views on education and schooling; relationship between experience and practice; leadership practices; school and leadership values; talk about leadership. I stayed open to emergent categories and, indeed, I found myself adding to and revising these initial categories. Merriam
(2009) suggests keeping the purpose of the study in mind throughout the process of categorizing and laying out the categories in a chart or table (p. 187). I used a similar strategy, preparing what I called a ‘Working Outline’ for the findings section of the report as I worked through the process of data analysis. This outline not only included the categories and sub-categories I came up with as I reviewed the data, but also matched the study’s central research question and sub-questions to particular categories. For example, the sub-questions, What do [principals of independent schools in Ontario] perceive to be their leadership values? and What alignments and/or tensions appear to exist between their leadership values, practices and stated school values? were matched with the fourth main category, “School and Leadership Values”.

It soon became clear to me that the third category, leadership practices, was, by far, the longest section, with no fewer than 9 sub-categories. Merriam (2009) notes that “[a] large number of categories is likely to reflect an analysis too lodged in concrete description” (p. 187); indeed, in my zeal to answer the research questions of the study, I had gone too far into description and lost the interpretive thread of my data analysis. In order to achieve a more meaningful explanation of how the principals understood and talked about leadership practices and values, I reviewed the data very carefully and noticed two distinct layers in the principals’ understanding of their experience. I decided to call these layers ‘private reflections’ and ‘public dimensions’ and to divide my findings and analysis into two separate chapters. I then reorganized the categories and sub-categories I had previously determined into the structure that now exists for Chapters 4 and 5. Throughout the process of categorization, it became clear to me that the findings of my report would need to be organized according to theme, rather than by individual, in order to answer the central research question and achieve the intended description and interpretation of the experience of independent-school principalship.
Ethical Considerations

The personal information about possible participant candidates that was collected during the recruitment process, stored securely and kept confidential for the entire research process included: name, current title, school e-mail address and gender. The personal information that was collected from participants during the recruitment process, stored securely and kept confidential for the entire research process included: name, current title, number of years in current role, school e-mail address and gender. Information about number of years of experience as an administrator and teacher was gathered during the later interview stage of the research project. All personal data concerning potential participant candidates and participants was stored on an encrypted data key.

Before beginning data collection, I obtained informed consent from all participants. I met each participant in person to provide an information letter, further information about the study, and a consent form (see Appendices E; E, Section A; E, Section A, Part 1) before scheduling or conducting any interviews. These documents were presented on OISE/UT letterhead and provided contact information for both me and my supervisor. I explained these documents orally to each participant, asked each participant to review them carefully, and offered the opportunity for him or her to ask any questions regarding the content of the documents and/or study before he or she signed the consent form.

The information letter (see Appendix E) explained that participation was completely voluntary and that participants were free to withdraw at any time. It also identified the slight risk that, due to the small size of the independent-school community in Ontario, participants may be recognized by others in the final report, and explained that, in order to minimize that risk, in all transcripts and the final report, names and identifying information about participants and their schools would be changed. The information letter also provided the title and purpose of the
study, stated the inclusion criteria for participants, and described participants’ part in the research, as well as the details concerning the protection, storage and final disposal of data. It emphasized that interviews would be conducted at a time and place deemed mutually convenient for the participant and the researcher, and that requests for interviews outside the workplace and regular work hours would be accommodated. The information letter also highlighted possible benefits that participants and the scholarly community may derive from participants’ participation in the study. At the end of the information letter, participants were provided with contact information not only for me and my supervisor, but also for the University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics, should they have any questions, complaints or concerns related to their participation in the study. Participants kept a copy of the information letter for their records.

The additional information page (see Appendix E, Section A) informed participants that they had the option to not answer any interview questions about which they felt uncomfortable and that at no time would value judgments be placed on their responses. It highlighted examples of questions I had in mind for the first interview, described the storage of and access to the data collected, and the timing for the destruction of the data collected. The additional information page also informed participants that they could request a copy of the transcripts of one or both of their interviews (to be sent via email after the interview had been completed and transcribed) by checking the appropriate boxes on the next page, and/or that sections be deleted from the transcripts, or that the entire transcript be destroyed, should the participant choose to withdraw from the study at any time. I also indicated in this additional information that, if a participant wished, I would share major aspects of my preliminary analysis by e-mailing key ideas and offering availability to meet to discuss the findings.
The consent form (see Appendix E, Section A, Part 1) asked participants to acknowledge that they had read and understood the documents provided to them, the conditions of the study, and the nature and limitations of the research. There were places on the consent form for participants to make any exceptions or stipulations regarding their participation, to consent to having their interviews audio-taped and transcribed, to request copies of the transcripts of the interviews, and to request a copy of the final research report. Participants returned one signed copy to me and kept one signed copy for their reference. At the first interview with each participant, I reminded the participant of the details of the consent and answered any questions he or she had prior to beginning the interview.

Formal consent was not sought from the participants’ schools for this study, as I was not seeking assistance from the schools or their Boards of Governors. I was prepared that, in the very unlikely instance that a possible participant indicated that he or she was not able to or did not wish to participate without the consent of the Board of Governors, I would suggest that the possible participant provide the Chair of the Board of Governors with the information documents (see Appendices E; E, Section A; E, Section A, Part 1) for his or her review and then I would offer to meet with the Chair of the Board of Governors in person to answer any further questions he or she may have about the nature of my research or the possible participant’s involvement in my study; such a situation did not arise.

I kept specific details about my study confidential, including personal information about possible participant candidates and their schools, as well as personal information about participants and their schools; any electronic documents I created that contained this information (e.g. a Word table) were stored on an encrypted data key. I offered all participants the option of being interviewed outside their schools and before or after regular work hours. All school documents and my typed or hand-written notes about those documents were stored under lock.
and key in my office; they will be kept in this way for a two-year period after the completion of
the study, after which time they will be properly destroyed and disposed; only I ever had access
to the school documents and my notes about them, and the only person with whom I shared this
information was my supervisor. The digital recordings of all interviews were stored on an
encrypted data key. Once the digital recordings of the interviews were transcribed, the original
or raw data, including any hand-written notes taken during the interviews, was stored under lock
and key in my home office; this data will be kept in this way for a two-year period after the
completion of the study and disposed of in the manner described above. Only I ever had access
to this raw data and the only person with whom I shared this information was my supervisor. In
the transcripts, names and other identifying information about participants and their
organizations were systematically changed. Identifying codes that could connect participants or
their organizations with the changed names were also kept under lock and key in the place
designated above; they will be kept for a two-year period after the completion of the study and
disposed of in the manner described above. In the transcripts, names and identifying information
about participants and their organizations were changed, in order to ensure as much
confidentiality and anonymity as possible; in the final report, no names or identifying
information about participants and their organizations were used. Although pseudonyms were
used during both transcription and analysis of data, they were replaced in the final report with a
labeling system (‘Principals A-G’) and both male and female pronouns were intentionally
avoided to ensure that the participants’ genders could not be identified in the report; taking such
measures to protect participants’ identities seemed necessary, given the small network of
independent-school principals in the province, in which individuals are well known to one
another. If a participant wished to receive a copy of the final research report, his or her contact
information was kept separate from the data collected.
Summary

This chapter described the research methodology of the study. A justification for using a qualitative, rather than quantitative or mixed-method, approach was provided, and the study was categorized as interpretive. The influence of work concerning language and leadership was acknowledged, as was that of work concerning cognitive perspectives on leadership, although it was noted that a cognitive perspective does not dominate this thesis. A description of my encounters with literature about leadership practices was provided to explain how I have come to understand leadership practices in terms of roles, responsibilities, approaches or styles, identities, and competencies. The influence of the work of leading scholars in the field of values and educational administration was described and the origin of my thinking about possible connections between leadership practices and values was also explained. Both the initial and the revised conceptual frameworks for the study were provided and the process of moving from one to the other was outlined.

Also in this chapter, the research sample was defined, and both the sampling method and recruitment process were described. At that point in the chapter, seven of the nine appendices (A-E, Section A, Part 1) were introduced. In the description of research instruments, the other two appendices (F, G) were introduced; also in that section, the primary research instrument, the interview, was described in detail and a justification for not using observations was provided. The remaining sections of the chapter described the four phases of data collection, the processes for transcription and analysis of data, and the ethical considerations of the study. The methodology explained in this chapter provides the foundation for the findings and analysis that will be provided in the next two chapters.
Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis – Personal Reflections on Independent-School Principalship

“People think this is an easy job – or the toughest job – but you don’t understand until you live it and know.” (Principal C)

In this chapter, data collected from the interviews are presented in terms of the participants’ personal reflections on independent-school principalship. Presenting these personal reflections before exploring the public dimensions of the principals’ experiences not only emphasizes the idea that the participants are individuals first and principals second, but also lays the foundation for a deeper understanding of the commentary they provide later on their more public leadership practices. The word ‘personal’ does not imply that anything private or secretive was revealed; it simply suggests that when given the time to pause, reflect and talk about their thoughts and feelings, the participants shared critiques, observations and insights, drawn from a wealth of experience and knowledge, that can help us better understand the people behind the persona of ‘principal’. In this way, the current chapter aligns with recent work (see for example Devos & Bouckenooghe, 2009; Kelchtermans et al., 2011) that has paid attention to what principals think and feel.

There are five main sections to this chapter: on leadership and being a principal; on independent schools; on lessons learned from experience; on leadership values; and, on the importance of learning and reflecting. These sections reflect the strongest and most consistent themes that emerged from the data regarding the principals’ personal reflections on independent-school principalship; collectively, they address the central research question and one of the three sub-questions of the study: How do principals of independent schools in Ontario understand and talk about their leadership values and practices?; What do they perceive to be their leadership values? Since the primary goal of the study was to better understand how the
principals understood and talked about their values and practices, their own words form the foundation of all sections of this chapter. Although, as Principal C notes above, we may never truly understand the experience of independent-school principalship if or until we serve in the role, listening to what these principals have to say about it is certainly a step in the right direction.

**On Leadership and Being a Principal**

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the fact that they hold the most senior leadership positions in their schools, participants had a lot to say about leadership and being a principal. In their interviews, they reflected carefully on the meaning of leadership and identified several qualities that they saw as essential for effective leadership. In some cases, the principals used terms familiar from the literature to convey their knowledge of leadership. For example, when Principal C said, “I am a servant of many, many masters”, Principal A reflected, “I think that being a leader in a school is about leader as servant, about helping other people”, and Principal D explained, “There’s a significant degree of servant leadership to how I see things, but it’s also about shared leadership”, they were all reflecting their knowledge of both servant leadership (see Greenleaf, 1977; Murphy & Beck, 1994; Smith, Montagno & Kuzmenko, 2004) and distributed leadership (see Crawford, 2012; Flessa, 2009; Gronn, 2008, 2009; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, & Hopkins, 2007; Spillane, 2005, 2006, 2009; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Principal G noted that as an educational leader, “you have to tweak your approach based on the situation and the individuals you are working with”; this can be seen as a reflection of knowledge of contingent leadership, described by Leithwood and Duke (1999) as an approach in which the focus is on “how leaders respond to the unique organizational circumstances or problems that they face as a consequence” (p. 54, emphasis in the original). In his work on cognitive perspectives on leadership, Leithwood (1995) clarifies the link between
contingent leadership and a leader’s thought processes with this remark: “While to be effective leaders’ overt behaviors may have to vary in response to different organizational circumstances, the thinking which gives rise to these different behaviors remains stable” (p. 120). Warwas (2015) recently presented an “explanatory model of values-based contingency leadership” (p. 326) that acknowledges the influence of values on leaders’ decisions and responses.

Other participants described leadership more generally, without using formal terminology. Principal E admitted the following:

If people ask me, “What’s leadership?” I kind of feel like a fish out of water, with my mouth gaping open. So, for me, that’s a struggle: understanding leadership. And it’s something that I keep learning and keep reading about, because I want to get better.

Principal E’s ‘struggle’ reflects the difficulty of scholars themselves to define leadership clearly and consistently, as discussed earlier in the literature review. Principal E later described leadership as being about relationships, action and character.

A sentiment shared by three of the seven participants was that educational leaders need to be passionate about their work. As Principal B put it, “People look to the leader in the place to be energetic, be enthusiastic, and really love the place and love what they do”. Principal E agreed, stating that part of the “fundamental job” is “creating a sense of passion”. In the following remark, Principal D noted that passion has an even greater significance in an independent-school environment: “Part of leadership is having the passion to be a leader not just within the walls of your institution, but also at the fundraisers and all those things”. In his study of successful principals in England, Day (2005) acknowledged the importance of acting with passion (p. 580). Parylo, Zepeda and Bengston (2013) similarly found that “[p]assion for teaching and education” (p. 575) was a common characteristic of the eleven acting principals they studied in the southeastern United States. Finally, Leithwood (2005) identified “a
tremendous passion and enthusiasm for the education of children” (p. 622) as one of the internal factors of successful educational leaders.

Two participants discussed leadership in relation to management. For instance, Principal A had this to say: “I suppose, if you look at [being an independent-school principal] in terms of management, lots of people go on managing schools long after they have lost the passion for it; that just happens. Management might be possible, but not leadership”. Principal C offered this view on management and leadership:

I think the biggest role for a leader is to manage people. By management, I don’t mean direct – although that may be part of it. When you are managing a group of people, what you are doing is understanding what their individual and group needs are, how you can work to facilitate their growth, and how you can find the ways to be able to provide those opportunities for them.

Principal C’s view reflects the murkiness of the ongoing debate about leadership versus management, as described earlier in the literature review. Bolman and Deal (1994a) remind us that “[t]he two concepts are not mutually exclusive, good leaders can be good managers – or vice versa” (p. 79).

Finally, three participants shared their views on what they saw as the ‘realities’ of educational leadership. Principal D remarked that “if leaders in general think they have it all figured out and they are not nervous about anything, they should be writing books or something; it’s natural to be a little nervous or worried about challenges and responses”. Principal C said this: “You know, people will say leadership is incredibly lonely. Well, it is incredibly lonely, because you can’t be ‘buddy-buddy’ with anybody”. This same sentiment was echoed by Principal A, who remarked that educational leaders “have to listen to everyone and trust very few”. Overall, through their comments, the principals in this study suggested that although
leadership is somewhat difficult to define, it is linked to service, passion, management, nervousness, and loneliness.  

In addition to leadership, the principals also shared candid remarks about what it is like to be a principal. Their comments focused not only on the title and role of ‘principal’, but also on the challenges and rewards associated with the position. According to Devos and Bouckenooghe (2009), “[r]ole conceptions…direct actions, strategies, and routine behaviors” (p. 177). Two participants had something to say about the title and role of ‘principal’, or ‘Head of School’, as it is often referred to in independent schools. Principal D noted that the title ‘Head of School’ implies educational expertise, while Principal B compared Heads of School to CEOs of corporations.  

Although a detailed study of role theory is beyond the scope of this study, it is worth noting that the connection between role and educational administration dates back to the work of Getzels and Guba (1957), who studied social behaviour and the administrative process. Getzels and Guba (1957) identified role as “the most important subunit of the institution” and as “the structural element defining the behaviour of the role incumbents or actors” (p. 426). Several studies of moral leadership and leadership values include discussions of roles. For example, in his analysis of values in educational leadership, Hodgkinson (1991) considers the formal roles and implied power structures in education (see Fig. 1, p. 39). In his study of the leadership values of hope, trust, piety and civility, Sergiovanni (2005) devotes considerable attention to the roles, role relationships and role sets he sees linking administrators, teachers, parents and students. He claims that “roles cannot meaningfully exist without being linked to other roles” (Sergiovanni, 2005, p. 116). Getzels and Guba (1957) noted that an individual who fills a particular role may change, but the role does not: “[a]n individual stamps the particular role he fills with the unique style of his own characteristic pattern of expressive behaviour” (p. 427).
This idea came through in the comments Principal F and Principal B made about the level of formality appropriate for the role and title of principal. Here’s how Principal F saw it:

I’ve been in some schools where the Head is wearing a funny tie and he’s high-fiving everybody and everything’s “awesome”. I think we have to remember that they are kids and they’re different from us. I don’t think that means that you have to be distant, but I do think there can be a falseness around that sometimes.

Principal B spoke about the same idea quite differently:

I think that in my first year as Head of School, I kind of tried to be something that I wasn’t. I’m not pretentious at all, I don’t think, and I don’t take myself too seriously.

But, there was something in the office, I think, that when I was first Head of School, I felt like I needed to behave a certain way. But, you don’t, you really don’t.

According to Devos and Bouckenooghe (2009), “[t]he way principals conceive their roles is influenced by their expertise on leadership and their beliefs on what is central in their leader role” (p. 175). Despite holding the same administrative position, the different experience and knowledge of Principals B and F (to be explored in subsequent sections) resulted in two very different opinions about what the role and title of principal imply.

Two of the principals cautioned about the dangers inherent in placing too much emphasis on the title of ‘Head of School’. Principal D best captured this notion in the following remark: “I think what I realized through…experience is that it doesn’t matter what the title is; if you are authentic and you are who you are, people will respond”. This remark not only suggests Principal D’s affinity for authentic leadership (see Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Begley 2001, 2006; Duignan & Bhindi, 1997), but also echoes Murphy and Beck’s (1994) insistence that “[p]rincipals must find their authority in their personal, interpersonal, and professional competencies, not in formal positions” (p. 15).
With regard to the job of being the principal of an independent school, participants offered a range of insights. After describing the unpredictable nature of many days at school, Principal F concluded, “It’s a really interesting job – and quite an odd one, in many ways”.

Principal A shared this thought about how being an independent-school principal has changed over time:

The job used to be the First Among Equals; the best Boarding Housemaster would become the Head of School – he would make the jump up. Now, it is completely, qualitatively different. It’s only gotten more complicated. Now it’s about strategic decision-making, management and financial acumen.

This comment draws attention to the increasing complexity of an independent-school principal’s daily tasks, reflecting the findings of scholars like Bredeson (1985), as well as Murphy and Hallinger (1992), about the complexity of the principalship in general.

Two principals divided their job into three particular components; for Principal E, those three parts were “strategy, financial well-being and leadership succession”, while for Principal C it was about “keeping the big, over-arching things on the move; managing the day-to-day things that will bubble in…; and keeping myself sane”. The first two parts of this second description were echoed and expanded upon by Principal A in this remark:

I would just like to say something about the role of the independent-school principal. You are balancing two fundamentally competing priorities, in terms of your time, your energy, and your outlook: the day-to-day running of the school and the year-to-year future of the school. You can never quite get it right, because you won’t be able to provide for the future of the school if you have no empirical, tangible sense of what’s going on “on the ground” with the teachers and students….On the other hand – and I think this is the easier trap to fall into – if you spend all of your time helping out and
making sure that everything is happening, you’re just not in a position to judge what will happen five or seven years later.

Principal A’s comment echoes, in part, the finding of Kane and Mason (1992) that independent-school principals in New York City “mentioned the importance of keeping the big picture in mind at all times” (p. 144). While Principal A said above ‘You can never quite get it right’, Principal B expressed the same idea by saying, “You do the best you can and you are going to fall short”. By using the second-person singular, both Principals B and A were both providing advice to me, the researcher, as an aspiring educational leader and striving to help the educational practitioners and researchers who read this report to understand the seemingly-impossible balancing act independent-school principals must face. Bredeson (1985) has commented on the “burden of the constellation of role expectations for the school principal” (p. 46). This image represents well what the principals spoke about.

Participants also acknowledged several other challenges associated with being the principal of an independent school. Principal A said unequivocally that working with a Board of Governors “is the most challenging part of any Head’s role”. Dealing with confrontation or conflict was identified by Principals B and E as another challenging part of the job.

Three of the seven principals noted that the constant scrutiny associated with being a Head can be very difficult; Principal E captured this idea best in the following remark:

It’s something my predecessor wrote about; he had written an article in which he said something that’s absolutely true, which is, “you’re in a goldfish bowl and pretty much every person in the building is thinking oh, I wonder what’s wrong with the Head today, he’s not smiling or I wonder why the Head’s smiling today”. You are really under the microscope at times when you don’t know it.
In addition to the constant scrutiny, five of the seven principals identified schedules jam-packed with appointments, meetings and events as being particularly challenging. Here’s how Principal F put it: “I would say any Head really needs to ‘get’ the fact that you need to go to everything. But, it drains you completely”. Similarly, Principal C said, “this is the toughest job in the world – and I mean that. And it can be exhausting”. Principal E described the tyranny of the daily schedule like this:

I find some days challenging, because I wake up with a list of eight things to do that day. I have seven back-to-back meetings and each meeting generates three more things to do, and I don’t get any of the things done that I intended to do, so I end up with twenty-seven things to do at the end of the day, instead of a smaller list.

Principal F reported that “there’s sort of no ‘down time’”, while Principal G was delighted to report that there had not been a meeting or event the night before one of the interviews for this study. The principals recognized the dangers inherent in their hectic schedules. Principal F said, “Well, there is massive potential for strain on family life. People get divorced. Alcoholism amongst Heads is common. People have breakdowns”. Principal D was aware that “if my family life isn’t happy, then there’s no point in doing this”. Three principals identified family support as being the key to guarding against the dangers of their hectic schedules and they spoke at length about the remarkable support they have from their own spouses.

Finally, two principals pointed out the solitary nature of the job as particularly challenging. Principal C remarked that “It is the loneliest job – and I know you will hear that from others, if they are honest. You are alone in so many things”. Principal B distinguished between ‘lonely’ and ‘being alone’ in this remark: “It’s not lonely, because you are surrounded by people, but it is a very ‘alone’ job. I can see why some people avoid it, or why some people get in and get out, or why some people struggle with life balance when they get into it”.

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Kelchtermans et al. (2011) explore the “structural loneliness” (p. 101, emphasis in the original) of principals, linking it to their “experience of being captured in a web of loyalties” (p. 101). Two principals suggested that the best way to combat this solitary aspect of the job was to have at least one trusted advisor outside of the school to turn to for guidance. For instance, Principal A said, “you need a valued advisor, someone who can help you along the way. I think that’s important; ideally someone inside the school and someone outside the school”. Interestingly, Principal A pointed out that the Chair of the Board of Governors would not be the person within the school to whom an independent-school principal would turn for advice, saying, “that relationship is fraught with tension anyway. I don’t know how a Head could go to the Board Chair and say, ‘Gosh, I’m really getting depressed or anxious about this issue’”. Principal A’s comment reflects this recent observation made by Baker, Campbell and Ostroff (2016) about the principal-Board relationship in independent schools: “Heads of school are confronted with the complex challenge of establishing their roles as educational experts while also viewing [Board] trustees as sources of advice, guidance, and accountability” (p. 585).

Although they identified many challenges associated with their jobs, the principals also spoke about how rewarding they find their jobs. Principal B simply said, “It is the very best job in the world”. Principals B, C and E all used the word “love” to describe how they felt about one or more aspects of the job. Principal G said, “I don’t really find anything in my job to be onerous; I just find that I thrive on the variety and balance of opportunities”. Principal F asked the rhetorical question, “Where else do you get to make such a huge impact on a community of people in a good way…than doing something like this?”. The comment, “I feel blessed”, offered by Principal E, captures well the sense of gratitude and overwhelmingly positive outlook on their job that was expressed by the group as a whole. In the following remark, Principal B suggested that enjoyment of the job increases over time:
I don’t know if I’m any better or worse at being a Head of School…but I do know that I sleep better with stuff unresolved. I used to not sleep at all if stuff was left unresolved. It’s so much easier now; the breadth of stuff I can leave unresolved at the end of the day is much greater. The stuff that still keeps me up at night is when I don’t see the link between what my job is for the [students] and how I am spending my time.

Aware of the prestigious, unique and solitary roles they occupy, and often overwhelmed by the demands of the job, study participants nevertheless believed that the ultimate rewards of being an independent-school principal outweighed the challenges.

Overall, the principals proved to be very knowledgeable about leadership and the administrative role they occupy. They provided thoughtful commentary on the job of being a principal, highlighting the power and responsibility associated with the role. The principals spoke candidly about the ‘darker’ side, revealing elements of isolation and loneliness in the independent-school principalship that might seem surprising, given the small size and emphasis on personal attention highlighted in the literature about independent schools.

On Independent Schools

Reflecting on the decision to leave the public education system many years ago to work at an independent school, Principal C described being confronted by “all of the misinterpretations about what independent schools are all about and the mythology that surrounds them”. The principals’ reflections on independent schools serve to reduce that mythology and help correct some of those misinterpretations. As a group, the principals provided thoughtful consideration of the place of independent schools in the provincial education system and detailed descriptions of the defining elements of independent schools. Perhaps most importantly, they revealed a keen awareness of the complexities and contradictions inherent in their immediate contexts, which constitute, as Principal B put it, “the water [they] swim in”.

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The principals had some intriguing things to say about independent schools’ similarities to and differences from public schools in the province. Although Principals D and E pointed out a few similarities between independent schools and public schools in terms of educational goals, students’ desire to belong, and the problem of ‘helicopter parents’, overall, it was commentary on the differences between independent schools and public schools, and on the distinctive characteristics of independent schools, that seemed to dominate the data. Principal D highlighted the lack of significant labour issues as a key difference between independent schools and public schools. After noting that there had been no employee grievances or complaints at the school within the last fifteen years, Principal D suggested the following to explain this relative state of calm in independent schools: “Faculty associations or teacher advocacy groups in private schools exist for different reasons than in the public system. There’s a mutual respect there that allows things to continue”. The lack of significant problems with students was another difference identified, although the comparison with public-school students was often implied, rather than stated outright, as in the following remark, made by Principal G:

We are looking at drug and alcohol use this week and it’s very easy not to make a big deal out of it, because in independent-school environments, you don’t want parents to think that there’s a problem, but you have to have the courage to say, ‘let’s examine it, let’s look at it’.

Here Principal G is questioning the validity of the assumption that the use of drugs and alcohol is not as significant a problem in independent schools, but the implied comparison with public schools draws attention to a perceived difference between the two types of schools. Principal D offered a similar statement of implied difference: “Without being dismissive, I think it’s fair to say that we don’t really run into the really significant problems here, like at many independent schools”. Bérard and Murphy (1993) point out this assumption of independent schools having
“better students” (see p. 27). The contrast between independent and public schools was also evident in Principal D’s remarks about policies imposed by the provincial Ministry of Education:

We offer primarily university or college level courses here and what I find is that most of the Ministry’s initiatives and policies are tailored to the needs of students who are struggling at the bottom end of the educational success criteria. So, often when a new policy comes through, it is really not addressing the private-school perspective….My biggest frustration beyond that goes to the fact that the colleges and universities have absolutely no connection the Ministry of Education, so we do all of these initiatives and for what? It’s almost a misalignment of Ministry perspective and the realities of the private school system….To be fair, it’s theory-based, so there’s some good stuff behind it, but it’s meant for a student populace that is struggling and you are trying to get them to pass.

Here Principal D suggests that students’ achievement levels and post-secondary goals are two other areas of difference between independent and public schools. A final point of comparison that emerged from the data was the experience of leadership in the two types of schools.

Principal D had this to say:

As [a teacher] in [a local public school board], I got a very public-education perspective on leadership and what I learned from that was, looking back on it now, as a group, we are very lucky to be working in the private system. More people seemed to be challenged for the reasons they were in education in the public system than my experience has shown me is the case in the private system. The challenges in the public system are different and the supports are different.

Principal C also commented on how leadership is different in the two contexts, but in quite the opposite way:
As an independent-school leader with experience in a public board, what I see as being the huge difference for us as independent-school leaders from public-school leaders, is that in the [public-school] boards, there is a whole cadre of skill sets in the [public-school] Board office that you can pull on to be able to support your practice; there’s lots of [professional development] available, there are opportunities for growth and the development of skill sets, there are role models that you can go to, there are mentors that can be had – all of these opportunities to learn and to grow that we don’t have. In the [public] board, you can pick up the phone and call somebody; in our schools, if you pick up the phone and call somebody, because we are all competing, it’s more complicated than that. I am blessed to have some colleagues that I can pick up the phone and call and say, “This is what’s going on – can I just have your perspective?” and I know that there’s the code of silence around that and there’s no judgment; sometimes you need that. But, we do not have a Board office to go to say, “I need some help with communication or crisis-management” – any of that. We have to have those skill sets, or be comfortable in accessing them in whatever way we can, to be able to grow our schools, to build within our own communities.

These comments highlight a little-known and noteworthy difference about the experience of leadership in Ontario’s independent schools: lack of support for principals. Decoux and Holdaway (1999) have described how independent-school principals in Alberta once found remarkable value in “regional offices for maintaining a constant source of information, assistance, guidance, collegial discourse, and occasionally mentorship, as well as a link to the provincial department of education” (pp. 75-76); as Principal C described above, no such offices have ever existed for independent-school principals in Ontario. A similar lack of support was suggested by Principal A, who had this to say:
This is a real issue in independent-school leadership…that the kinds of things that made you successful as a teacher and an administrator are not the skill set you need as a Head of School – partially, but not entirely. Those things might get you there, but you won’t stay there.

Overall, despite observing some general similarities between independent schools and public schools, participants commented more frequently on the differences between the two types of schools, especially with regard to leadership support, student achievement levels and post-secondary goals, problems with students, and labour issues.

The principals in this study also spoke about the qualities that make independent schools unique. For example, increased opportunities - whether for students or for educators - were mentioned by two participants as being at the heart of the independent-school experience.

Principal B talked about providing increased opportunities for students as the unique responsibility of independent-school educators:

I think a lot of our job – especially at independent schools – is to put in front of [the students] opportunity after opportunity after opportunity until they find something that really grabs them and that they are really engaged with, and then they learn what it means to work hard and really be the best at something – and it can be working out in the weight room, it can be debating, it can be acting, it can be solving linear equations – but what does it feel like to fully commit yourself and be the best you can be at something?

Principal C expressed a very similar notion in this comment:

So, the [students] really have the opportunity to look at all aspects of learning and who they are as learners. What can we do as a school to not only support them…in their learning but also help them see outside the walls of the school to understand that truly they can do anything?
As noted in the literature review, Kane (1992) has commented on the great variety of opportunities available to students at independent schools. What the comments provided above add to our understanding is a sense that independent-school principals feel acutely responsible for ensuring that aspect of the student experience. Increased opportunities seemed to extend to the principals as well as to the students. Principal D noted that “to be able to create initiatives and run with it is one of the most exciting things about being a leader in a private school”. This sentiment was echoed by Principal A, who offered the following candid remark: “The wonderful thing is, that even though you have a Board, in an independent school you can be relatively nimble as principal. In a public school, I wouldn’t ever be allowed to do what I’m doing with the curriculum here”. These remarks echo Kane’s (1992) identification of “self-defined curriculum” (p. 7) as one of the six basic characteristics of independent schools and his claim that independent schools are “free to experiment” (p. 9). Principal A’s comment also draws attention to a unique public dimension of the independent-school principalship, working with the Board of Governors, which will be addressed in more detail later.

Another aspect of independent schools that the principals spoke about is their identities as close-knit communities or ‘families’. Three of the principals described their schools in such terms. For example, Principal B enthusiastically declared, “This is a wonderful community…the culture here is very much a family, very much like home”. Principal D said, “we always call this [school] a home away from home”. Principal F described the ‘family dynamics’ in the school like this: “It is really a community in the true sense of the word. We’re not going to agree all the time. We’re not all going to share the same views, but the end point has got to be the same for all of us”. According to the principals, the close bonds between members of these independent-school families are forged in various settings. Principal C said that the bonds between students of different ages in the school are formed in co-curricular clubs in which “there is a beautiful,
natural continuation from what the [students] are learning in the younger grades to the
application of that learning in the older grades” and for which the older students serve as leaders.
In the following remark, Principal A commented on the importance of shared experiences both
within and beyond the classroom for building that close-knit community:

I think one of the strengths in independent schools is being able to have a difficult
conversation with a student in class and then get out on the rink or the field and you have
this whole different kind of rapport. They can really see that the difficult conversation
really wasn’t personal.

This sentiment was echoed by Principal D, who said that, in coaching situations, “you have a
group of students in the building who see you in a totally different light”. The principals’
insights illustrate Powell’s (1990) comment that “independent school teachers….interact with
students in more varied ways than many other teachers, and probably know them better” (p. 126).

Although some of the participants in this study spoke about their schools as families, they
were also keenly aware that independent schools are businesses that charge substantial tuition
fees. This defining element is well documented in the relevant literature (see Allison, Hasan, &
Van Pelt, 2015; Gossage, 1977; Kane, 1992; Mackay & Firmin, 2008; Powell, 1990), but the
 principals offered personal reflections on the topic. Principal F put it like this:

Well, no one likes calling these places businesses, but they are. When you are 10 kids
down on your budget, that makes for a quarter of a million dollars’ difference. We’re
not-for-profit, we don’t make huge surpluses, we’re not here to make money, so you have
to make sure the school is full and all that kind of thing.

When describing a particular staffing decision, Principal C remarked, “It’s the business side of it
all. And, that’s probably the same in all of our schools.” One participant in particular seemed to
struggle to reconcile this ‘business side’ of things with certain ideals. Principal B suggested that “some Heads are well-intentioned teachers who have to run businesses [while] [o]thers are business people who are forced to work with children”, later insisting that “In schools, we are not in the bottom line business; we are in the heart and soul and mind business”. Principal B then explored the issue further in these remarks:

I don’t think there is a family in this city that wouldn’t want to send their kids to one of our schools, but they can’t all do that. There’s an unspeakable - or unspoken - inequity among children in our city and province. We allow a two-tier education system! We don’t have private medical clinics; I can’t pay to get my child an MRI faster than somebody else, but I can pay to get my child a better education. It is inequitable. It’s one of the reasons why our instinct…is to not draw attention to it very much, because it doesn’t sit well. It’s what we swim in….I think every school should look like our schools, but they don’t. These schools cost a lot!

Of particular note in this passage is Principal B’s metaphor, expressed in the phrase ‘It’s what we swim in’, that compares the inequitable education system in which independent schools exist to murky but familiar water. According to Newberry and Richardson (2015) metaphors can “reveal how we feel about a situation and our role in it” (p. 425). Although all of the principals conveyed their awareness that substantial tuition fees make independent schools distinct, Principal B seemed particularly uncomfortable with the implications of that distinction.

Speaking in terms of achievement, immunity, community, opportunity and – perhaps surprisingly – inequity, the principals thus expressed both pride in and discomfort with independent schools. Their comments help clarify how they think and feel about the schools they lead, and serve to reduce the mystery surrounding independent schools.
On Lessons Learned from Experience

In this third section of the chapter, the principals’ personal reflections about lessons learned from experience are presented. Principal E noted, “the things that we have done shape us, and teach us, and guide us”. This aligns well with Bolman and Deal (1994a) who assert that “[l]eadership is cultivated or nurtured primarily through experience” (p. 87). As the principals spoke about their previous experiences, three sub-themes emerged as particularly important: being an alum, working your way up, and experiences beyond schools. Collectively, the experiences of the principals suggest that there are many different paths to independent-school principalship, with many opportunities for learning and growth along the way.

**Being an alum.** Two of the seven principals interviewed attended the schools they now lead. Their comments about their previous experiences as students inform our understanding of their current practices as principals. Both of these participants spoke about their journeys from student to principal as somewhat circular, starting and ending in the same place. Although they acknowledged that they may not have known it at the time, both principals said that the school cultures and values had a significant impact on their development as young people. They also said that it was the teachers at their schools who inspired them to pursue careers in education. Principal B revealed, “I became a teacher because I thought that the teachers that I saw who worked here must have the most richly rewarding and fulfilling lives”. Principal D identified the inspirational spark as being a favourite teacher’s comment about “the value that he got out of interacting each and every day with the students and trying to influence young people”. For Principal B, returning to the school as principal was a matter of destiny: “I really recognized that the universe was telling me I was supposed to be here”. Both seemed to enjoy how familiar and comfortable the environments of their alma maters were. Here’s how Principal B put it: “I happen to be at a school where, perhaps not surprisingly, the things that resonated for me when I
was a kid still go on….I love this school. It is in my DNA, it’s in my bones”. Both Principals B and D thought that having attended the schools they now lead resulted in deeper understanding. Principal D said it came down to this: “my experiences as a student here helped me see life through the [students’] eyes”.

**Working your way up.** Whether in public schools or independent schools, five of the seven participants in this study worked their way up to their positions as principals from classroom teaching through divisional and/or board-level leadership. As Principal A put it, “I’ve done the whole gamut”. All of the principals started working in schools as teachers, either at the elementary or secondary level. At the secondary level, they taught a wide range of subjects – everything from English and History to Chemistry, Math, Geography and Languages. They all talked about how much they enjoyed their time as teachers; two even used the word “fabulous” to describe their teaching experiences. Principal E similarly shared, “I missed teaching tremendously when I got into administration”.

Early in their careers in schools, the participants worked simultaneously as teachers and coaches, or, in independent schools that offer boarding, as teachers, coaches and Boarding Housemasters. Principal F described learning from observing the co-curricular program in a boarding environment like this:

when you can see how relationships change away from the classroom and how you can relate to children differently in different environments like that, not the formal one of the classroom, I think that’s very helpful; it certainly gives you good insight into the value of co-curricular activities.

Principal A, who also had experience in boarding schools, similarly commented, “To me, coaching was always very much another teaching situation”.

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Two principals in this study moved from teaching directly to administration, but the remaining five took intermediate steps as department heads within their schools or as subject coordinators and consultants within their larger boards of education. As administrators in both independent and public schools, the participants worked in a variety of roles that involved leadership at divisional and whole-school levels, including Head of Senior School, Director of Academics, Dean of Students, and Vice Principal. Although those who served as Vice Principals in public schools were primarily responsible for discipline, those who were Vice Principals in independent schools had a variety of portfolios, including student discipline, teacher development, and curriculum innovation. Principal G spoke about how previous observations made of a Student Services program as a Vice Principal in a public high school directly influenced later decisions made about that same program as the principal of an independent school. Principal C talked about learning how to diffuse difficult situations with parents by working through such situations “as a Vice Principal a million years ago”. There is an increasing interest in better understanding the experience of vice or assistant principalship (see Parylo et al., 2013; Ribbins, 1997). The remarks of both Principal C and G illustrate a key finding of Parylo et al. (2013) about the importance of principals’ previous experience as assistant principals (see p. 576).

Three of the principals in this study served as principals of other schools before coming to their current schools. According to Principal F, the Board of Governors at the school was specifically looking for “someone who was not a first-time Head, because…they wanted the school to be in safe hands”. The latter part of this comment highlights the strategic aspect of board competency explored by Jackson and Holland (1998) with respect to non-profit boards (see p. 161). For Principal B, the previous experience of being a principal proved to be liberating:
So, when I went to that second school – the first school where I was an administrator – I came to realize this idea that you can run a school by loving the children. And, you can run a school as you are yourself, not you posing as something else to fit into that school. That really eye-opening idea of wow, it’s o.k. to run a school like that, in a very human, emotional, fun, family way was such a good fit for me. And so, as a Head of School, it gave me this great freedom.

Five of the participants spoke directly about the value of working your way up through various positions from teacher to principal. Principal F said, “I think if you are a Head and you’ve never been through [the experiences teachers go through], it’s quite hard to empathize – or it might be”. Principal A similarly remarked, “doing all of those kinds of jobs, I’d like to think gives me a pretty good sense of what other people are doing around our school, in terms of the things that are facing them”. Principal D noted that “people [in the school] had seen me grow as a leader through different positions” and that working through those different positions created a tremendous sense of confidence. According to Principal F, although moving up from one level to the next was the “expected route”, it was nonetheless “very helpful” and lent a certain degree of credibility in the role as principal. This comment about credibility was echoed by other principals. In the following remarks, Principal C explained how moving from teacher to principal had developed an appreciation for complexity and shaped problem-solving skills:

I would say that as you progress through the different roles, things become much more complex. When you are a teacher in a classroom, you are dealing with students and potentially parents, and colleagues. The ramifications of decisions, probably, at that time, are shorter and smaller. When I was in those positions and as I worked my way up through, what I really began to predicate all of my beliefs on [were] [the thoughts] What is the immediate result? and What will be the result in five years’ time?; and that really
created the context of *Is this as bleeding and burning as it appears to be at this second?* and *If I were to cast back five years into the future and look back at this, would I say, “Seriously?”* What is truly the issue here? Is there an underlying issue that is really creating the problem?

Principal G saw the value of experience like this:

I would say that the other area where I really feel every one of my experiences has had a significant impact is on really being a curriculum leader. Putting learning at the forefront in teaching and at the forefront of everything we do in this school…. everything in my career has been focused on that and it really emerges as the one area that’s been in the forefront.

Principal G here reflects Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach’s (1999) claim about expertise being one of the sources of influence in the model of instructional leadership.

Four principals talked about how doing many things in their previous roles and making mistakes along the way had given them increased confidence and points of reference for decision-making. Principal B said, “there are only so many different types of situations you are going to be faced with, so you can always look back and think, *Okay, I dealt with this before and it turned out badly or I dealt with this before and it turned out okay*”. In the same vein, Principal C remarked that “when you are in a particular situation – and let’s use a stressful one, because the easy ones you will glide through –…[you will think about] what is it that you have done in the past in a similar situation that has found the best solution for all parties”. Speaking in similar terms, Principal G, looking back over many different roles held in both public and independent schools, talked about using past mistakes to inform current decisions:
I may not have dealt with it well in the past, but I’ve had the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them. So, now, when it comes up, I think, *Oh yes, we did this*, or *

I know from this experience to avoid that and do this instead.*

Principal E similarly noted, “Some of my biggest mistakes have been the greatest teachers”.

According to Bolman and Deal (1994a), “[l]eaders often learn as much from their failures as from their triumphs or successes” (p. 87). Principal G highlighted the comfort that comes from experience by saying this: “I feel so fortunate that I got this job after so many years, because it’s somewhat rare that I come across a situation I haven’t dealt with in some way”.

Indeed, three of the principals in this study spoke about feeling very well-prepared to take on their current roles as principals of independent schools. For example, Principal F, looking back on a particular leadership role that had offered a great deal of autonomy and independence, said this:

There’s very little, I think or I’d like to say, that I haven’t had an experience of – ranging from expelling students, to finding that there are things going on that you don’t particularly like on the discipline front, to dealing with all kinds of issues around faculty and staff, to dealing with contracts, to dealing with crisis management moments – you name it, really….So, all the kind of day-to-day things…but also dealing with the Board, writing strategy papers, chairing committees – all those things.

But this was not the case for all participants. Principal A had this to say:

I think that the things that are successful in bringing you to become a Head of School are not the things that will make you successful in the job. The job that I’m doing…doesn’t owe anything to [my previous work as a classroom teacher].

According to Principal A, knowing about and having skills in business, industrial psychology, and working with a Board of Governors are essential for being a principal of an independent...
school, but such knowledge and skills are rarely acquired in previous experiences - especially in schools. Thus, this principal saw previous experiences in terms of lessons not learned.

Two principals commented on the importance of observing role models as they worked their way up. Principal G said, “I think it all comes back to role models. I have tried to watch people I have seen in education”. Bolman and Deal (1994a) would likely agree, given their claim that “[p]eople learn secondhand from examples set by others” (p. 88). Like Principal G, Principal D revealed this:

Regardless of the position I was in, I always tried to observe those who were in leadership positions and watch what they did. You get to be a bit of an armchair quarterback, but you notice things and think I really like the way they handled that.

Principal G offered this story about a particularly influential role model:

My first principal in [a local district school board] was a great guy who really believed in equity and inclusion and those have been guiding principles for me….the principal’s view was you have to find ways to include the parents, get them involved and make them feel comfortable.

Principal D described lessons learned from both female and male role models:

When I worked in the public system, I had a female principal and that was someone who people really respected; she was nice, but when she walked the halls, people stopped and said hello. What did I pick up from her? What made her that respected? I think she was very kind, very honest, very forthright. She had experience behind her; it was not her first principalship. When I came here….I had four important male role models….People want someone who is genuine and that’s probably what I have learned from [these men]. People also want someone who is going to have a backbone, so I have tried to learn from the different leaders that have been above me.
In general, as the principals worked their way up through a range of positions from teacher to principal, they learned from experience and gained a wealth of knowledge, skills and attributes.

**Experiences beyond schools.** The previous experiences of the principals were not limited to schools; valuable experiences were also had working in universities and in the world of business. Principal E’s first teaching job was, in fact, at a university, not at a school. This principal continued to teach subject-specific courses at that university during the evenings, weekends and summers for a decade, while teaching at the very same independent school that Principal E now leads. Principal G also taught at a university, in a teacher-education program, before becoming an independent-school principal; reflecting on that time, Principal G said that that kind of university teaching is particularly relevant to the job of principal, “because that’s all about teaching others and helping facilitate discussions about teaching and learning”.

Other principals in this study came to their roles in independent schools with strong backgrounds in business. Working in a variety of corporations, both big and small, gave Principal B experience as a business manager and partner, so that being “used to earning more than you spend” makes the current work on budgeting very easy. According to Principal G, who holds an MBA, that particular degree “couldn’t have been better” preparation for being the principal of an independent school. The principals saw knowledge of how businesses operate as essential for independent-school leadership, as principals must deal with issues like enrollment, annual giving and capital campaigns. Principal A said that an important part of the job is “managing a small business” and therefore “understanding the principles of management and business is critical”. Principal B simply said, “I have to make sure the business is run properly”. These findings are particularly significant, as they complement and inform those of Thody and Punter (2000), who argue the importance and value of independent-school governors with business backgrounds. According to Thody and Punter (2000), such governors have the
“experience of having responsibility for a workforce and budget of a size similar to those of their large secondary schools/colleges” (p. 189) and bring with them “current business knowledge on tricky issues such as redundancy, dismissal, appointments, salaries and financial planning” (p. 189). If independent-school governors and principals should both be business experts, one can’t help but wonder what the effect might be on the educational focus of independent schools.

Indeed, two principals spoke about the emphasis on business expertise and what it might mean for independent-school leadership. Here’s how Principal B summarized it:

I would think that this model of business acumen versus teaching acumen for Heads is very interesting. And we have been in this shift for the last five or six years….The more interesting stories are probably those in which business people try to impose those kinds of values on very human, family organizations.

A similar sentiment was expressed by Principal A like this:

The irony is, someone who has spent all of his time at [a business school] would probably manage the school better than I would, but the fact of the matter is, it’s still a school; they want a principal, they want someone who is good with all of the constituents.

As they reflected on their experiences beyond schools, the principals once again proved to be thoughtful leaders, keen to share their thoughts and help shape a deeper understanding of their craft.

Whether learned from working outside of schools, working up through schools, or being an alum, the principals’ lessons from experience had profound effects on how they came to understand both themselves and the art of leadership. Principal E offers this final insight:

“Taking a course on leadership can, perhaps, open your mind, but the experiences you have and the mistakes you make are even more important”.

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On Leadership Values

According to Begley (2000), when considering the relationship between values and educational administration, it is necessary “to distinguish the values manifested by individuals from the more collective social values of a group, profession, society, or organization” (p. 235). While the principals’ understanding of their schools’ history, mission and values will be explored in the following chapter, here attention is paid to what the principals had to say about their own leadership values. Some intriguing differences in description emerge from their comments.

In general, the principals seemed keen and well-prepared to talk about their values. Principal E, a long-serving leader, offered this interesting remark:

I don’t think that if I was just a teacher I would understand my own values as much [as I do as a principal]. You are tested on a regular basis about your values and good leaders reflect on the situation and how they’ve arrived at it and what it means about their values. Leithwood (1995) provides support for Principal E’s claim with the remark that “[e]xpert school leaders are more aware of their values” (p. 122).

Six of the seven principals used single words to identify some or all of their leadership values. For example, Principal A said, “Honesty and integrity – always” and Principal D listed, “honesty, trust, integrity and faith”. Although values like courage, faith, responsibility, empathy, trust and respect were mentioned (for a discussion of faith and trust as leadership values see Sergiovanni, 2005), honesty and integrity were most frequently listed by the principals who chose to articulate their values as single words, with four of the seven principals naming honesty, and five of the seven naming integrity. Their descriptions of these two dominant values were very interesting. For example, Principal F equated honesty with candor in this remark: “I am an honest person and I am direct”. For this same principal, integrity was about “behav[ing] in a
particular way”, while for Principal C it meant “always doing what’s right when no one is watching” and “following through”. Here’s how Principal E spoke about honesty and integrity:

My understanding of integrity is not just knowing what the right thing to do is, but doing the right thing. It’s making tough decisions when you have a choice to make. And so, it captures honesty. It’s about doing the right thing whether people see you doing it or not. It’s about doing what’s right for the kids, doing what’s right for people. If you have a situation where you could, for example, get away with paying someone less, because they don’t know any better, it doesn’t make it right to do. And I think of that, because a woman who worked here for years and years before I was Head, was here visiting – she is still involved with the school – and she was dreadfully underpaid when she was here, and she gave her life and heart and soul to the school. She’s still angry about it. And that’s not the right thing to do, even though they got away with it. So, that’s what I think integrity is.

Begley (2000) reminds us that “any specific value can be held in response to one or more in a range of potential motivations” (p. 236). Using the example of honesty, he further expands on the idea with this comment:

For example, a person could subscribe to honesty as a value to avoid the pain of sanction for dishonesty. Alternately, a person could manifest honesty because this is a shared professional or community orientation, or because the consequence of widespread dishonesty is social chaos, or because it is the right thing to do, or any combination of these basic levels of motivation. (Begley, 2000, p. 236)

From the comment above, it seems that Principal E prizes integrity, described as including honesty, not only because of a professional orientation as an educator (‘doing what’s right for the
kids’), but also because of a sense of social responsibility (‘doing what’s right for people’) and a desire to avoid inflicting suffering on others.

Four of the seven principals also spoke about some of their leadership values in different ways, using longer descriptions to express their ideas. Their comments can be grouped into value statements about children, about learning, and about ways of interacting with others. The participants who said they valued children articulated this idea in various ways. Principal B simply said, “children are important to me”. Principal F similarly remarked, “what I value, I suppose, is the people, the young people, the children here”. Principal G explained, “anything to do with the welfare of students and helping to support the students to make their own choices matters to me”. Principal A expressed this same value in a slightly different way by describing an effort “not to see children as imperfect adults” and a belief in “understanding the comic character of the child and that the genre of the school is a comedy”. Here’s a further explanation from Principal A:

If you consider a day at school, it’s full of false starts – kids going this way and that way, kids forgetting things in their lockers – it’s a comedy! And knowing that changes, fundamentally, your outlook and the outcome of things.

In addition to valuing children, two principals also spoke about valuing learning. Principal B’s description of leadership values included “the singular importance of learning and growing and getting better as humans” and the idea that “everyone can learn”. Principal A similarly identified learning as a core value in the remark that “the classroom is the centre of the school; everything that goes on in the school is in the service of what goes on in the classroom”. All of these remarks align well with Louis and Wahlstrom’s (2011) assertion that “[t]he central job, and also the most difficult, for school leaders is to shape the school’s culture to focus unremitting attention on student learning” (p. 52). Two of the seven principals also spoke about values in
terms of ways of interacting with others. For Principal G, the motto of “always listen; never assume” was important. Principal A said that a key personal leadership value was “to presume good intentions”.

Although the variety of leadership values articulated by the participants could be interpreted as lack of unity amongst the principals of independent schools in Ontario, it is useful to consider one final comment about leadership values offered by one of the most experienced principals in this study. Principal G noted that all leadership values “come from your own background, education and experience”. Considered this way, the range of leadership values articulated by the principals indicates not weakness in disunity of description, but strength in diversity of experience. As explored in the previous section of this chapter, the principals had a wide range of experiences in their careers, and these experiences shaped their thinking about values. The variety of descriptions also provides insight into the principals’ underlying motivations, as with Principal E, which helps us understand why they value what they do. According to Begley (2000), “It may be interesting and easier to determine what people value, but what is often most crucial is why they do so” (pp. 236-237).

Throughout the principals’ commentary about their leadership values, some confusion about the terminology became apparent. Principal C saw values as different from skills, while Principal E struggled to distinguish between values, actions and attributes, saying things like, “I see values as different from attributes” and “I don’t know if Courage is a value or an action”. The following comment, from Principal C, suggested an understanding of ‘value’ as a measure of worth, rather than of morality:

I’m just reflecting on the topic of values. I think that the biggest challenge that we have as school leaders is really being aware of competing values. And by that I mean, looking at what is the value proposition for your school? What is it that you value the most about
your school? What is it that you value the most about your role?...So, what is the value?

Why do we value it?

Two principals admitted outright that they were confused by the word ‘value’. For example, when asked to identify personal leadership values, Principal B began by saying, “I never know what this means”. Principal A said, “I’m not sure if this is a value, but I’ll just throw it out there”. The principals’ confusion about values terminology and tone of uncertainty used when speaking about their own leadership values, evident in phrases like ‘I’m not sure’, ‘I never know’ and ‘I don’t know’, not only reflects the problem of definition evident in the literature that has been acknowledged by scholars of values and leadership (see Parkes & Thomas, 2007), but also suggests an interesting starting point for further conversations between principals, both within and beyond the independent-school community.

**On the Importance of Learning and Reflecting**

The final category of personal reflections offered by the participants concerns the importance of learning and reflecting. As the principals shared stories about formal and informal study, it became apparent that these educational leaders are continuously striving to understand better both themselves and the world in which they live.

Two participants spoke about the Masters degrees and doctorates they had completed. In the following remark, Principal D commented specifically on the value for independent-school principals of having graduate degrees:

> having credentials can set a tone for your staff and faculty. Credentials represent knowledge, hard work and a sense of professionalism that people can aspire to; it can set a real tone in your building. At the end of the day, does it mean you are better than somebody else? Absolutely not, but it sets a standard and I think people appreciate when
leaders have a sense of knowledge, ability, and accountability for themselves within the greater educational environment.

In addition to formal study, the principals also spoke about learning informally by reading. During one interview, Principal C said, “I’ve got the book Start with Why right over there on my desk – it’s a fabulous book”. Two principals described reading various works specifically about educational leadership. After declaring, “I love to read educational literature”, Principal G then offered these additional details:

I really believe strongly in Michael Fullan’s work on pressure and support…. I really follow all the change literature; I love Hargreaves and I still read his stuff all the time.

Linda Darling-Hammond – I love her stuff. These are just a few of the people I have really admired over the years in terms of educational change.

Fullan (2011), perhaps the foremost expert on educational change, and one of the three authors to whom Principal G referred explicitly, has noted that “research and theory can be useful, but only insofar as they help leaders move forward” (p. 3); he asserts that the “best source of learning is day-to-day practice because it is only experience that can engage and shape the brain” (p. 5). If taken in combination, Principal G’s comment here about reading change literature and comments in the previous section about lessons learned from experience paint a picture of a principal who is working hard to ‘move forward’ as a change leader.

Principal E was a particularly voracious reader. In addition to books about leadership, this principal also talked about reading books about philanthropy and time-management, as well as classic works of fiction and current popular works of non-fiction. Principal E commented on this variety by simply saying, “I like to read books about making the organization better”. This seemed to apply to the reading of fiction as well, since Principal E noted, “I love books that trace a character in various experiences they have that lead to a culminating moment when all of those
things come together to put them in a position where they can do something”. When describing all of this reading, Principal E candidly remarked, “I set a goal this year to try and read one book a week; I’m falling behind”.

Closely connected to their learning from reading or graduate work was the principals’ practice of reflection. Several scholars have noted that reflection is an essential tool for the development of authentic leadership (see Begley, 2006; Duignan & Bhindi, 1997; Gardner et al., 2005). Five of the seven principals spoke explicitly about being reflective. After admitting, “I look back a lot”, Principal E later said this about being a long-serving leader: “this has been a growth experience for me. I’ve learned. It’s been non-stop learning”. Principal D spoke about reflection as a tool for recognizing mistakes made and learning from those mistakes, saying, “I think as leaders that’s what we’re asked to do. Do we constantly reflect and, if we’ve made mistakes, do we acknowledge them?”. In doing so, Principal D aligned with Bolman and Deal (1994a), who note that “[s]tanding back from a situation and disentangling complex causes and effects can play an important role in figuring out what to do differently in the next situation” (p. 89). Principal G saw the process of reflection as intertwined with the processes of goal-setting and professional development. Two of the principals even commented on their participation in this study as a form of reflection. For instance, Principal G said, “It was great getting the questions in advance, so I could think it through – that was really helpful”, while Principal A said, “This has been very helpful to me. I’m getting much out of this; it’s kind of a retrospective”. Principal C offered this insight concerning the importance of reflection:

The more opportunities you have to test yourself or to try new things, the more you understand about yourself and it’s the self-knowledge, really, that helps you to be a better leader. If you can reflect on your practices, and learn from that reflection – that’s really what it is, for me.
Hodgkinson (1999) would likely agree with Principal C, given his assertion that “it is the peculiar onus upon those who would aspire to leadership in the truest sense to achieve the maximum degree of self-knowledge and self-mastery” (p. 149). In general, through their commentary on the importance of reflecting and learning, the principals revealed themselves to be both authentic leaders and lifelong learners.

**Conclusion**

The participants interviewed for this study offered personal reflections about five main topics: leadership and what it is like to be an independent-school principal; independent schools; lessons learned from experience; leadership values; and, the importance of teaching and reflecting. Although they struggled to define it, the principals spoke about leadership in terms of service, passion, management, nervousness and loneliness. They connected the title of ‘principal’ to both educational expertise and business leadership, had differing opinions about the level of formality the title implied, and recognized that the title could threaten authenticity. They spoke openly about the complexity of their roles and suggested that it is virtually impossible for independent-school principals to ever get the balance right between the competing priorities of the present and the future. Although they faced the challenges of constant scrutiny, hectic schedules, work with the Board of Governors, and paradoxical feelings of isolation and loneliness in their close-knit school communities, the principals nevertheless found great enjoyment and satisfaction in their jobs.

They saw more differences than similarities between independent and public schools, and called attention to the lack of regional and provincial support systems for independent-school principals. When they spoke about the defining elements of independent schools, the principals in this study focused on increased opportunities, close ‘family-like’ bonds, and the reality of independent schools operating as businesses that charge substantial tuition fees.
Those participants who had attended the independent schools they now lead talked about the lasting impact of the schools’ cultures, values and teachers, and how their experiences as students led to greater awareness and understanding as principals. Those who had worked their way up through different instructional and administrative roles in schools, observing and learning from role models along the way, also spoke about gaining awareness, as well as confidence, credibility and empathy. The principals saw past mistakes as additional sources of confidence and generally felt well-prepared to take on their current roles. In connection with their own professional experiences beyond schools, they simultaneously acknowledged the importance of business knowledge for independent-school principals and the potential danger of this drive to shift the fundamental focus of their organizations.

When they talked about their values as leaders, the principals emphasized honesty and integrity. Additionally, they revealed not only confusion about terminology, but also different ways of understanding values, based on diversity of experience. As they spoke about the importance of learning and reflecting, the principals emerged as authentic leaders, dedicated to the ongoing pursuit of knowledge that might make their organizations better.

All of the insights shared by the principals in this chapter pave the way for a deeper understanding of the commentary provided in the next chapter concerning their public leadership practices.
Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis – Public Dimensions of Independent-School Principalship

“It’s about being what you are in the school.” (Principal F)

In this chapter, data collected from the interviews are presented in terms of the public dimensions of independent-school principalship. These are the aspects of the job one might expect to hear principals talk about, including communicating, relationship-building and making decisions; however, even if the dimensions are familiar, the insights are not. The image of the independent-school principal that emerges from the data is of that of an individual caught in a complex web of competing demands, priorities and tensions.

There are ten main sections to this chapter: knowing the school history, mission, vision and values; aligning and shaping values; being visible; teaching; communicating; building relationships; collaborating, delegating and empowering; making final decisions; navigating change; planning for the future; and tensions related to practices and values. These sections reflect the strongest and most consistent themes that emerged from the data regarding the public dimensions of independent-school principalship, or, as Principal F says above, “being what you are in the school”. Collectively, they address the central research question and two of the three sub-questions of this study: How do principals of independent schools in Ontario understand and talk about their leadership values and practices?; How do they describe their leadership practices?; and What alignments and/or tensions appear to exist between their leadership values, practices and stated school values? Since the primary goal of the study was to better understand how the principals understood and talked about their values and practices, their own words form the foundation of all sections of this chapter.
Knowing the School History, Mission, Vision and Values

Bolman and Deal (1994a) claim that “[l]eadership is contextual and it is important for leaders to have a deep understanding of the cultures in which they are embedded” (p. 83). Deal and Peterson (1994) similarly argue that “[a] good principal understands his or her school – its historical patterns, the underlying purposes they serve, and how they came to be” (p. 29). When asked about their schools’ histories, missions, visions and values, the principals in this study had a lot to say. Given the strong historical connections to religious groups held by most independent schools in Ontario, it is not surprising that, when asked about their schools’ histories, the principals commented on the foundations of faith upon which their schools are built. The principals were very aware of this history; as Principal D noted at the beginning of the first interview, “A lot of independent schools were initially faith-based schools”. Six of the seven schools were founded by religious groups, four in the mid to late nineteenth century and two in the second half of the twentieth century. All of the principals of the schools that were founded by religious groups named the founding group and year with accuracy and ease. Many provided detailed descriptions of their schools’ histories and several acknowledged the importance of the religious roots. For instance, Principal F commented that, “The founders and the founding Head are the ones who really did establish what the school stood for in those early stages”, while Principal E noted that the approach and philosophy of the founding religious group “still have a pretty significant impact on us”. Indeed, two principals commented on the influence religion has on their schools’ admissions, missions and rituals. For example, with regard to admissions, Principal D said:

Our faith, at least the way the school sees it, is instrumental in terms of who we draw as students. And that’s not to say that we don’t have students from other faiths here and it’s
not to say that we don’t have teachers from other faiths – but they are accepted with an understanding of what we offer here.

This comment echoes Kane’s (1992) that “independent schools are at liberty to select the kind of students the school believes will benefit from the type of education program [offered there]” (p. 10). Principal B was more cautious in making the link between faith and admissions; after noting that the school “remain[s] affiliated with” the founding religious group, this principal added, “Having said that, we have [students] of no faith and all faiths, which we are, of course, happy to have”. Three principals commented on how their schools’ missions were linked to their religious roots. Principal D clearly stated that the ultimate goal of the school was to guide students “to a life of [faith-based] leadership and good citizenship”. Principal E explained that wanting students to become life-long learners includes wanting them to exemplify the values of the founding religious group. Seeing the religious roots of the school reflected in the broader importance of spirituality in the school community, Principal B made a careful distinction, noting that, “We don’t say that we ‘honour’ our [religious] tradition, as many schools do; we say that we celebrate that affiliation. Celebrate, not honour.”

Principal A commented on the “really rich culture of rituals” present in many independent schools; this is another arena in which the influence of religion emerged clearly in the data. According to Deal (1992), in schools especially, “[r]ituals provide everyday reminders of values and bond people to each other in a common quest” (p. 240). Six of the seven schools in this study were founded by religious groups and of those six, all have designated times and spaces for religious gatherings. Some schools hold daily events, such as Chapel, while others gather only on designated religious holidays. Some have permanent sacred spaces on campus, while others use multi-purpose spaces, such as the gymnasium. All of the six principals of the faith-based schools regularly lead or participate in or attend the religious rituals of their schools.
Principal B summarized the importance of these faith-based events in the life of the school this way:

We have a beautiful, sacred chapel and we come together as a community once a week and we talk about the value of spirituality, of stillness, of time to consider and contemplate and reflect and be bored and listen. I think that if I didn’t force the [students] to do that for half an hour each week, I’m not sure they ever would. I always say, it’s one of those things where if we didn’t have it and I tried to add it in at the end of a day somewhere, it would never fly; that we have it is one of the great gifts of this school.

The sacred spaces, religious rituals, and principal participation in those rituals are all part of the symbolic orientation of schools explored by Deal and Peterson (1994), in which emphasis is placed “on the ways leaders draw on history to develop and articulate shared values and traditions” (pp. 6-7). Indeed, “convening rituals” (Deal, 1992, p. 240) and “encouraging ceremonies” (Deal, 1992, p. 240) are identified as two ways that effective independent-school principals “reinforce cultural bonds” (Deal, 1992, p. 240). The collective commentary of six of the seven independent-school principals in this study suggests that the religious roots of independent schools in Ontario are not only vital parts of the past, but also defining elements of the present, and potentially significant influences on the future.

Although the principals were asked simply to talk about their schools’ mission statements, six of the seven recited them verbatim during their interviews. This finding is consistent with that of Gold et al. (2013) concerning principals in England. The one principal who did not recite the mission statement verbatim said, “Gosh, you think I would be word-perfect on that one, but I’m not; I can supply you with it”. This comment and the direct quotations provided by the other principals suggest that knowing the school’s mission statement
is an unspoken expectation of and significant pressure on independent-school principals.

DuFour (1991) describes a mission statement as “an expression of the school’s purpose and function” (p. 19). Mission statements figure prominently in independent schools; indeed, two of the seven principals noted that they had reviewed and revised their mission statements within the past year. Principal F said, “We treat the mission as a day-to-day guide to our work. That’s what really helps us every day to make sure we are meeting the objectives we want to meet”.

Principal G similarly noted, “We come back to the mission all the time on our team” and Principal B spoke about the school’s mission as being a “living mission”. Principal A remarked that “the mission and vision of the school are kind of your articles of faith”; this connection between mission and vision is explored by Murphy and Torre (2015), who “unpack vision into three distinct but related domains: mission, which addresses overarching values and purposes; goals, which provide direction; and expectations, which establish specific targets” (p. 179).

Three of the principals suggested consulting the school documents in order to verify and supplement their recitations of the mission statements. Although they ranged from simple statements to complex declarations, all seven of the mission statements included references to such broad educational pursuits as learning, improvement, leadership, character development, morality, and/or the development of community. Despite the apparent similarities, Principal B notes in the following comment that there are differences between the value systems of independent schools as expressed through their mission statements:

I worked at this school and culturally, in terms of the practices and values, I just assumed that was how all [independent] schools worked. Then, when I went to my next school, I realized that [independent] schools are very different – they feel very different. Their value systems are different, their cultures are different, and the way people perceive their
work is very different, and the reasons parents bring their kids to that particular school are very different.

This comment aligns with the work of Powell (1990), who notes that “independent schools sometimes differ among themselves by ideology” (p. 119). It also relates to the work of Deal and Peterson (1990), who, in their analysis of the principal’s role in shaping school culture, define school culture as “the character of a school as it reflects deep patterns of values, beliefs, and traditions that have been formed over the course of its history” (p. 7) and note that “[e]ach school has its own character or ‘feel’” (p. 7).

All of the seven schools had vision statements as well as mission statements. DuFour (1991) describes a vision statement as a “common understanding as to what a school stands for and what it is attempting to become” (p. 21) that “stimulates change” (p. 23). Principal F described the school’s vision statement like this:

[T]he vision statement is really a recognition that here, as in all schools, I believe, if you simply have a mission, you can lack focus going forward. So, we really worked hard on establishing a direction for ourselves. We haven’t really put a time limit on it. We have a Strategic Plan that’s designed to last for five years or so, but actually the vision statement could last a lot longer. And it has to do with…the way we believe university education and the working world is changing too.

Here, Principal F talks about the vision statement as a description of an ideal that provides direction for the organization far into the future and emphasizes the hard work that went into the visioning process. In his review of seven country reports about successful leadership, Leithwood (2005) notes that “successful leadership creates a compelling sense of purpose in the organization[n] by developing a shared vision of the future” (pp. 620-621). Bolman and Deal
(1994a) assert that “[h]aving a vision may not be as important as engaging people in a process of visioning” (p. 84).

In addition to vision and mission statements, the participants also talked about their schools’ values. DuFour (1991) points out that these three components are inherently linked:

Thus, the extent to which a principal can use a vision statement to influence a school depends in large part upon the degree to which that vision is reflected in the explicit core values that are recognized within the school and promoted on a day-to-day basis. (p. 22)

According to Deal (1992), values “express what an organization stands for, its essential character” (p. 239). Most schools in this study had a list of three to five core values, with ‘respect’ and ‘responsibility’, as well as variations on ‘knowledge’, ‘community’ and ‘empathy’, featuring prominently. Interestingly, very similar school values were named by principals of independent schools in Alberta (see Decoux and Holdaway, 1999, p. 77). Principal F offered a comment that captures well what value lists are all about: “We’re trying to help them to prepare for their lives now and for what’s coming afterwards, so that they have the kind of values that are really going to make them good people, or help them to become good people”. By using the phrase ‘help them to prepare for their lives now and for what’s coming afterwards’, Principal F reflects what Gold et al. (2003) call “the ultimate focus of school leadership practice—that is, the efficient and effective preparation of young people to be productive members of society” (p. 130).

Reflecting Deal’s (1992) claim that values are “typically expressed in symbols” (p. 239) and in line with Bolman and Deal’s (1994a) assertion that “leadership is inherently symbolic” (p. 85), two principals spoke about the importance of publicizing the school’s values, either in list form or as the mission or vision statement. Principal A remarked, “It’s not a bad idea to have the mission and vision in and around, on the doors and stuff”. Principal F was more specific, saying,
“You will find the mission posted around the school in a number of places….it’s in the halls, in about 5 places around the school”. Such visible representations of the school’s values seemed intended not just for the students; as Principal F noted, “you still have to convince the parents that you have a mission and vision that they want to buy into – quite literally”. The principals definitely recognized the importance of the school values to their roles as principals. Principal A said, “If you have a good mission…that should drive everything that happens in the school, including whether or not the windows are double-paned”. Perhaps Principal E said it best with this remark:

What it comes down to is my most important task or job is to make people believe in the school. So, that means making sure that the people who work here believe in the purpose of the school and that it’s a great place to work; that parents believe in the school and the job that we’re doing; that the students believe in what they’re doing here and want to be here and want to emulate the values….It’s about articulating the mission and vision.

Bolman and Deal (1994a) would likely agree with Principal E, given their assertion that “one of the most important aspects of leadership is communicating the vision to others” (p. 84).

**Aligning and Shaping Values**

Perhaps not surprisingly, all of the participants in this study agreed that it was vital for independent-school principals to ensure their values aligned with those of the schools they lead. Principal D said, “I think that if you are going to be part of a private-school environment…. you need to clearly understand what the values are of the school and whether they align with who you are as an individual”. Principal G said that, as the principal, aligning one’s values with those of the school is “totally important, because you don’t want to be hypocritical and you want to be able to be authentic”; here again we hear echoes of authentic leadership (see Avolio & Gardner,
Here’s how Principal E described the importance of value alignment:

I think you are going to kill yourself if you are not in alignment with the school’s values…especially in longstanding independent schools where you have alumni and teachers, and it’s in their bones that “this is the way we’ve always done it” and “this is what’s important to us”. I think you have to be in alignment. If you don’t believe in the values, how are you going to get anyone else to?

The rhetorical question with which Principal E ends this comment helps both the researcher and reader to realize that independent-school principals must align their values with those of their schools, because part of their job is to promote, or ‘sell’, the school to prospective families and supporters. Using the metaphor of the body, Principal C summarized the importance of value alignment with this remark: “They have to. It’s as simple as that. You are the face of the school, so you have to emulate all of the core values. You have to practise them. You have to base decisions on them”. Elsewhere, Principal B used the same metaphor to describe the relationship between principal and school. By comparing the principal to the face of the school, Principal C suggests not only that independent-school principals are the most visible part of the school ‘body’, but also that they are individual representatives of the larger collective with a duty to represent the school values at all times.

Four participants spoke about the potential danger associated with a misalignment of values. Using a musical metaphor in which the school is the symphony and the principal is the lead instrument, Principal F said that if a principal’s values were not aligned with the school values, “You would be immediately exposed as someone who is not in tune”. Echoing this idea of potential discord, here’s how Principal B described the results of misalignment:
The tension that would be caused by a misalignment would either kill the school or kill the principal! I really think that! It’s going to be one or the other. The first canary in the coal mine would be the faculty; they would put up with it for a bit, but then someone would go to the Board or something. There would be a quiet revolt and then an open revolt. Or, the principal would develop a substance abuse problem or something! Or, everyone would be in that horrible place, where the teachers just close the doors and do what they were always doing and the school would never evolve or grow. That alignment is essential.

In a similar vein, Principal A said this:

The job would be untenable if they weren’t aligned and you would become sort of schizophrenic! I can’t imagine what it would be like if you didn’t share the values of the school. It’s absolutely necessary. Absolutely necessary. And that’s because you can only put your best self aside or act for so long; that takes a certain degree of energy. Put it this way: can you think of anyone who managed or led an institution who didn’t agree with the values of that institution?

Notice Principal A’s repetition of the phrase ‘absolutely necessary’; as a rhetorical strategy, repetition is traditionally used to create coherence, provide emphasis, and enhance the impact of the speaker’s message (Nida, 1990, pp. 41, 42, 45). Here, Principal A indeed seems to be emphasizing the need for value alignment. Interestingly, in the following remarks, Principal C addressed the rhetorical question posed by Principal A:

if you went into the histories of independent schools, not only in Canada, but also in the United States, I think you would find there have been times when Heads have strayed – the joking term is they became a ‘severed Head’. They made mistakes and they were held accountable for the mistakes that they had made. And that’s when there is a
misalignment and that can’t be…. You are a leader and, as a school leader, you are a role model not only for your staff, but also for your students, and they need to see you upholding not only the values of the school, but also what we believe as a society is correct. Your behaviour must indicate this. How can you be a leader and ‘muck up’?

Principal C’s use of the second-person, seen in the second half of this passage and in several other comments, is noteworthy. By using the second-person here, Principal C casts the immediate audience (me, the researcher) in the role of educational leader, so that I might better understand just how great the pressure is on independent-school principals to demonstrate complete value alignment at all times; staff and students (and, by extension, parents) are always watching and judging what the principal does. The rhetorical question at the end of the passage prompts the entire audience, consisting of both researcher and reader, to consider the answers to the question without actually responding to it, which, in turn, suggests that there is no other option for an independent-school principal but to align his or her values with those of the school.

As reflected in all of the passages provided above, the principals clearly believed that there could be severe consequences, both professional and personal, for any independent-school principal who did not ensure that his or her values were aligned with those of the school.

With regard to how closely aligned they felt their values were with those of their schools, the principals shared some interesting thoughts. For the two principals who now lead the schools they once attended as students, the refrain was remarkably similar. Principal D said, “I grew up through [this school] so the [school values] have had a significant impact on me…. [the school values] are the fundamental principles in my life”, later adding “in self-reflection, I’d like to think I align. You’d like to think that’s why you are in the position [of principal]”.

Principal B asserted, “My leadership values are aligned one-for-one with the values here” and suggested “I think it was both nature and nurture”. Even though they did not attend the schools
they now lead, other principals also spoke about near-perfect or perfect alignment between their values and those of the school. Principal E said, “I would like to think [my values and those of the school] align completely”. Principal C explained, “All of the school values are values that I hold, and things to which I strive, and things I believe we should all strive for”.

Principal F described the degree of alignment between personal values and those of the school somewhat differently by saying this:

even though they are different words, to my mind, [my values and those of the school] align very well. Without looking at tightly-defined terms, I don’t think there’s anything that contradicts the school’s values in the way I behave; in fact, I think [the school’s values] almost grow out of [how I behave].

Principal F emphasized the notion that an independent-school principal truly embodies the school values by saying, “I stand for and am the public representation in many ways of the school’s values”.

Principal A offered a particularly interesting perspective on alignment between the principal’s leadership values and the school values. Here’s the comment:

I’m going to use a musical simile or metaphor: I think that my way of looking at things is as counterpoint to point. I think that in so far as a school has a dominant culture, a way of doing things, that is going to go on whether you like it or not, it’s your job to look at what is possibly missed. And, of course, in music, that’s exactly what the counterpoint does….So, I think I tend to do that, because I think that formal education, institutional education, takes itself generally too seriously, sees things as being too intentional – teachers wanting to control and manage outcomes and all of that. I think that the school motto…is deeply problematic. I think it really is…so amorphous and so antique….I don’t think there is anything in my own values that is counter to those of the school –
there’s nothing that is subversive – but it is my job to make sure the mission and vision of the school are relevant, and anytime you want to make sure something is relevant, usually you end up finding stuff you are doing that isn’t helpful or useful.

By using a musical metaphor, Principal A here suggests that the principal has a duty to maintain a critical eye when reviewing school values if the school is to remain harmonious. Begley (2006) would likely agree, given his assertion that “our personal values as well of [sic] those of the profession, organization, community and society are not necessarily consistent or compatible with each other” (p. 578).

The data collected for this study revealed that the participants not only had something to say about aligning values, but also about shaping them. The common idea seemed to be that independent-school principals may shape their schools’ values, but they will never fundamentally change them. Principal D said, “I think you can enhance a school’s values, maybe add to it. I think most school cultures are a product of tradition and you are going to rest your laurels on the motto of the school”. Principal B similarly noted, “I don’t think a school Head can re-make a school culture….You can shine a brighter light on the school culture”. Other principals spoke about discussing and examining school values without fundamentally changing what their schools stood for. All of their comments align well with Deal and Peterson’s (1990) assertion that “[c]ulture is a powerful force. Trying to shape it, change it, or fight it can have serious repercussions” (p. 13). They also resemble the outlook of independent-school principals in Alberta, who “exercised caution when attempting to influence a change in the culture” (Decoux & Holdaway, 1999, p. 77).

Three participants talked specifically about strategic planning as the avenue for shaping school values. Principal D explained it like this:
Changes to the school values are done through strategic planning and that may be done
by a school to bring in new leadership, or it may be done to update a school’s
perception…. They update words and terms, maybe to make it a more contemporary
slogan.
Six of the seven principals interviewed for this study shared stories of how they led such
strategic planning endeavours, thereby shaping the values of their schools. Three of those stories
are particularly illuminating. Principal G seemed to play the role of ‘pioneer’ of value
statements at the school:

We didn’t have values when I first arrived here. They had a mission and vision, and they
had some strategic directions. So, in my first year…we reviewed the strategic directions
and added to those….And then, we created the values. So, I was part of the process for
creating the values….It took us well over a year and a half to solidify those values. It
took a long time. And if anything, we’re still working….we are trying to make them part
of the entire school focus…. once I realized that they didn’t exist, then I really saw the
need….we worked through it with faculty, staff – we had many meetings – students,
somewhat with parents as well. It was a facilitated process; we didn’t hire an external
facilitator – we did it ourselves. And we finally whittled it down to a list that we feel is
solidified. Actually, it probably took two years to do all of that. It took quite a bit of
time.

With the following remarks, Principal E explained the process used to make the school’s list of
values more clear and concise:

It may be no small coincidence that the articulation of [the school’s] values has occurred
while I’ve been Head; although, it was a very democratic process we went through to
review our values. It wasn’t me just saying, “Here are our school values”; we engaged
our staff and our Board and our students in the process…. We had all of these different value-statements. So, I said, “Here’s a list of them” and I got everybody to vote and choose their top five.

The process described here echoes Bolman and Deal’s (1994a) suggestion that “the leader senses [e] and distills [l] values that run deeply within the context of the organization” (p. 84).

Principal A had this approach that tried to focus on the school’s unique qualities:

When we went and looked at our mission, we had open groups with Board members and alum and people talked about confidence and compassion and all of those things. My argument was always, “Look, no one is going to suggest that these aren’t really important things. The problem is they are so generic.” I have no reason to think that [students] at other schools aren’t confident and compassionate people too. So, what are we doing differently?

According to Bolman and Deal (1994a), “We need to see leaders both as defenders of values and as educators or creators of inspiring, motivating cultures” (p. 92). Using a variety of different strategies, the majority of principals in this study clearly played an important part in shaping their school’s values. Overall, the principals’ commentary on the public dimension of aligning and shaping values indicates that there is very close alignment between what independent-school principals stand for and what the schools they lead stand for.

**Being Visible**

Another important public dimension of independent-school principalship that emerged from the data collected was the idea of being visible in the school community. When asked to identify key leadership practices, Principal B said, “be visible, be accessible”; this remark illustrates the imperative mood, which, as mentioned earlier, is used “to command, enjoin, implore or entreat” (Shea, Scanlon, & Aufses, 2008, p. 58). Principal F said, “I think you’ve got
to be visible; you can’t be hidden away….I think the visibility is something that’s important”. Principal A shared that, “When parents say, ‘Geez, do you every get home?’ I wear that with a badge of honour, because I do get home, but if they think that I’m that visible, then that’s good”. The principals spoke about being visible in three main ways: starting the day off right, making the rounds, and leading in public.

The principals emphasized the importance of being visible right from the start of the day. Principal F said, “I am usually here first, because I think it’s good for the Head to be in and really get under the skin of the place and see what’s going on”. Two of the participants spoke about being visible in subtle ways, by doing things like exercising with colleagues in the school’s workout room before the school day started, but the rest talked about being visible in a very obvious way as students and staff arrived at school. Here’s how Principal F described being part of the morning meet-and-greet:

I would say that three mornings a week I’ll have my coat on, I’m outdoors, saying “hello” to students and parents, looking at my watch when faculty come in late – not sure they notice – but just to be seen and be around the place.

Principal B put it like this:

I start every day on the driveway... We have two entrances, so every single day I am at either entrance outside in the morning. I like to be out there. The cars drop off there, so I say good morning to each [student] by name. I fundamentally believe that learning is kind of a risky proposition for kids and the simple act of saying their name in the morning and welcoming them is a really big start.

And Principal A described it this way:

The inviolate part of my day is drop-off in the morning – I’m always there….I find that that one common feature each and every day means I say “hello” to every single [student]
and at least one of their parents every day. That sets the tone and the tenor for the day; you can actually tell from the way they tumble out of the car….I think that having that first greeting with the [students] in the morning cuts down hugely on formal student and parent meetings in my office; I think I save hours and hours and hours! Part of it, frankly, is just knowing that one is there.

All of the principals who engaged in the morning ‘meet-and-greet’ said that it was a very rewarding part of their day. Principal A even remarked, “I would say morning drop-off is essential, because it is a proxy for being there – it’s that simple”.

The principals also talked about doing daily ‘rounds’ of the school as another way of being visible. According to Bredeson (1985), “[o]ne characteristic of the principal’s role is that unlike the classroom teacher, the role is not necessarily restricted to one room, location, or even a single role” (p. 38). Principal F said, “During the school day, I try as many times as I can to get out of this office and move around the building”. Principal A described it like this: “I block off in the day-timer ‘out in school’ – it’s that simple. It’s an appointment with the school and there is nothing short of an emergency that can encroach on that time”. According to Deal and Peterson (1994), “[t]he appointment book and daily routines demonstrate what a principal really cares about” (p. 32). For two participants, the emphasis while ‘making the rounds’ was on connecting with the adults in the building first. For instance, Principal D, who made a point of checking in with front-office staff, Advancement staff, and other administrators before visiting students and teachers, explained the order of the ‘rounds’ like this:

I think that, by nature, I want to know that people are happy, and that’s probably why I want to be out making sure that not just the students, but the admin assistants in the building too feel a part of this place, because it doesn’t run without the admin assistants.
For other principals, the emphasis was on visiting the students and teachers. Principal F reported eating lunch with students and staff in the school’s dining room every day and having this approach in general:

As much as I can, I try and get into the classrooms, or just go to the staff room and say “hi” or just go and see what’s happening. Most recesses, if I can do it, I’ll go and stand in the corridor and just say “hello” to the kids as they go past….I think it’s just important to be there.

When the principals described their visits with students and teachers, they did not suggest that their visits were for the purposes of supervision or evaluation. Here’s how Principal A explained it:

I make it a real point of going to a lot of classes and when I go to the class, I am always there as a student. I always ask questions of the kids and the teacher. I want the kids to wonder, “Why was [the principal] here? [The principal] wasn’t observing. [The principal] didn’t have a pencil in…hand, checking things off a list. And [the principal] probably knows enough French. So, why is [the principal] here?”. And, of course, it’s just to show that the most important thing is that we are a community of students and teachers, and that trumps everything.

Similarly, Principal F said this:

I go to a lot of classes, and sometimes the teacher will say, “Can I help?” and I’ll just say, “No, I just want to sit at the back for a while”. And then I listen, talk to the kids for a bit and go out of the room. And, some [faculty members] will still come afterwards and say, “So, what did you think?” and I say, “I didn’t think anything – I was just enjoying being there and being part of it”.
By making classroom visits part of their regular routine, the principals in this study stand out as exceptions to the norm identified by Hallinger and Murphy (2012) of “[p]rincipals who begin the morning with an intention to visit classrooms [but] often find themselves waylaid by students, teacher, staff, and parents with urgent problems to be solved” (p. 10). The literature suggests that classroom visits can have a significant effect on relationship-building with both students and teachers. Decoux and Holdaway (1999) found that “high visibility and contact with students” (p. 77) was one key factor in the successful relationship building of independent-school principals in Alberta. According to Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) “[w]hen principals talk about instruction, visit classrooms, and make instructional quality a visible priority, teachers are more likely to trust the principal” (p. 55). Relationship-building, another public dimension of independent-school principalship, will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Regardless of the order in which they made their daily rounds, two of the principals suggested that being visible in this way had its challenges. Principal F admitted, “that’s really hard – to pull yourself away from a computer or pull yourself away from a document you are working on or find ten minutes”. Principal A noted that, “this tangible part of the job can be emotional and exhausting; everyone is needy, very needy”. Nevertheless, the principals agreed that being visible was crucial in order to set a positive tone in the school and build a foundation for strong bonds. Principal D remarked, “It’s funny, because there are days when you think ‘I’ve spent almost the whole day in my office’, but even when you step out here or there for just a few minutes, you realize you are making contact”. Principal A summarized the importance of making the rounds like this: “The day is essentially going around and finding out what I can do to make your day easier. And maybe that sounds a bit trite, but I think that really is what you are there for – for students and teachers and parents”.
A third way in which the principals of this study described being visible was by attending a variety of school-related events with larger audiences consisting of students, staff and parents. These events included assemblies, concerts, plays, athletic events, staff meetings, Parent Association meetings, Board meetings, Open Houses and numerous special events throughout the year. Principal A described such events as “another kind of appointment” in the daily schedule. Some of these events fit into the regular school day, while others extended into the after-school and evening hours. Here’s how Principal B explained the importance of attending assemblies during the school day: “I don’t speak in every assembly, I don’t run the assemblies, but I make sure I stand at the door, hold the door, and say ‘good morning’. Just being present and being visible is big”. Similarly, Principal F said this about attending Chapel: “I can’t miss it. I’m the figure head and even if all I’m doing is standing at the side listening or praying, I have to be there”. Principal G described the importance of attending the meetings of the Parents Association and Alumni Association, saying, “I don’t always stay for the whole meeting but I do an update and work closely with them. These groups run all kinds of events in the school.” Principal F also suggested that it was important to be seen by parents at school-related events:

For instance, we do overseas trips and we will often do a presentation to the parents before they go and I come to it. I don’t sit at the front; I sit at the back. But, I go to it, because I want people to say, “Oh, it’s a big deal, the Head’s come along”. As they leave, I say, “It’s going to be a great trip, isn’t it?” and I consider that to be important.

The principals consistently reported that being visible at these larger, ‘public’ events could be time-consuming and not necessarily the easiest part of the job. For instance, Principal F had this to say:
It’s a huge time expenditure, which, I think, people who are not in the job – and this counts for some Board members too – don’t quite understand; they can’t understand why you have to get off the balcony on the dance floor occasionally.

Here, Principal F’s use of a dance metaphor not only highlights the performance element associated with attending all of these events, but also draws attention to the Board of Governors as a particular constituency that fails to understand the complexity of independent-school principalship. The incredible expenditure of time spent at events was again evident when Principal G exclaimed, while describing the schedule of the previous day, “We didn’t have anything at night yesterday – it was lovely!” Principal D helped illuminate what makes leading at large school-related events so difficult by admitting the following: “I still get nervous in front of our faculty and staff….People tell me I look relaxed up there, but on the inside I’m thinking Oh my God. Some of it is the art form of putting on the façade”. In a similar vein, Principal F revealed this:

I think you’ve almost got to put on a face that may not be you. And probably, people advising you [about doing this job] might say, “You should be yourself”, but you are the face of the community….you have to be Mr. Jolly and your own feelings have to be suppressed sometimes…[it’s about] giving an outward appearance that matches the position, because everything you say and do can and will be noted.

This notion of ‘giving an outward appearance’ or ‘putting on the façade’ constitutes an important finding of this study in terms of the public dimensions of independent-school principalship.

Overall, through their comments about leading in public, making the rounds and starting the day off right, the participants revealed that being visible was another key public dimension of the independent-school principalship.
Teaching

In addition to being visible in the school community, the principals in this study spoke about teaching as an important public dimension of their leadership. Despite holding the title of ‘principal’ or ‘Head of School’, three participants still identified strongly as teachers. For example, Principal G explained, “I’m also a history teacher….so I’m always focused on how do we write inclusive history, and I think I have that same approach [as principal]”. Principal F referred to “the way we work as teachers” and Principal B talked about plans to teach high-school English in the future. In the previous chapter, when the principals shared their thoughts about the importance of learning and reflecting, they cast themselves in the roles of students. Ryan (2007) helps us make sense of these seemingly contradictory roles as students, teachers and principals by noting that although leaders “may see themselves as teachers in one setting and students in another, the way that they occupy these identities will be linked to…past experiences and identities” (p. 345). When the principals talked about how they continue to teach, they did so in reference to situations in and beyond the classroom, working with both students and adults.

Teaching students. The participants in this study described teaching students on a regular basis, whether as classroom teachers, assembly speakers, advisors or role models. Their various understandings of ‘teaching’ reflect the variety of interpretations of instructional leadership explored earlier in the literature review. Two of the seven participants talked about teaching in secondary classrooms while maintaining their leadership roles; for Principal D, that meant being the full-time designated teacher for one section of a senior-level course, while for Principal F, it meant serving as a ‘guest teacher’ for a unit of study here or there. Principal F explained the choice like this:

I taught a bit last year. I thought I would be very noble and teach every year, but it’s very difficult. So, now what I’ll do is say to one of the [secondary subject] teachers, ‘I’ll come
and do a module for you’ – 4 weeks or 6 weeks or whatever – and then she does all the preparation, she cleans up afterwards, she sets all the homework, so it’s dead easy for me. Principal D, who established a model for the school’s administration that required almost every administrator to teach, explained the decision to teach in these terms:

Admin teaches, one, because I believe in the model and, two, I was a young administrator coming in and what I didn’t want to hear was *he or she has no idea what is going on in the classroom or how can they tell us to be doing this?* – you know, the typical human responses to optics.

Kane and Mason (1992) similarly commented on independent-school principals’ desire to teach as a way of “establishing themselves with the faculty” (p. 142). Principal D’s thinking about administrators teaching aligns with that of Newton and Wallin (2013), who claim that “the dual role of teacher and administrator enhances the instructional leadership and efficacy of the principal” (p. 68).

Both Principals D and F commented on the value of teaching in the classroom, in terms of developing stronger bonds with both students and teachers. Principal F said this:

It builds up a relationship with the students, but it also lets the students see that *Oh, the Head can do this as well* and I think that’s good for the faculty to see as well. I think I have a reasonable reputation as a [subject] practitioner and that builds the relationship. Here’s how Principal D explained the value of teaching as principal:

Do I like the marking? No! I have 23 independent-study projects to mark presently, so that’s a bit of a challenge. I could give up teaching…but forcing the schedule – not forcing me, but the schedule – to include me teaching puts me with the most important people in our building.
Principal D not only conveys a willingness to teach, but also suggests that classroom teaching is an intentional aspect of the principalship that can be accomplished by simple scheduling. Principal D also believed in the importance of teaching for building credibility with colleagues, as can be seen in this comment: “I don’t necessarily see myself as a role model in curriculum, but I believe that my role-modeling of still teaching makes a difference”. Both Principals D and F also remarked on the value of classroom-teaching for maintaining their own awareness of and appreciation for the work that teachers do on a daily basis. Principal F said, “The longer you are out of the classroom, I think the quicker you forget how demanding it is”. Principal D said, “I sit amongst my [secondary subject] colleagues [at department meetings] and I am wow-ed by what they do”. All of these comments reflect the following conclusions made by Newton and Wallin (2013):

One of the most significant benefits of the teaching principalship is its effect on relationships with teachers and other members of the community. Teaching principals suggested that their roles as teachers in their schools allowed for more collegial dialogue with other teachers, enhanced credibility with staff members, and fostered greater understanding of and empathy with teachers, students, and the community. (p. 69)

Taken together, the commentary of Principals D and F suggests that if they continue to teach in the classroom once they become administrators, independent-school principals have the opportunity to model instructional excellence, improve relationships, and forge remarkable learning experiences – for the principal as well as the students.

Other principals in this study spoke candidly about the decision not to teach. Here’s what Principal E had to say:

I don’t teach here, no, and that’s a very conscious decision. I know there are two schools of thought about whether a Head should teach. Some think the Head should ‘be in the
trenches’ and let everybody else know that they understand [teaching] – and I completely get that. But I think that Heads are pretty highly-paid teachers who really need to be focused on what Heads do. Every one of us, whether it’s a teacher or an administrator, needs to be doing the job that only we can be doing. So, other people can do the job of teaching, and probably do a better job than I can. If the only reason I’m doing it is to set a good example, then there are probably other ways I can support the teachers. I can’t ask those teachers to go out and fundraise or do some of the things that a Head should do.

I chose not to teach at the start, because I just didn’t think I had the time.

By claiming that ‘other people can do the job of teaching, and probably do a better job than I can’, Principal E echoes a comment made by one of the participants in Kane and Mason’s (1992) study of independent-school principals in New York City (see p. 142) and illustrates Hallinger and Murphy’s (2012) finding that expertise is one of three factors “that bear on the intentions of principals who seek to enact the instructional leadership role” (p. 8), with “time to lead, and the normative environment of the school” (p. 8) being the other two.

Although not all of the principals in this study maintained the role of classroom-teacher, those who did not spoke about teaching students in other capacities. Two principals described speaking in assemblies as teaching and they shared stories about particular assembly talks they had given. Here is Principal F’s account:

I did [an assembly talk] yesterday – I do about two a term – about failure called “It’s Okay to Fail” – our kids get obsessive about any kind of failure; they are under a lot of pressure – some self-made, some from parents, and some from school. It was really a public statement about “it’s okay - it’s all a learning process”. … Three kids wrote to me independently afterwards to say how much they enjoyed it and could I send them the PowerPoint.
And here is Principal E’s recollection:

The one that jumps to my mind happened a number of years ago. Hopefully there have been more since then! I spoke to the students about the power of saying ‘thank-you’ – how it makes you feel, how it makes other people feel and that they should all thank at least one person that day. A [student] in grade 9 came up at the end of it and said, “Thank you for allowing me to be at [this school]”. That was totally unexpected and I thought *Oh, [that student] was listening!* Sometimes that’s all it takes: to think that somebody actually heard what I said.

The opening phrase of this passage, ‘The one that jumps to my mind’, reflects a narrative tone. As previously noted, the tone that a speaker uses conveys his or her attitude toward both the subject under discussion and the audience to whom the speaker’s remarks are addressed (Shea, Scanlon & Aufses, 2008, p. 1013). Here, by using a narrative tone, Principal E, in the role of storyteller for me, the researcher, suggests that teaching students in assemblies, and indeed being an educational leader, is part of an ongoing story. Both Principals E and F found teaching by speaking at assemblies very rewarding. Principal E described the feeling like this: “you feel like you are reaching [the students] with some pearl of wisdom”. Principal F said, “That’s really rewarding, that even with the rest of the job I do, I’m still given opportunities to connect to students”.

Other participants in this study saw themselves as teaching students in other ways. Principal B described serving as an informal advisor to a small group of students as teaching:

I believe every [student] needs a special wing to get under and I have my cadre of [students] who will come to me with certain things and say, “Can I talk to you for a few minutes?”; so, I am a teacher in that way.
For Principal A, teaching often took the form of informal storytelling. Here is one such story from Principal A:

There was one time with a group of older students that really seemed to make an impact. It was a group of grade 11 and grade 12 students - a really bright group of students. They were talking about vicarious things and they were saying how a couple of them decided to dress up as homeless people and spend a night in the street….I told them about how when I was student in university in [a city in Ontario], I did tutoring at the local prison, tutoring in literacy – basically, teaching them how to read. It was very gratifying work.

One of the inmates invited me to a dance in the penitentiary. My first instinct was, “Wow, this is going to be so interesting! Who gets to do this kind of thing?” but then I realized that that would be wrong; I would be taking advantage of the situation and trying to live vicariously. I could help them learn how to read – that was an open, honest thing. But if I attended that dance it would be a form of voyeurism. So, I told this story to the students and it made them think about the issue more seriously and understand what real empathy – not voyeurism – looks like.

Interestingly, Principal A used a narrative tone to tell this story about the power of storytelling, beginning the recollection with the phrase ‘There was one time’ and ending it with ‘So’ to mark the lesson or moral derived from the experience. Three principals commented on teaching students by being role models. Principal D said, “When you engage with students on a regular basis, they know your expectations and you can role model the behaviour you want [to see]”.

Speaking about picking up garbage on campus during the day, Principal B revealed, “For me, it’s an opportunity to teach; it’s that whole ‘do what I do and not what I say’ [thing]”. Echoing a similar sentiment, Principal F shared this:
I do set high standards as well. I always dress properly, I always address people properly. I spoke to a little girl at lunch yesterday and she said ‘yeah’ and I said, ‘Let’s just try that again’.

Elsewhere, Principal F said, “if we are going to wear a uniform, let’s wear it properly”. Principal F’s use of the hortative mood in both of these comments is interesting. The hortative mood is marked by use of the word ‘let’ and “exhorts, advises, calls to action” (Shea, Scanlon, & Aufses, 2008, p. 58). By dressing properly, speaking properly and using the hortative mood when speaking to students about dress and behaviour, Principal F serves not only as a role model, but also as an encouraging, rather than authoritarian, teacher. In their work as role models, advisors, assembly speakers, and classroom teachers, the principals saw themselves as still teaching students on a regular basis.

**Teaching adults.** The principals also described teaching adults as well as students. Principal C put it like this: “as you get up into leading groups of people, your ‘class’ changes”. The principals in this study talked about teaching adults in terms of role modelling behaviour, training, counselling, and mentoring.

Just as they described themselves as teaching students by role modelling appropriate behaviour, the principals also described themselves as teaching adults in the same way. According to Devos and Bouckenooghe (2009), “[a]n important element in effective leadership behavior is the way in which leaders act as a role model toward the team members” (p. 177). Principal E said, “You can’t teach people that they need to be respectful but not show respect yourself”. Principal F talked about “modelling the behaviour you expect from other people” in terms of courteous habits, such as thanking someone for a card or gift received, and professional appearance. When describing the principal’s part in supervising rehearsals for the school play,
Principal G said, “I try to do something myself, because if you want staff to do things, you need to lead by example”.

Training adults, whether formally or informally, was another way in which participants saw themselves taking on a teaching role. Principal E shared this insight about using assembly talks as opportunities for informal training of staff:

Often, the feedback I get is more from the teachers than the kids. I’ve discovered that if you want to train a faculty in a certain way, they are very resistant to being told what to do. If you are telling the kids and the faculty are listening, [the faculty] actually pick it all up and will run with it. So, the messages that I give to kids about being good people or believing in the school seem to resonate more with the faculty than with the kids….If I had set out to do [such training] with the faculty, I probably would have failed miserably.

Two other principals talked about training teachers in a formal capacity at professional-development events either hosted at their schools or by various independent-school organizations.

Most often, the comments that the principals shared about teaching adults focused on counselling and mentoring. Principal E said this:

It took me about 7 or 8 years to realize that I had actually shifted from teaching students to teaching adults…. when adults come and say, “Look, should I do this?” or “I have this problem”, there’s a teaching element there.

Using the imperative mood that reflected a sense of authority and a swimming metaphor that helped highlight the danger of such situations, Principal C offered this advice about how to help colleagues work through problems that generate emotional stress: “Don’t dive in the deep end with them….if you have someone who is wallowing in emotion, don’t get in there with them;
toss them the life raft and stay on deck”. Principal C also spoke about offering career
counselling to the administrators on the school’s Leadership Team; here’s the comment:

They are the group I believe I should be spending time with, helping them enhance their
processes and work with their constituents….You never stop being a teacher, so they are
my “class”. So, lots of time spent there….really helping them see what are their next
steps….What do they do really well and what are some places in which they could
enhance their skills.

Principal E talked about mentoring adults in a formal way, by working with a group of teachers
in a leadership development program; this practice can be classified as an act of transformational
leadership, as Nash and Bangert (2014) note that “[a] defining characteristic of transformational
leadership is that followers have opportunities to become leaders” (p. 463). Other principals
talked about mentoring when they shared stories of colleagues dropping in on an impromptu
basis to seek advice. Principal B described the overall approach to teaching adults like this:

As an administrator – I’m always cautious that this not sound patronizing - I believe our
work with the adults in our community should mirror how we expect them to work with
the children in the community. So, I have high expectations, provide lots and lots of
support, differentiate, assess in lots of different ways – all of the models of good
teaching. We want our kids to be designers and problem-solvers and 21st-century
thinkers; well, we should approach our colleagues like that too and challenge them to
solve things and design things and build things. Trying to replicate the best practice of
adult-to-student to administrator-to-adult is what I always try to guide my practice with.

Principal B’s uncertain tone at the beginning of this passage and use of both first-person plural
and first-person singular are notable; while the first-person singular reflects Principal B’s power
and influence as principal (as well as the grammatical person one would expect participants to
use most often in interviews for a qualitative study), the first-person plural conveys Principal B’s sense of unity with other independent-school principals, and the candid interruption of ‘I’m always cautious that this not sound patronizing’ reveals Principal B’s hesitation to seem too superior to colleagues. Again trying to minimize that positional power, Principal B later said with a laugh, “sometimes I’ll tell [other administrators] how I screwed up a similar situation in case they can learn from that”.

When considered as a whole, participants’ comments about teaching both adults and students reveal common elements of formal instruction, role modelling of behaviour, and counselling. Even if their administrative duties took them beyond the classroom, it seems that the principals found other ways to maintain teaching as an important public dimension of their leadership. In the previous chapter, they spoke about the importance of having role models as they worked their way up through their careers, and here we see them practising as role models for others.

**Communicating**

As well as teaching, communicating was also found to be an important public aspect of independent-school principalship in Ontario. This finding corroborates that of Kane and Mason (1992) who concluded from their small-scale, observation-based study of independent-school administrators in New York City that “school heads spend the majority of their time communicating with the varied constituencies of the school” (p. 141). It also echoes the work of Deal and Peterson (1994), who include “principal as a disseminator of information” (p. 21) as one of eight technical leadership roles principals may take on. Principal A identified communication as the most challenging part of being an independent-school principal, “because you can never communicate too much”. Principal E made this remark:
I spend most of my day communicating with people….So, that’s probably not the ‘right’ answer to your question, because the answer should be ‘I spend my time coaching or developing strategy’ or something, but I think the vast majority of it is communicating.

Principal E’s assumption that there was a ‘right’ answer to the question is worth noting here, as it may reflect Principal E’s keen awareness of being a participant in a formal study of leadership and struggle to reconcile theoretical knowledge of leadership with practical experience. Other principals reported that much of their days were consumed with communicating, either in group meetings, in individual conversations, through writings, or through e-mails and phone calls.

**Group meetings.** The principals’ comments about group meetings with different constituents revealed that this form of communicating often dictated daily schedules, with some meetings starting as early as 7:30 in the morning and others extending late into the evening. Principal B acknowledged, “I spend a lot of my days meeting with adults”. When sharing the schedule from the day before, Principal G noted, “I started the morning yesterday with two meetings – this happens a lot, where you have things overlapping and you just can’t help it”. Participants described regular meetings that took place on daily, weekly, bi-weekly or monthly bases with many different groups, including other administrators, staff, students, Board members, the Parent Association and the Alum Association. Through their remarks, the principals revealed their attitudes about, approaches towards, and opinions of group meetings.

The general attitude of the principals towards group meetings seemed to be one of acceptance, rather than enjoyment. Principal G acknowledged, “I know that sometimes having so many meetings can feel onerous”, while Principal D said, “I guess you don’t always like them”. Here’s how Principal B described the feeling about large group meetings: “I don’t dread those meetings, but I don’t like big meetings with lots of adults that are free-flowing”. Board meetings seemed to be a particular point of pain. When describing a day in which there were
three different Board Committee meetings scheduled, Principal F said, “that starts to dominate
your time, because each one of those [meetings] requires paperwork to be prepared, it requires
things to be circulated, it requires work to be done”. Principal A had this to say about Board
meetings and the misconception that such meetings deal in ‘secret’ business:

I’ve said to my Board before – and not facetiously – you should invite some people to a
Board meeting. They would find the proceedings so prosaic, so tedious, so uninteresting
that they would never want to come back! As opposed to the ‘cloak and dagger’ side to
it.

Having accepted the reality of possibly-tedious group meetings dominating their
schedules, three of the principals aimed to make those meetings as efficient as possible by
adopting a structured approach. For instance, Principal G explained, “You want to have a focus
for the interactions – an agenda or something to focus on”. Similarly, Principal A said this:

I try to be absolutely vigilant about a meeting not being a transcription centre or place to
distribute information ….There should always be a conversation and a purpose to it. And
there should always be a starting time and an ending time to it.

Principal F provided an even more detailed description of the approach to meetings:

We go to meetings and we want to come out with outcomes….we don’t just come to
meetings to be updated…. I think people might say that has led to us, in the building, to
rely more on information exchange by remote means, so, online or by e-mail or by
publishing papers. I think that’s a better use of people’s time, to be honest….You do
have to think things through and talk and discuss things, but we time-limit our meetings,
we have them at times of the day when we have to go to other things so they can’t ramble
on….We do have forums, we do do surveys, but we try and make our business as brisk
and business-like as it can be.
According to Gold et al. (2013), “[m]eetings can be seen as the visible manifestation of a school leader’s values system: clear ideals about respecting, transforming, developing and including staff can be evidenced by the importance given to meetings in a school and by the way they are run” (p. 132). In their remarks about running meetings with efficiency and purpose, Principals G, A and F revealed an obvious respect for their colleagues’ time.

In general, the principals saw group meetings as being ultimately valuable for several reasons. Principal G said this:

if you think about it, you don’t ever want to lose those opportunities, because those give you a time to touch base. If there are issues, you can find out early, because you have regular meetings. You want to also use these interactions to determine actions, next steps.

Principal F admitted that even though Board meetings in particular were “very time-consuming”, they were also “rewarding… in the sense that you can see that you’re able to achieve something”. Four participants commented on how useful group meetings could be for building transparency in the school community. Principal D said, “There are meetings sometimes that are important, but could they be done through email? Sometimes, but I think they are necessary to continue to build the transparency and trust”. Sharing the minutes from group meetings seemed to be an important part of building this transparency. Here’s how Principal F described the process:

we publish our minutes [from the Leadership Team meetings] to the whole school – to all the faculty – so we have to make sure that those minutes reflect a robust conversation….All the faculty can see [the document containing the minutes], all the staff can see it; they can’t contribute to it after the event, but they can contribute to any agenda beforehand by going to a line manager or a member of the Leadership Team to say, “I’d like you to discuss this, please, and I’d like feedback from you”. And, if it’s necessary,
they are invited to come to the meeting to come and say whatever they want to say. It’s only happened once and I’m not surprised at that.

In a similar sentiment, Principal A made these remarks:

I think that in a principal’s day, the more transparent you are and the more information you make available, the less likely people are to ever want to look at it. My expenses, our admin meeting notes – all of that stuff is available, anyone can look at it. And sure enough, the number of people who look at it in a year? Maybe six.

Revealing a strong commitment to inclusion, Principal D summarized the value of group meetings with this comment: “People just want to know. If they are part of your institution, and you want them to be part of your institution, then why shouldn’t they be privy to things that may – or may not – happen?” Overall, the principals’ comments about group meetings suggest that, despite being numerous and not particularly enjoyable, they are important, structured public forums in which independent-school principals have the opportunity to communicate with various constituents, accomplish a wide range of tasks, and build transparency in the school community.

**Individual conversations.** The principals also spoke about communicating in terms of individual conversations, whether with staff, students or parents; they saw great value in this type of communication. As Principal A notes in the following comment, individual conversations can be vehicles for showing interest in and attention to staff:

every time you address someone by their first name, you show a degree of interest. And every time you refract something back and say, “When you were explaining this to me…” it shows you were listening and it avoids the perfunctory. Even if you do that in a 2-minute conversation, that can go a long way.

Principal B echoed this sentiment in this remark:
I have lots and lots of conversations during the day with the people who are running the school; they know I like to know what is going on, because I want to know stuff about the kids, but I don’t tell them what to do. I support what they do. Indeed, two principals said that individual conversations were essential to their leadership. By claiming that individual discussions offered opportunities to share the vision of the school and “make people believe in the school”, Principal E echoed Bredeson (1985), who claims the following:

vision is the principal’s ability to holistically view the present, to reinterpret the mission of the school to all its constituents, and to use imagination and perceptual skills to think beyond accepted notions of what is practical and what is of immediate application in present situations to speculative ideas and to, preferably, possible futures. (p. 43)

For Principal D, individual conversations were part of “being attuned to the politics in the building” and “pro-active communication”. In their exploration of the political role of new English headteachers, Crow and Weindling (2010) claim that “the micropolitics of the school is an important and, possibly, timeconsuming part of the principal’s political role” (p. 141). Hoy and Miskel (1996) assert that the informal system, or “grapevine”, of a school “is not an enemy to be eliminated or suppressed; on the contrary, it can be a useful vehicle for improving efficiency” (p. 57). They suggest that “[t]he knowledgeable and flexible administrator uses the grapevine, thus avoiding the bureaucratic frustration of those who only play it by the book” (Hoy and Miskel, 1996, p. 57). Principal D seems to be one such knowledgeable and flexible administrator, using individual conversations to stay in touch with the micropolitics of the school. Several participants spoke about individual conversations as part of having an ‘open-door policy’. Principal D described how teachers and students would often “drop in” at the principal’s office. Principal B said this when asked about having an ‘open-door policy’:
Yes, but of course it’s never open – that’s the thing. I think I have more of an “I’ll walk by your room” policy or an “I’ll sit next to you at lunch” policy or “I’ll come and stand next to you while you are doing lunch duty” policy. This office is kind of out of the way, and it’s really nice to come in here and sit, but the way our geography is, nobody really walks by here. If “open-door policy” means you don’t have to make an appointment, I would love to think that I am completely approachable and have that.

Principal F offered a similar, yet distinct, perspective:

That’s the other interesting thing; all Heads might say we have an ‘open-door policy’ but we don’t really mean it. I think that here, that’s exactly what it had become, so the Head’s assistant was by-passed and people would come straight to this door and say, “Oh, can I just ask you about so-and-so?” and I’d be sitting and working on something. So, I’d say, “Oh, well, is it very, very quick?” and now it just isn’t worth it. So, I say, “If the door is open, try [to come and talk to me], but I might ask you to go back and make an appointment”. If the door is closed, I’m definitely not available.

This same principal also established a set time each week, similar to a professor’s ‘office hour’, when anyone could drop by without having an appointment. Kane and Mason (1992) also found that independent-school principals in New York City had ‘open-door’ policies (see p. 142); they argue that the principal’s office was a “forum for consultation, not the apex of a rigid hierarchy so often associated with more traditional corporate models” (Kane & Mason, 1992, p. 141).

Regardless of exactly where they placed individual conversations in their overall approach to leadership, the principals agreed that this type of communication could be very difficult at times. Principal B admitted, “Honest feedback to colleagues – that’s hard”. Principal D put it like this: “Do I enjoy working with the faculty? Yeah. Are there days when you know it’s going to be a tough conversation? Yeah. Are those fun days? No.” This comment illustrates
the use of hypophora, the rhetorical strategy of “raising a question and going on to answer it”
(Blair, 2012, p. 153), often confused with the rhetorical question. Despite the difficulty, the
principals also agreed that the difficult individual conversations could not and should not be
avoided. Here’s how Principal F explained it:

I’m straight with people and I do feel that if somebody needs to hear something, you can
do it nicely, but they need to hear it. In my position, to not do that, or to fail to ask one of
my colleagues to follow up, it’s sort of dereliction.

And Principal D saw it this way:

When issues happen, you have to be able to have the tough discussions. They’re not
easy, but I’d rather just go in and talk about it. And if you have that trust, if you set the
groundwork, people won’t see it as getting into trouble, but as ‘thanks for keeping me out
of trouble’.

Principal C offered a different perspective on having difficult individual conversations with this
remark:

I always try to save my experience with whoever the individual may be – especially if
they are having struggles – and encourage them to work with their [divisional Head] or
HR or someone else. If I leap in, there’s no place to go.

The principals’ comments about difficult individual conversations referred to parents as well as
to staff. Principal B offered this example:

Telling someone their [child] can’t come back to the school [is difficult]. I’ve had
conversations with families that can’t pay the tuition anymore and it’s terrible; we’ve
exhausted every possibility and you just end up saying, “I’m so sorry, but I can’t just
waive it”. Those are very difficult. Very challenging.
Principal C described dealing with difficult parent conversations like this: “I always start off those conversations by saying, ‘We all have the same goal and that is to find success for your child, whatever that looks like’”. Despite their potential to become challenging, individual conversations offered opportunities for the principals to demonstrate interest, share ideas, gather information and avoid future problems.

**Writings.** In addition to describing individual conversations and group meetings, the principals also spoke about communicating with the school community through various forms of writing. Deal and Peterson (1994) have pointed out that, in addition to the content of a principal’s writing, its form, emphasis and volume are also important. Principal A said, “I think that writing or speaking as the Head of School is essential. I do maintain a blog and it has a place. Sometimes one is more compelled to write than at other times”. Principal G described contributing to the school newspaper in this way:

> Every week, I write an article in our leaflet, our student newspaper – just a short article. Sometimes doing that can feel like *Oh, wow,* but it’s an opportunity and I’m not going to give it up, because it’s an opportunity to share what the school is doing, to help raise issues with parents for ongoing dialogue, and also shape that dialogue in line with the school goals.

The quality of writing in school publications was particularly important to one participant. Principal F, who regularly writes for the school magazine, talked about also doing the final review of the weekly school newsletter in these terms:

> I am the last pair of eyes that looks at the [school newsletter] before it’s sent home to parents. Not editing, but I do the final scrutiny, kind of like the gate-keeper on publications….I insist on seeing the [school newsletter]. It has our biggest readership; every parent gets it. If I’ve signed it off and there’s an error in it, then it’s nobody else’s
fault, because I’ve missed it. I’m not blaming somebody else for something that didn’t look good.

Principal F’s use of the gatekeeper metaphor here is interesting, since it has received attention from educational researchers. Deal and Peterson (1994) include “principal as gatekeeper” (pg. 22, emphasis in the original) in their identification of eight different technical leadership roles, explaining it, in part, as the principal “ensur[ing] that the community’s interests are well represented in internal patterns and practices, [and] broadcast[ing] the accomplishments to external constituencies” (p. 22). According to Kelchtermans, Piot, & Ballet (2011), the gatekeeper metaphor “captures the structural role and position of the principal” (p. 96) and consists of three distinct elements: “the outside (out of school), the inside (in school) and the gatekeeper on the threshold between the two, with a Janus-head looking both towards the outside and the inside” (p. 97). Principal F’s use of the metaphor of the gatekeeper to describe doing the final review of the school newsletter suggests that among the outside forces against which principals needed to protect the school is the judgment of members of the wider community. Overall, the principals’ comments about writing revealed that this method of communication was an important public dimension of their leadership, because it let them share information, express opinions, and reach out to a wider audience in the school community, especially parents, in a controlled way.

**E-mails and Phone Calls.** All participants in this study commented on e-mails and phone calls as other significant ways of communicating with members of the school community. They spoke about the benefits and detriments of e-mails and phone calls, as well as ways of managing these methods of communication. Collectively, the participants’ commentary suggests that communicating via e-mail and phone is a defining and demanding public aspect of being an independent-school principal in the twenty-first century.
Two of the principals in this study commented on how detrimental e-mails, in particular, were in their daily professional lives, simply because of the incredible volume and constant influx of this type of communication. Principal E said this:

A huge part of my interactions are my e-mail interactions, which I hate – I don’t hate interacting with people, I just hate e-mail. There’s just way too much of it and it seems to get in the way of other things.

Principal D explained, “It’s not that the messages are negative or the responses are overly challenging – it’s just being inundated with e-mail. Inundated!”, adding, “I wouldn’t even know how many e-mails I get in a day….There are some days when you sit through two lunch periods answering e-mails”.

Despite this constant onslaught, the principals recognized how beneficial communicating through e-mails and phone calls could be. Principal D remarked, “I believe that whether it’s through an e-mail or a phone call, that personal contact is important – it’s important that somebody thinks you care”. This sentiment was echoed by Principal A, who spoke about making ‘good-news’ phone calls: “there are certainly phone calls during the day when I reach out to parents – what I like to call catching a kid doing the right thing. It’s a great way to use a phone!” According to this same principal, by making such a phone call, “you positively bring happiness into [a parent’s] life”. Principal G saw every e-mail and phone call as an opportunity: “Even if it’s a phone call from a parent with a complaint, that’s an opportunity. Everything is an opportunity to change a perspective or a perception and to reposition the school in a more position direction”. A similar idea was suggested by Principal A, who described angry e-mails as opportunities for individual conversations:

The thing that is pure gold is to answer an e-mail either with face-to-face contact or on the phone; it’s actually a policy in our school. If you have anyone in the organization is
bent out of shape, or if you get an angry e-mail, you don’t send another e-mail. It makes a huge difference.

Principal A noted that this policy applied to parents as well as colleagues:

I will and have called parents out on emails they have sent; I have no problem calling them into my office and saying, “Here’s what you said about this teacher and the school – knock it off.” There is absolutely no reason for incivility; if you have an issue, you come in and talk about it.

Six of the seven principals spoke about ways of managing e-mails and phone calls.

Principal E offered this insight into what managing e-mails is all about:

Since our last meeting, I have been learning, thinking, and doing a lot of research on how to manage your e-mail more effectively; actually doing that is another matter. It’s shifting your routine so that you give the time to the creative time that you want and get away from the uncreative time. And so, with e-mail, what I’ve read about is that when we are facing something to do, we tend to slip into the ‘easy’ stuff that is trivial, because at least you feel like you are getting something done, instead of the ‘hard’ stuff which involves creative work; I know I tend to do that….You can certainly – the theory goes - make your life more rewarding and productive by managing your creativity and the trivial better.

Four of the study participants spoke about managing e-mails and phone calls by responding as soon as possible. Principal C simply said, “Something comes up – good or bad – and you respond. You e-mail back”. Principal D put it like this:

I think most rule of thumb, to be fair to everybody, is to respond to emails and phone calls within 24 hours….If I know it’s sitting on my desk and there’s the phone number or there’s the email and I know it’s there, I can sit there and stew about it for 4 hours or I
can just get it over and done with. And sometimes, you make the phone call and it’s just
“Oh, I was just wondering if you would be able to do a letter of reference for my [child].”
That’s great! I could have stewed about it all night or just made the phone call. So, it’s
about responding to phone calls and emails with immediacy.

Principal G suggested that responding with immediacy is all about respect and representing the
school well:

I like to be responsive, so I try to respond in a timely fashion, because that sends a
message about the school. It’s all about respect. If you respond quickly to e-mail, that
shows respect for the people who have gotten in touch with you. It sort of percolates
through all of the areas.

Principal A differentiated between responding with immediacy electronically and responding
with immediacy in person. With regard to immediate electronic responses, Principal A said, “If
you respond to an e-mail right away, people will pick up on that behaviour; it just spawns more
e-mails!”, but with regard to immediate in-person responses, “I never, ever answer an angry e-
mail. The angrier it is, the more likely I am to insist on a face-to-face meeting; whether it’s a
parent or a student or a teacher, I will always see them within 24 hours”.

Other strategies employed by the principals to manage e-mails and phone calls included
sorting the messages or calls before responding and limiting the amount of time spent on such
communication. Principal A described the sorting method like this:

Whenever I get an e-mail, honestly, if it’s addressed to more than just me, I may not even
open it, because I’ll think, this can’t be that important – which is terrible, but I just think,
someone will grab me if it’s really important.

Two principals revealed that it was their assistants who did the sorting of e-mails and phone
calls. Here’s how Principal F described it:
[My assistant] filters things and there are things that she will know she has to pass on to me, because I have got to reply and she can’t. There is a lot she fields and one of the most important things she does is that.

In terms of limiting the amount of time spent on e-mails and phone calls, four principals spoke about allocating time at the beginning or end of each day. Using a simile to clarify meaning, Principal A explained it this way:

In a typical day, I try and not let electronic mail take over; I have two times when I look at that: first thing in the morning and then at the end of the day. And my reason for that is that I just find that otherwise you, as an administrator, can very quickly lose focus – it’s like a centrifuge that just spins out all over the place.

On the topic of managing electronic communication in particular, Principal F offered this insight:

[Being an independent-school principal has] changed dramatically in the last few years, because of the advent of electronic communication. In my last job…[former principals] had come back…and they would say, “oh, I had half a secretary and we managed the whole school on our own”, but, of course, in those days, everything came by mail, it took a week for a letter to get to you, you took a week to think about what you were going to reply, you sent it back three weeks later and the issue had gone away. The immediacy that we now have means that, probably as in many schools for many Heads, the burden of e-mail, that burden of electronic contact, demands some managing.

Whether seen as burdens or opportunities, e-mails and phone calls definitely emerged as a topic of interest. As they described communicating via e-mail and phone, the principals revealed an important public dimension of their leadership practices that has the potential to dominate their time, consume their energy, and distract from other tasks.
Overall, the principals’ commentary about communicating suggests that it is an essential public dimension of independent-school principalship, not only because it allows for the exchange of information and opinions, but also because it provides the principals with some measure of control, ways to build transparency in the school community, and multiple opportunities for connection, improvement and progress.

**Building Relationships**

Another significant finding of this study is that principals of independent schools in Ontario described building relationships as a fundamental public aspect of their leadership. As Principal F said, “it’s the DNA of a school, really, the personal interaction”. This finding unites principals of independent schools with those of public schools; indeed, in the Ontario Leadership Framework, “Building Relationships” is one of five domains of successful leadership practices (Leithwood, 2012, p. 12, emphasis in the original). In their personal reflections on independent schools, the principals suggested that independent schools are families. By extension, their remarks about building relationships can be divided into those that relate to their ‘immediate’ families of staff members, students, and parents, and those that relate to their ‘extended’ families of Board members and members of the larger community. Although the strategies they used for each group were somewhat different, the participants suggested through their commentary that independent-school principals spend a lot of time, energy and patience getting to know different constituents in order to build a network of strong relationships within their individual school ‘families’.

**Staff.** When asked to describe how they build relationships with staff members, the principals had a variety of responses. Principal E began with this admission: “I feel sort of awkward answering, because I feel like I’d be making it up….I’m really not sure what the right answer is”. Noteworthy in this comment are the tone of uncertainty, evident in phrases like ‘I
feel sort of awkward answering’ and ‘I’m really not sure’, as well as the sense that there was a ‘right’ answer to the question, which was seen in other comments made by Principal E, despite reassurances to the contrary. Perhaps Principal E felt lacking in expertise on the topic of relationship-building, despite many years of practical experience and proven success, and was, once again, very conscious of the formal purpose of our conversations about leadership. Other principals began by commenting on the need for differentiation, reflecting Marshall, Patterson, Rogers and Steele’s (1996) assertion in their study of assistant principals that relationships “depend on context, the specific times and places that affect each individual and every situation” (p. 280). Principal A said, “How you do it is you work around their role and their practice….the people you interact with are all different people with different roles, different experiences, and different educational levels”. Here is Principal B’s similar remark, with additional insights:

I build relationships patiently and the same way that teachers build relationships with students in their class; you differentiate and understand that the same approach will not work with everyone. It seems obvious but it’s true. You just pay attention and find out what makes people tick.

If differentiation is key in relationship-building, it seems logical that patience and paying attention are also necessary, as Principal B indicates. As the participants talked further about building relationships with staff, they revealed several common strategies for doing so: respecting and empathizing; acknowledging; being available and listening; supporting; and, socializing.

The way that the principals spoke about the staff members at their schools, especially the teachers, indicated that respecting and empathizing with staff was important for building positive relationships. Principal E offered this insight in terms of respecting teachers: “I certainly know that giving teachers autonomy is huge….Mastery is the opportunity to hone your craft”. This
insight reflects Salo, Nylund and Stjernstrøm’s (2015) assertion that “[t]eaching is characterized by a strong professional autonomy, resulting in isolation and freedom from interference” (p. 492). DuFour (1991) also comments on teacher autonomy, asserting that “[t]reating teachers as professionals is at the very heart of the issue of creating a school climate conducive to staff development” (p. 31). Powell (1990) notes that in independent schools, classroom freedom “is a well-established condition of teachers’ work” (p. 133). Principal F had great empathy for the teachers, saying, “I do get that [teacher perspective] and I also get the fact that things like reports have to happen, it’s stressful”. Principal A made the following comment when describing the process for making ‘daily rounds’ of the school: “If I had to prioritize, I would actually put the teachers at the top of the list, because they are the frontline people; if they are really humming and ticking, the school works really well”. Principal D similarly noted that teachers “are out in there ‘in the trenches’”, further adding that “it takes special people to spend their days with young kids and teenagers”. The metaphors of battle used by both Principal D and A, as expressed in the phrases ‘in the trenches’ and ‘frontline people’ are intriguing; by comparing teachers to soldiers, classrooms to trenches, and the school to a battlefield, the principals who used these metaphors suggested that the daily pursuit of education is not just a struggle, but a combat mission, with elements of danger and risk. Overall, the principals’ comments about teachers were very positive and indicated that having respect and empathy for this group was an essential relationship-building strategy.

Participants’ commentary also suggested that acknowledging the staff was an important means of building bonds. The principals spoke about offering individual acknowledgement, not group acknowledgement; as Principal E noted, “Both praise and criticism in groups is counter-productive”. Here’s how Principal C explained the importance of individual staff
acknowledgement: “I am grateful for everything that people do in this building and they need to know it”. Principal B shared this:

I have a very good memory – I’m blessed with a very good memory, not just for names but when I see things too – so if I see someone, I will say, “I know you were trying that role-play with the novel study; how’s that going for you?”. And, it can be a bit of trick in that I don’t actually know that much about what you are doing there, but I am telling you that I am paying attention and acknowledging [that work].

Three participants commented on the importance of acknowledging staff in sincere and specific ways. For example, Principal E called thanking people “a form of recognition” and emphasized the importance of saying “‘thank you’ for specific things, as opposed to ‘thanks for the great job’, so ‘thanks for that really good comment in the meeting yesterday’ or whatever the case may be”. Principal A similarly remarked on trying “to be a cheerleader for good work in the school – and not in a gratuitous way”. Principal F offered this explanation as to why acknowledgement is superior to other relationship-building strategies that independent-school principals might use:

I don’t do a yearly chat with each faculty member; I don’t see any need….I also send out boxes of chocolates or bottles of wine for anything that’s done that I think is worth my marking. And, I think, in a way, that’s more genuine than, “Hey, let’s talk about how your year is going”.

For the principals in this study, recognizing, in sincere ways, the good work done in their schools, was definitely an important way of building positive relationships with staff members.

Four principals also talked about building relationships with staff by simply being available and listening. Principal E said, “I think I try to be available, and listen” while Principal B insisted, “you need to be a need to be available for [relationship-building] – physically, emotionally, viscerally available”. In line with Principal B’s comment, Day (2005) has called
attention to the extensive emotional energy needed in order to be a successful principal. Being available and listening as a strategy for building relationships seemed to be about *gathering* information, rather than *providing* it, as can be seen in the following description, offered by Principal C:

I will also spend time with teachers who are working on a project – maybe something that they are doing outside of school, or maybe something they are doing with and for the school – to be able to gain some understanding on that.

It can also be seen in these remarks, made by Principal G:

There are so many times when I’ll have somebody and I’ll think ‘Now, why did they do that?’ But if you are rushed or busy, take the time to listen….You learn things that you wouldn’t have known and by taking the time to listen, you really understand the problem better.

The comments of Principals C and G reflect Leithwood’s (1995) ideas in his work on cognitive perspectives on leadership about understanding being the first of two general categories of processes involved in problem-solving; understanding is about “giving meaning to a situation (or ‘mess’) and evaluating that situation in light of one’s expectations or aspirations by comparing it to relevant schemata stored in long-term memory” (p. 120). Overall, the principals in this study suggested that being available and listening was an important relationship-building strategy when working with staff. As Principal B put it, “If you can just listen and file away a little something, it’s a very good practice”.

Another relationship-building strategy that was apparent in participants’ comments was supporting staff members, either with emotional ‘back-up’ or with investment in professional development. Two principals shared specific stories about providing emotional support to staff. Principal A said, with regard to one of the Vice Principals, “When she has some really bad news
to deliver, I deliver it for her, because she has to deliver these kinds of things all day long”.

Along similar lines, Principal B disclosed this:

I’ve got one situation right now: an unhappy set of parents, probably – no, definitely – unrealistic in their expectations and now disappointed in expectations not met, and it’s just taken away too much time from my teachers and my administrators, so I said, “I think you guys are done with this and it’s over to me now – you go work with the kid and I’ll work with the parents”.

Notice Principal B’s use of the first-person possessive in the phrase ‘my teachers and my administrators’; such diction not only implies a sense of ownership and power associated with the principalship, but also suggests that it is a principal’s duty to protect the staff from negative outside forces – in this case, unhappy parents. Through their practices of providing the staff with emotional support, Principals A and B illustrate well the theme of concern, or “the ability to recognize and respond to needs” (p. 280) identified by Marshall, Patterson, Rogers and Steele (1996) as central to “[m]anaging relationships within the ethical framework of caring” (p. 280).

Principal D, one of the two principals who maintained a teaching role, spoke about showing support for staff by investing in professional development. According to DuFour (1991), “[p]rincipals who recognize that school improvement means people improvement and commit themselves to creating the conditions to promote the professional growth of their teachers, can make an enormous difference in their schools” (p. 96). After describing the school’s specific professional-development initiatives, Principal D said, “we will put money toward this because we think it’s important to support the teachers with their different needs”, later adding “showing that you have invested in PD, whether it’s personal or educational, draws relevance for people. It sends the message that what we do here is important and we need to keep learning”. Recently, Drago-Severson (2007) proposed a “learning-oriented model of school leadership” (p. 114,
emphasis in the original) that “can support the process of growth for adults with different developmental orientations” (p. 114) and encourages principals “to enact their roles as professional development leaders and architects of learning communities” (p. 115). Principal D seems to be one such leader and architect. In the comment below, Principal D further revealed that sometimes launching new initiatives and supporting staff members through that process, in an effort to build strong relationships, can be challenging; this echoes DuFour’s (1991) claim that, when dealing with staff development, “[a] degree of concern and anxiety are inevitable by-products of asking people to make a change” (p. 65). Here’s Principal D’s comment:

Nobody likes confrontation or those situations in which you know people are going to be disappointed when they leave or you are putting more work on people’s plates when you know they are already working very hard. That’s always the challenge with Ministry initiatives and school initiatives.

In such cases, Principal D’s support for staff included “the ongoing massaging of Ministry expectations….just helping people come to an understanding of the way that education is moving”. This strategy matches Winton and Pollock’s (2013) description of the political skill of policy appropriation required of principals, which involves “making sense of district and provincial policy mandates and determining how they will be enacted at the school level” (p. 43). According to Leithwood and Duke (1999), the literature usually classifies policy implementation as a managerial task, while policy making is considered a leadership task (p. 53).

A final strategy for building relationships with staff that was evident in participants’ descriptions was socializing. Sometimes the principals talked about socializing as engaging in conversations at school about personal lives rather than professional matters. From such conversations with staff members, Principal D knew various details, including who had been sick recently, who was going to have another child, and who had children recently accepted to
university. At other times, the principals spoke about socializing with staff members at school events. Reflecting on conversations with staff members at play performances, sports games and guest-speaker talks, Principal F concluded that, “To be seen is important and to talk to people as you’re there. Not to take the limelight, because it is somebody else’s show, but just to sit and listen”. Three participants described socializing with staff members at special events to which staff were invited to attend with their partners. Principal D summarized the importance of socializing with staff in this way:

If you are going to build community, community can’t just be always be about work. It’s important to show your human side at social events – it’s still professional and there are boundaries, but it’s essential to be part of that social life.

Interestingly, when they spoke about building relationships with staff, two of the principals distinguished between building relationships with members of their Leadership Team and building relationships with the rest of the staff. For instance, Principal F said about the Leadership Team, “We are in and out of each other’s offices all day, and we communicate in the evening and weekends by e-mail, and we go to social things”. Principal B called the Leadership Team a “trusted council” and revealed that the principal and the Leadership Team go away on summer retreats, as is common at many independent schools. Principal F best captured the difference between building relationships with members of the Leadership Team and with other members of staff with this candid remark: “It’s harder to build a relationship with [the rest of the staff], because you just don’t see as much of them. It’s easy to build an image, in a sense”. This comment suggests not only that there may be varying degrees of closeness in the relationships independent-school principals build with staff members, but also that there may be a hierarchy of sorts within this particular group of the independent-school ‘family’.
**Students.** Many of the strategies that the principals used to build relationships with staff members also seemed evident in their commentary about building relationships with students. In particular, through their remarks, the participants in this study revealed that they build relationships with students by acknowledging, listening, supporting and ‘socializing’.

Just as they did with regard to staff, participants spoke about offering individual acknowledgement to students. Principal E said this:

I try to be personal, I try to remember things, I try to acknowledge things. So, if I’m walking down the hall and I see a student, I can say, “I loved your question in [assembly] today!” or “Great goal in the game last night!” or “How’s that cold feeling?”.

Principal A shared a similar story:

around report-card time, I ask the teachers to tell me about the students who need a pat on the back or have come from nowhere to somewhere – even if that somewhere isn’t really a big deal. Those kids are the proverbial “canaries in the coal mine”….the kids you worry about and who need to be celebrated.

Principal F seemed somewhat frustrated in attempts to acknowledge students’ good work, explaining the situation like this:

No matter how many times I ask teachers to send me kids for good behaviour or great achievement, they don’t. I have a treasure chest down there of cookies and candy, so nobody comes in here and leaves empty-handed, but [the teachers] don’t [send students down] often enough, because they don’t remember, because they’re too busy.

And so, with varying degrees of success, the principals in this study worked on building positive relationships with students by acknowledging their good work.

Other strategies apparent when the principals talked about building bonds with students, as with staff, were listening and supporting. Often, the principals spoke about using these
strategies during structured activities; for example, Principal G described hearing student concerns as the staff representative at Student Council meetings, Principal F talked about listening to every grade 12 student during a 20-25 minute ‘exit interview’, and Principal D explained how Homeroom meetings were used to offer students “some encouragement or a bit of a pep talk”. Sometimes, the principals talked about listening and supporting individual students. For instance, Principal C shared a story about working with one student for five years on personal development issues, including organizational skills; the strategies of listening and supporting came through clearly in that story as well.

The final strategy the principals used to build relationships with students that was evident in the data collected was socializing – but a slightly different kind of socializing than the principals talked about in relation to building relationships with staff members. Principal C described it best by saying that this kind of socializing is about “[r]eally getting to know the [students], having fun with them, attending events that they are at”. Three principals talked about getting to know the students better through informal conversations at school. For example, Principal F described it like this:

it’s really nice to be in a hall, or…just stand around in the Dining Hall for 20 minutes to chat with people – that’s really pleasant. And it is rewarding in the sense that you are interacting with kids….To hear articulate, happy, pleasant, excited kids talking to you about something that’s happened at school or is happening…that’s great.

Principal B revealed the positive results of such informal conversations: “I know everybody’s name – every student for sure…and I also know something meaningful about everyone – not just that a [sibling] went to this school, but something meaningful”. This comment aligns with Powell’s (1990) assertion that, in independent schools, “[m]uch institutional energy is expended to ensure that all students are known, that no one falls through the cracks and gets lost” (p. 124).
Although Principal B’s comment does not suggest that having informal conversations constituted a great expenditure of energy for Principal B, it does suggest that personalized knowledge of students is a definite by-product of such a leadership practice. Three participants talked about ‘socializing’ and building relationships with the students at athletic events. For instance, Principal C shared, “I went to the final soccer game on Friday in the pouring rain, because it was their championship game” and Principal F talked about going by the gym every day, just to “be seen” by the athletes at practice or a game.

Overall, the principals in this study revealed that they build relationships with students by ‘socializing’ with them, listening to them and supporting their growth, and acknowledging their good work. All participants agreed that this was one of the most enjoyable and essential of all their leadership practices. Principal F said that “the nicest pieces are the interactions with kids” and Principal D suggested, “as educators, if we ever lose the passion to be with the students, I don’t know that we can be effective leaders”.

Parents. When asked to comment on how they build relationships with parents, participants’ commentary revealed not only specific strategies for doing so, but also that different principals had different levels of interaction with this group of the ‘immediate’ independent-school ‘family’. For example, Principal E simply said, “I can’t say I interact too often with parents, other than with parents who I have a purpose in seeing”. Principal F explained parent interactions like this:

we have really had to work hard to re-educate parents that they don’t need to see me about everything, and that’s very hard in a fee-paying school, when people think, I’ve paid my $25,000 a year and I want to speak to the Head….traditionally here, it’s been a ‘family school’, where you can always get the Head if you want him – and that’s great, but it prevents the Head from doing much serious work.
Those principals who did interact on a regular basis with parents seemed to do so in a variety of contexts, including in the parking lot during morning drop-off or afternoon pick-up, at the school store where parents often volunteer their time, and at various school events. In these contexts and others, there seemed to be several common strategies the principals relied on to build relationships with parents. One of them was drawing on their own experiences as parents. For example, Principal A talked about empathizing with parents’ reactions, because of personal experiences as a parent. Principal F said this:

I do know what it’s like to be a parent, I know what it’s like if the report card or the exam results are bad. So, I think part of that is that I’m also modelling what it’s like to be a parent in the community and what it’s like to be a parent when times are tough, or what it’s like when a fifteen-year-old boy has decided he’s not going to speak to his parents anymore – I know what that’s like.

Another strategy that became apparent in the data collected was listening and problem-solving. As they did with regard to students and staff, the principals talked about how important it was to listen to what parents had to say – good or bad. Principal F clarified, “That doesn’t mean that you have to be cow-towing to parent views, but you have to be cognizant of them”. Principal G that “really listening to [parents’] issues” could “help inform where you go in the future”. Principal F, who does not play a direct role in discipline at the school, said that this is intentional, so that the principal can listen and advise “when things are difficult between a family and the school”. Sometimes the listening and problem-solving strategy was employed in a structured setting. For example, when describing meetings with representatives of the Parent Association, Principal G had this to say:
they’ll bring in items, I’ll bring in items, so it’s an opportunity for exchange. I learn so much from those meetings, because it can help you avoid issues, because they become a conduit of parent concerns, so it becomes problem-solving too.

Principal C described providing counsel to a mother during a meeting about “a very difficult situation for the family”. This same principal best articulated the ultimate positive result of listening to parents by saying this: “They know that you are there for them and that you can spend the time around working together”.

One final relationship-building strategy the principals seemed to use with parents was taking advantage of every opportunity for positive interaction. For Principal A, that meant making those ‘good-news’ phone calls to parents as a way of “positively bring[ing] happiness into their life”. For Principal G, it meant holding numerous parent receptions to reach out to those parents who “didn’t always feel that they had the language or the culture to be part of the school”. Principal C’s comment best illustrates the overall strategy:

it’s being an active participant in events, attending as many different things as you can, because out of that builds a relationship. You are there. You are cheering the kids on the sideline with parents for a game. You are at a [fundraising] gala together. You are at a significant event at the school together.

In general, the principals’ commentary made it apparent that key strategies for building strong bonds with parents included taking advantage of opportunities for positive interaction, listening and problem-solving, and drawing on the principals’ own experiences as parents.

**The Board of Governors.** All participants in this study spoke about building relationships with members of The Board of Governors as a crucial part of the public dimension of their leadership. Board members can be considered part of an independent school’s ‘extended family’; they are not necessarily present at the school on a daily basis, but they occupy a great
deal of the principal’s time and, collectively, they wield a great amount of power within the school community. Here’s what Principal F had to say about the relationship between the principal and the Board:

the connection between the Board and the school can be intimate in some cases, because Board members here – and probably in most [independent] schools – are all, pretty much, still current parents. So, there’s a relationship built, whether you like it or not, with you and the Board members; in fact, with you and all the parents, because of what the kids say when they come home from school at the end of the day.

Principal A cautioned about the dangers of this parental presence on the Board by saying, “Independent schools, especially day schools, are susceptible to the influence of the Board, especially when there are a lot of parents on it”. Principal F noted that “Probably something like half, or even more, of my time is spent on Board business and governance and those things”. In terms of the power the Board holds, Principal B said, “I don’t own the school. I report to people and those people are the caretakers of the school and its longevity”. Principal F put it more bluntly: “I’m the Board’s only employee; I’m answerable to the Board for everything that happens”. This comment reflects McCormick, Barnett, Alavi and Newcombe’s (2006) observation that, in independent schools, “governance is not only a board activity but also an interdependent partnership of leaders albeit, an unequal one because only the Board has ultimate authority and has the power to dismiss the Head” (p. 430). Principal A described the principal’s relationship with the Board as “symbiotic”, further explaining that “The Board is your leader, your boss, and yet the day-to-day running of the school is my job and not theirs”. The use of the first-person possessive pronoun seemed intentional here, as a way of Principal A, the highest-ranking educator in the organization, asserting control over the daily operation of the school and making a clear distinction between the role of principal and Board member or Chair. Principal D
echoed Principal A’s remark, stating that “If the Board is there supporting the running of the school, not directing the educational philosophy or direction, that is key”. The literature supports Principals D and A in their comments about separation of duties. According to Poulney (2013), “the role of governors is to monitor the school activities but not be involved in the minutia of the day to day work” (p. 92). McCormick, Barnett, Alavi and Newcombe (2006) similarly note that “the Board Chair ideally should maintain an effective close working relationship with the Head, providing strategic leadership without becoming directly involved in operational management of the school” (p. 432).

Three participants commented on the difficult and delicate nature of working with the Board. Here’s how Principal C described what it is like trying to balance the expectations of the Board with those of other constituents:

I sometimes feel like [Nik] Wallenda [the wirewalker] crossing the Niagara gorge: there is a wire on which I am standing, and there are days when I am not blindfolded and I am holding that lovely pole to keep my balance, but there are days when someone puts the blindfold on and nudges me out, and there are days when there is a tailwind or a headwind and other days – which are the worse – when I have a crosswind! So, I often think, What is [the weather] going to be like today, as I stand out here in the middle of the Niagara gorge?....You have to be respectful and engaging and encouraging to everybody, understanding what is out there [in the gorge]. And not lose your balance on the tightrope!

By using this simile that compares the principal of an independent school to a famous Canadian wirewalker, Principal C not only underscores the elements of danger, performance, skill and strength inherent in the job, but also further emphasizes the importance of building strong relationships that can withstand potentially ‘windy’ conditions. Principal C’s simile also calls to
mind Begley’s (2008) caution, similarly expressed, that if educational leaders do not “keep the fundamental purposes of education in mind as they make decisions, manage people or resources, and generally provide leadership within their organizations….they will be tossed about like a rudderless ship in a storm by the competing agendas and interest groups that make up any community” (p. 21).

Collectively, the principals’ comments about the Board revealed that the key strategy for building relationships with Board members was spending time – lots of time - together. The participants talked about having a variety of regular Board meetings, usually during the evenings. Principal F described it like this:

I have five Board meetings a year and I’m sort of ‘on show’, but we usually have a social thing beforehand, and it always ends with an in camera session, which I step out of, but I hang around until the end of that and chat with everybody before they go. So, there’s all that piece of it. And then, there must be five Board Committees, each of which meets pretty much monthly, so there’s probably – this sounds horrendous when you start to do the numbers – a lot more meetings with me and some Board members. Those are sort of formal-ish occasions, but each one of them is an opportunity to build your relationship.

Poulteny (2013) helps clarify Principal F’s reference to Board Committees with this: “Sub-committees are specialized groups chaired by individual governors and often centred on more weighty issues related to finance, education and health and safety, including safeguarding” (p. 92). Beyond the formal Board Committee and full Board meetings, the principals also talked about interacting with Board members informally at evening and weekend school events, such as fundraisers and performances, and at evening and weekend social events, such as Board luncheons. They also spoke about spending even more time with one particular member of the Board: the Board Chair. All of the participants mentioned regular meetings with the Board
Chair, as well as other points of contact; in their study of independent-school principals in Alberta, Decoux and Holdaway (1999) found that “[t]he amount of contact with the chair varied considerably according to the governance structure that the board had adopted” (p. 76). Principal F spoke in more detail about contact with the Board Chair, saying “I have a weekly telephone meeting with the Board Chair, and he and I will go for lunch every now and again, and we e-mail each other a heck of a lot”. Here, Principal F referred to ‘the Board Chair’, where elsewhere Principal F used the first-person possessive pronoun ‘my’ when referring to teachers and administrators at the school; this subtle distinction may reflect not only a closer bond shared between Principal F and the teachers and administrators than with the Board Chair, but also Principal F’s greater sense of authority over teachers and administrators than over the Board Chair. James et al. (2012) have drawn attention the complexity of the role of Chair; this may place the Chair and principal on a more equal, and potentially competitive, footing.

In spite of – or perhaps because of – the great amount of time spent with their Board Chairs, two of the principals offered direct critiques of Board Chairs in general. Principal A noted that “if there is not a lot of training for becoming a Head [of an independent school], there is zero training for becoming a Board Chair”. This comment reflects Gossage’s (1977) description, provided earlier, of the Board as “recruited almost exclusively from the ranks of former students, parents, and friends of the school” (p. 3) and is potentially quite concerning, given the extensive responsibilities assigned to the Chair (see James et al., 2012). Principal F echoed Principal A’s sentiment about the limitations of the Board Chair in this remark:

Board Chairs are often not educators, so they can bring you a perspective from outside the industry, but they are often not that well-informed, so while they can be a good sounding-board, sometimes what they don’t get is the potential impact of something that you do as the Head.
Here Principal F emphasizes the idea that although the Chair is the leader of a non-profit board, that board serves a school and the Chair works with a principal, so there are educational aspects of the work that may be beyond the Chair’s expertise.

Through all of this time spent together, the principals worked on building strong bonds with Board members. They certainly recognized the importance of those relationships. Principal G acknowledged that “working with the Board is so important in these roles” and Principal F said that working with the Board “takes a lot of my time and it’s probably the most important thing I do”. The importance of the relationship with the Board is documented in the literature; according to McCormick, Barnett, Alavi and Newcombe (2006), “There is widespread consensus that a good working relationship between the Board and Head is essential for effective school governance” (p. 432). Two principals suggested that building strong relationships with Board members was something of an investment in the future. Here’s how Principal D explained it: “In terms of negotiating the times of friction, I think it will all be based on the relationships that you’ve developed with your Board members”. Principal F noted that “In times of tension, I think you need an understanding Board Chair, an understanding Board”. Although the participants’ comments about working with Board members did not reveal relationship-building strategies as specific as those used when working with parents, students or staff, they did indicate that principals of independent schools spend an incredible amount of time outside of the school day forging connections with these members of their ‘extended families’.

Community. Another group that may be included in the ‘extended’ independent-school family is the community beyond the walls of the school. In this study, ‘community’ refers to alumni, local community organizations, and the larger independent-school community, consisting of other independent schools and both provincial and national organizations independent-school organizations. Although at most of the independent schools in this study,
building community relationships was the purview of a particular person, such as a Community Outreach Officer, or a particular department, such as Advancement, all of the principals also seemed to play a crucial role. Crow and Weindling (2010) see school leaders’ involvement in the local community as distinctly political, in which the leaders act as “boundary spanners, between the school and community interests, buffers, to protect teachers from undue community pressure, and bridgers, to connect the school and community to increase social capital” (p. 141).

The principals’ comments about working with different community groups revealed two important relationship-building strategies: actively seeking out opportunities and investing time in building bonds.

Many of the principals’ remarks indicated that they actively sought out opportunities to build relationships with members of the community beyond the school. In terms of alumni, three principals spoke about working closely with Advancement on “alumni outreach”; for instance, Principal D spoke about making “a conscious effort” to meet with the Alumni Rep in the school on a daily basis. Stories about off-site alumni visits also indicated that the principals actively sought out opportunities to build stronger relationships with this part of the larger community. With regard to local community organizations, the principals also seemed to have an active and deliberate approach. Principal C said, “this is part of my vision for the school, that we are an active and vital participant as an entity in the local community” and Principal G noted that “[b]uilding partnerships is huge for us”. The principals in this study talked about a variety of programs in which staff and students participate with different local community organizations, including not-for-profit groups and post-secondary institutions. Principal C shared this story about building a new relationship with a local community group:

We have a new relationship with a not-for-profit organization that is all about seniors learning from students how to use technology. So, last Monday our [students] were at a
seniors’ home working with the seniors on how to use technology, and I’ve had emails back both from the seniors’ home and from the organizers to say just an unbelievable experience and connection. And this will continue now. So, the [students] will go back and they have their senior buddies. Yesterday, we had a community member, a senior, walk into the school off the street and ask the [students] if they could help him with his use of technology.

Principal E shared stories about meetings at the local Chamber of Commerce and mayor’s office that indicated an active approach to building relationships in the community. In their remarks about building relationships within the larger independent-school community, the principals revealed this same active approach. Principal A talked about the effort all members of the admin team make to regularly visit other independent schools throughout the school year, while Principal G described reaching out to schools, both independent and public, through various programs and initiatives. Principal E took the first steps towards building closer connections with numerous provincial and national independent-school organizations by “thr[owing] a pitch in” to do a conference presentation with one of them. Overall, it was clear from their comments that the principals actively sought out opportunities to build relationships with the larger community beyond the walls of their schools, effectively acting as the “bridgers” described by Crow and Weindling (2010).

The other strategy the principals seemed to use in this area of relationship-building was investing the time to nurture the relationships. Two participants talked about the considerable amounts of time they spend with alumni. Principal A said, “You have to do a lot of listening”. Principal D explained it this way:
We have a lot of alum who will come back…to come in and pick up yearbooks and say hello – and that’s great. The funny part is, that can be 10 minutes here, 10 minutes there and - even though it’s for all the right reasons – that’s another half hour gone.

The principals also spoke about the time invested with local community organizations. For example, Principal C said, “We have a four-year relationship…with an organization that supports single moms with kids who don’t have a place to live and the organization has apartments that they provide”. Principal E spoke about “the time I’ve invested in attending [community events] and giving presentations and doing one-on-ones”. In the participants’ comments about building relationships within the independent-school community, the same pattern emerged. When speaking about making regular visits to other independent schools, Principal A explained, “We try as an admin team to have each of us visit one other school once a term”. When talking about engaging with independent-school organizations by doing things like giving conference presentations and leading workshops, Principal E described receiving invitations to return, year after year, for many years. Just as they did with Board members, study participants seemed to invest a great deal of time building relationships with members of the larger community.

All of the principals in this study recognized the importance of building strong community bonds. With regard to building relationships with alumni, Principal A said this:

the fact that people feel like they really do own their old school is really important – it gives [independent schools] resiliency and strength. If no one cared about the school, it wouldn’t go on. Understanding that and tapping into that is important.

Principal E echoed the same sentiment in the remark that one of the most important parts of the job was “making sure…that alumni believe in [this school] being the place that they remember and want to support…donors need to believe in the school”. In terms of building relationships with local community groups, the same principal explained, “it’s [about] making the community
believe in the great things that we’re doing… it’s about promoting the school, it’s about making people say, ‘Wow – what a great place; I want to be part of that’”. Principal C acknowledged that when they participate in community events, the students “are phenomenal advocates and ambassadors for the school”, but this principal also offered an additional reason why it is important for independent-school principals to build community bonds:

it’s not just being the host or providing the venue, but also helping the [students] understand what their world is, because they live in a bubble and need to understand, for example, the poor in our community.

In the following comment, Principal E best explained why building strong relationships within the independent-school community matters:

I used to go around asking people, “How do you judge a great school?” and some of them said, “Having a Head who is known”, which I found interesting, but I took it to heart….I think I’ve become known in independent schools, which – if I’m doing a good job and known – reflects well on the school. They say, “Oh, [the principal] is a good guy; the school must be a good school”….That’s a part of leadership that many people may already know, but you need to engage in the community. You need to engage in the independent-school community. You need to be known.

Whether for the purposes of representing and promoting the school, expanding students’ worldview or ensuring future donations, all study participants recognized the importance of building strong relationships with the various members of the larger community.

When considered as a whole, it is clear that building relationships was one of the most important public leadership practices for the principals and one that consumed the majority of their time and energy. Principal E offered this insight into how building relationships fits into the leadership of an independent-school principal:
I think that leadership is about action, and I don’t mean the big, bold, ‘leading the troops’ kind of action. I mean the day-to-day, moment-by-moment actions, which includes acknowledging people, letting them know you know them, thanking them for what they do, appreciating them, recognizing them – that goes far further than bigger things that we tend to think are aspects of leadership.

The principals proved to be adept at using a range of strategies to build strong bonds with both their ‘immediate family’ members, consisting of staff, students, and parents, and their ‘extended family’ members, consisting of Board members and members of the broader community. With patience and purpose, they invested incredible amounts of time in building relationships, aware of their great value and ultimate rewards. Principal B said, “You build a reputation around that, around relationships”. Principal E put it like this: “Ultimately, if you want to lead or you want people to follow, you need people to know you and trust you and believe in you. And that comes through building relationships”. Two quotations from the literature help clarify Principal E’s meaning here. DuFour (1991) asserts “the fact that the principalship is placed above the position of teacher on the traditional hierarchy of the organizational chart insures [sic] the principal only of subordinates, not of followers” (p. 15). Duignan and Bhindi (1997) claim that “[a]uthentic leaders earn the allegiance of others not by coercion or manipulation but by building trusting relationships” (p. 206, emphasis in the original). Both of these quotations emphasize the same idea expressed by Principal E: by taking the time to build bonds based on trust and authenticity, leaders earn followership.

**Collaborating, Delegating and Empowering**

The interconnected leadership practices of collaborating, delegating and empowering also emerged in the data as significant aspects of the public dimensions of independent-school principalship. Two principals talked about collaborating in terms of teamwork. Using the
imperative mood, Principal G described a key leadership practice as “Work in collaborative teams”, thereby conveying not only a belief in the value of collaboration, but also a level of authority on the topic of leadership and a desire for both the researcher and readers of this study to take specific action as educational leaders. Principal D’s entire approach seemed to revolve around the idea of collaboration, as can be seen in this comment:

> We are moving together as a team. Whether it is the administrative team or the collective team here at [the school], that’s the kind of environment that I would like to think I am bringing here to the school.

Principal D’s use of the first-person plural here casts the principal in a collaborative role, working alongside staff members to accomplish shared work in the school. The group with whom the principals collaborated most often was the team of senior leaders in the school.

Although the exact composition of the Leadership Team differed slightly from school to school, usually that group included the Vice Principal, the most-senior academic leader (e.g., Academic Director), all divisional leaders (e.g., Heads of the Junior, Middle and Senior Schools), the most-senior leader of the Admissions department, the most-senior leader of the Advancement department, and the most-senior leader of the Finance department. Not all participants found it always easy to collaborate; here’s how Principal C explained it:

> You have a team that you are working with and you get all of the information, but it’s managing all of that to get to a consensus, which you may not always get to. And that’s a tough thing for me, because I like to build consensus.

According to Principal F, successful collaboration with any team comes down to this: “work out a way of really working together well and getting to know each other well”.

In terms of delegating, Principal F said it was a necessity for an independent-school principal: “you have to have people you can delegate the day job to”. Principal G shared the
same sentiment, revealing, “I really try to get people doing the things that they are able to do and that they are good at. You have to work through others. In a school, it’s all about that”.

Principal A simply stated, “I also think you should distribute the leadership”. Principal B described distributing or delegating like this:

There’s a little bit of a pyramid thing in which each of the [divisional] Heads of School have administrators who work for them – in both cases, a Curriculum person and a Student Life person. So, they are working with those people, who are working with the teachers, who are working with the [students]. And there’s a bit of a pyramid scheme to it, so that I work and build capacity and coach and offer counsel and listen and head-scratch together and make decisions together with those two school Heads…

According to Bredeson (1985), metaphors “reveal a great deal about how school principals interpret their organizational role, how they conceptualize schooling, and how they put their beliefs and values into practice” (p. 29). By comparing distributed leadership to a pyramid scheme, Principal B interprets the principal’s role as one of authority figure and overseer, rather than one of micro-manager.

Empowerment is closely linked to the processes of distribution and delegation. For instance, Hallinger and Murphy (2012) note that delegation is “a key strategy designed to increase the time for leaders to focus on ‘important’ tasks” (p. 16), but they further note that “[i]t is useless to recommend that leaders employ delegation unless staff have the capacity to perform their new roles and responsibilities” (pp. 16-17). Two principals spoke explicitly about empowering colleagues by trusting them and not micro-managing them. Principal F said, “My senior colleagues know that when I’m off the building site, ‘it’s your baby; please don’t bother me unless you really need me or the building is burning down’”, later remarking about the staff
in general, “They have a budget, they’re clever people, they can make decisions”. Principal B described empowering the staff in this way:

I’m really good at allowing my leaders to lead – whoever that may be. Whether it’s the managers or the teachers, I offer counsel and reflection or offer an opinion if I am asked or make a decision if I must, but I really try not to take over.

All of the participants recognized the importance of empowering their staff. Principal F said, “I think that unless you give [the staff] the chance to lead, things become top-down and driven from the top, and that doesn’t work, in my experience”. According to Principal C, “the most rewarding [thing about being an independent-school principal] is when you ‘launch’ somebody”. In this last comment, echoes of servant leadership can be seen; Smith, Montagno and Kuzmenko (2004) note that “[t]he servant leader’s motivation is directed more at the personal growth of the follower, thus the servant leader’s success is determined by the extent to which the follower moves toward self-actualization” (p. 89). Through their collective commentary, the principals revealed that the related practices of collaborating, delegating and empowering were essential public dimensions of their leadership.

Making Final Decisions

Although the principals indicated that empowering their staff members was an important public dimension of their roles, they also revealed that making final, and often difficult, decisions was something that they believed to be the sole responsibility of the principal. For example, Principal F said, “Ultimately, I make the decisions on things”. Using that same word ‘ultimately’ repeatedly for emphasis, Principal B explained, “Ultimately, the things that have my name attached to them as ‘Whose responsibility is this?’ are not that many. Ultimately, what am I responsible for? Everything!” Indeed, when asked to name the most important task as principal, Principal B said, without hesitation, “Being the visible, last line of decision-making
and the consistent embodiment of the idea that someone is in charge”. This finding echoes that of Decoux and Holdaway (1999) regarding independent-school principals in Alberta, who “generally stated that when necessary they would make the tough decisions” (p. 79). Principal D drew attention to the elements of performance and skill involved in making decisions by using a football metaphor to describe the constant presence around principals of “armchair quarterbacks, or people who think they would make a different decision”. As these and other principals spoke about making final decisions, they emphasized the importance of taking the appropriate amount of time, having ‘guiding lights’ to follow, and being courageous.

**Tools necessary for the task.** Two principals said it was vital when making final decisions to take the appropriate amount of time, whatever that might be, given the circumstances. For instance, Principal F remarked, “One of the things that I’ve brought [to this school], which I think we needed, is we make decisions. We don’t take six months or a year over something that doesn’t need to”. Principal A offered this explanation:

> you have to take time to assess a situation; you have to make sure that you judge what you are hearing through several filters – that’s really really important. And, patience; people will often want you to make a decision much more quickly than you are interested or willing to do. Take the urgency out of it.

Note the use of both the second-person and the imperative mood in this passage; Principal A is not only providing advice to the audience, but also speaking from a position of authority and imploring them to follow that advice. This idea of taking the time to consider multiple perspectives was echoed by other participants. In the following passage, Principal G talks about the importance of taking time to make decisions about student discipline:

> I take the time. We do thorough – really thorough – investigations. Whether it’s bullying or harassment or whatever, those are complex cases, so I consult legal advice, I consult
social workers, parents, all of that, before making a decision, so that you’ve got a complex, 360-degree perspective. Not rushing is key. Sometimes those cases can take 2 to 3 days.

Principal B summarized the importance of taking the appropriate amount of time to make final decisions like this:

Situations arise that require slow, ponderous decision-making and situations arise that require lightning-quick decision-making, and when someone with some degree of wisdom and thoughtfulness is in charge, that lets everyone do their work and not worry.

Another idea that the principals emphasized when talking about making final decisions was the importance of having ‘guiding lights’ to follow throughout the process. For three principals, those ‘guiding lights’ were religious beliefs, while for two others they were the mission and vision of the school, and for the remaining two, they were personal values. Here’s how Principal B described it: “I love kids. I love working with kids….In my decision-making, if I remember that that’s the ultimate driver of making decisions, it makes it easier”. Note Principal B’s repetition of ‘love’ here, which reinforces the idea that love for children directs this educational leader in the decision-making process. Principal C summarized the ‘guiding light’ idea like this:

It’s almost like gate-keeping. There are so many things in education you could do, you have to know what are your decision-making qualities or matrix or whatever it is that you use to be able to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ and ‘this is why’.

Just as Principal F did when describing doing the final review of the school newsletter, Principal C here uses the gatekeeper metaphor. According to Kelchtermans, Piot and Ballet (2011) this metaphor helps us better understand how principals act “both proactively and reactively towards the outside as well as the inside” (p. 103). In the comments above, Principal C suggests that the
principal must act both proactively and reactively to protect the school from the constant wave of outside educational innovations by using ‘guiding lights’ to make and justify final decisions.

The final idea apparent in the principals’ commentary on making final decisions was the importance of being courageous. Two of the principals talked about this idea, especially in relation to making difficult decisions. For example, Principal F noted, “I think you also have to be brave enough to say, ‘This isn’t working; we need to do something about this’”. Principal C said, “Whatever the decision is, there’s been all the due diligence – research and everything else…but there are times when you have to make a decision and you are not sure. It’s tough to be courageous sometimes”. Day (2005) highlights courage as one of the attributes needed in order to be a successful principal.

**Situations with staff.** Four of the seven principals spoke about making final decisions related to staff. Principal F talked about making final decisions about hiring teachers, including supply teachers:

Another thing that I do that I would defend more robustly is – and I know this can be criticized – when we appoint teaching faculty, I always interview them, no matter what level….My view is, if someone is going to get into the building and do the most important job that we can do, for me not to have laid eyes on them and heard that they can string a sentence together, that they look presentable, and that they’re the right person, I’d be failing in my duty….Nobody comes and teaches here unless I’ve met them. O.k., you could look at that and say, “Is that a good use of your time?” and I think plenty of administrators would say, “No, it isn’t”, but I happen to believe that appointing staff is probably the most important thing we do.

Deal and Peterson (1994) would understand Principal F’s practice; they describe hiring as a “technical process to select individuals who possess the requisite skills, intelligence, and
capacities to serve as competent teachers” (p. 77) that “communicates the importance…of what it means to become a member of the school” (p. 77).

Two of the principals spoke about policy-related staffing decisions. Here’s Principal E’s story about a policy-related decision that was guided by a sense of compassion:

In general, in terms of compassion, we have holiday policies and leave policies. Every so often, a teacher comes with an exceptional leave request and I’ve had administrators who say, “No way – that falls outside of the usual leave” and I’ve said, “Wait a minute; how can we make this work?”, because these people work very long hours – evenings, weekends and so on – and there has to be a bit of a balance. I don’t think any of our staff abuse our sick-day policy, for example. So, we don’t have that sort of chronic abuse. If someone makes a request and it doesn’t fall under the leave policy, I think we need to say, “Why are we saying no to this?” So, I tend to try and take a compassionate approach to those kinds of things, knowing what I would hope and expect if I came with a similar request.

Most of the stories about staffing decisions had to do with termination of employment. A general sentiment expressed by the principals was that firing someone was a very difficult thing to do. Speaking for independent-school principals as a group, Principal B suggested a possible reason for this: “We tend to be drawn to education because we want a life we can lead with our hearts; none of us are equipped to fire someone or tell someone that their contract is not being renewed”. Principal B’s use of the phrase ‘lead with our hearts’ echoes Bolman and Deal’s (1994b) reminder that “the heart of leadership is in the hearts of leaders” (p. 310). Sometimes the principals talked in general terms about how their leadership values came into play in staffing situations. In his work on the cognitive perspectives on school leadership, Leithwood (1995) claims that values play a key role in helping leaders understand and solve problems, because
“[v]alues shape one’s view of the current and desired goal state and figure prominently in the selection of operators to reduce the perceived gap” (p. 122). Principal B, who valued children and learning and improvement, offered the following insight, using the musical analogy of point and counterpoint:

So, two of these things play in counter to each other: the one being that everyone can learn. The truth is that sometimes you have to say, “I’m not sure this is working; while you are learning, you just aren’t the right fit” or “you can learn elsewhere”. Removing mediocre or ineffective teachers, or custodians, or whatever, because they are not serving the community and the [students] in the community is just something you have to do sometimes. And you do it because you owe the kids better. I owe this kid a better teacher. I owe my colleagues someone better in this position. Loving the kids really drives it.

Principal B’s comments illustrate exactly what Deal and Peterson (1994) were talking about when they said that “[p]ublic excommunication of people who are not serving a student-centered mission is one way a school demonstrates what it values” (p. 79).

Three principals shared specific stories about terminating someone’s employment. Here’s Principal C’s story:

The significant problem was that a faculty member…surfaced reasonably quickly in the fall as not meeting the expectations of the school. Not working with the [students] as we would expect. Not supporting them as we would expect…. So, quite a turn from the interview and quite a turn from the detailed references that we had. Quite a surprise. So then, [it was about] working with the appropriate Head [of division] in dealing with the faculty member specifically, looking at a Performance Improvement Plan and working through a Performance Improvement Plan …. We were working on it, and we needed
time to work on it – there was a process we had to follow….So, that was in the fall and just before Christmas, we had seen the changes we wanted to see and things were settling….We came back from Christmas and it was like we were back in September. So, we revisited all of the same issues and we knew we could not continue this relationship.

But, we were in a position in which we knew it was critical to have the next hire ready to go, to manage the expectations of the families and the [students]….So, we worked with HR to get the next candidate – and did this all very quietly – and before March Break, we had released the teacher….We had the new teacher in place, so then it was all about the critical management of communication with faculty, because, of course, they were not apprised of the situation….that was a significant problem, especially because so much of it had to be done quietly.

And here is Principal F’s story:

in communities like ours, if you go through a process over many months where you are gradually coming to the conclusion that the things you are putting in place are not having the effect you want or that person needs to overcome the challenges they have, and you’ve reached the point where you have to say good-bye, that’s difficult enough. But, there are ways of behaving that you have to abide by, in order to give that person the opportunity to move on with dignity, to move on without their reputation being impugned, without any shadow being cast over them, and that’s really really hard when pretty much everyone in the building, when it happens, wants to know what’s happened, wants to know what has he or she done….And all of that stuff has to stay confidential. That integrity that you have to have can be very difficult to stick with, because you want to be able to say to people, “this was the reason”, but you can’t. You have to demonstrate the integrity you want everybody else to have, so you have to speak in language that is
supportive of the person affected, supportive of the community and the effect it’s going to have, but reinforce the fact that we don’t do these things at the drop of a hat, that they are always done very professionally, and that it’s always a last resort; however, sometimes it is the only option left to us as a school and it has to happen.

In both of these passages, the principals talked about how they made the necessary final decisions by following a set process, maintaining discretion and adhering to their commitment to integrity.

Principal E shared the following story about “terminat[ing] a long-serving teacher – about 7 or 8 years - who was very popular with the students and the parents”:

we made the decision and we didn’t send out an announcement about it; we waited until exams were over and marks were in. And then, in the normal course of our communication, sent out an e-mail to say, “Best of luck to the following teachers, who aren’t returning…” – and for various reasons, including retirement, maternity leave, whatever. It’s what we had always done, even when we were letting teachers go. But this one, all of a sudden there was this backlash.

Although this backlash resulted in several weeks of meetings with concerned parents and the Board of Governors that created such a negative tone that Principal E referred to it as “the worst summer of my career, and the worst experience of my career”, this educational leader still affirmed, “I never doubted the decision I made – it was the right decision”.

Overall, in talking about making final decisions in situations with staff, the principals not only emphasized their power within the organization, but also the values on which their decisions were based.
**Situations with students.** Similar findings emerged from the principals’ talk about making final decisions in situations with students. Principal C talked about using both courage and integrity in order to work through a difficult situation regarding a student’s mental health:

There was a student who was indicating that she was potentially in a position that was emotionally unstable and, potentially, might be in a position of harming herself or others. So, it was about spending time with her family to help them understand what we were seeing and helping them see, because, of course, like many parents, you would never want to believe that your child is in that situation. So, that took a huge amount of courage and it was the right thing to do – no question. It was one of those situations that kept me up at night, because I was worried about her and the family. She couldn’t stay at our school, because she needed help….It was a tough situation all around, and, because of the need for confidentiality, it couldn’t be shared. We live in a society in which people want to know every dirty little detail and people wanted the information, but the answer was, “I’m not at liberty to share it”.

Principal E shared a story about student expulsion in which integrity trumped compassion:

One thing that comes to mind…is when we expelled a student for academic reasons. He was on an [academic] contract and he got [a very low average in one year], so he was told he wasn’t allowed to return for [the next year]. His parents came in and pleaded and begged and so on. [We] said, “O.k., if we allow him to come back, we have to set a target for his fall report, and if he doesn’t reach that target then he’ll have to leave.” And, [the parents and student] chose a target…higher than what [other students in that grade] needed to get. So, when the time came around, he had [improved] but [was] not near the target they had chosen….So, it was a pretty tough decision….But, we decided to say, “You can’t stay”; we had set this [target] and helped him along the way. The student was
aware of it – he had chosen it….I really felt that the integrity of what we had said we would do trumped the compassion for the student….I felt it was really an integrity call; if we had been compassionate – and I think I err on the side of being compassionate more often than not – it might have taught him a pretty strong lesson that we didn’t want to teach him.

According to this same principal, “most of the decisions we make are not right versus wrong decisions; they are right versus right decisions”. This statement echoes the findings of Cranston, Ehrich and Kimber (2006) in their study of ethical dilemmas faced by independent-school principals in Australia. In both of the passages provided above, the principals worked through difficult situations with students by relying on their personal leadership values, especially integrity.

**Times of crisis.** Three principals spoke about making decisions in times of crisis and when they did so, they again emphasized the importance of relying on values. Smith and Riley (2012) describe five categories of school-based crises: short-term, cathartic, long-term, one-off, and infectious (see pp. 59-60). According to Bolman and Deal (1994), “[p]articularly in times of crisis…we look to leaders, not to managers, for hope, inspiration, and a pathway to somewhere more desirable” (p. 77). Principal D shared the following story about dealing with a flood in the building:

Perfect example, we had a flood here this morning….the fire alarm goes, so we’re all standing outside….We went over to [the largest space on campus] and then got the kids all there. So, we’ve got about 1000 kids in [that space]….That happened at about ten to eight and by 8:30 we’re sitting here in a meeting and we’ve got to cancel school. So, how do you respond in times of emergency?….I just said, “Let’s call the faculty and staff down for a meeting and we’ll let them know. We’ll put out a communication to parents”.
How do we not raise alarm? Well, [by saying] “it happened last year, it’s just unfortunate, it should be fine for tomorrow and we’ll be back up and operational”.

There’s a safety issue and because the water is connected to the heat pumps and we turned the water off, there won’t be any heat in the building. Then we met with faculty and staff and they were good. I mean, they kind of ‘get’ what’s going to happen and we just cancelled the day. We made an announcement, explained exactly what was going on and went from there.

Even though this situation would be classified by Smith and Riley (2012) as a ‘one-off’ crisis, because it was “quite unique and would not be expected to recur” (p. 60), it was nevertheless a time in which uncertainty could have led to widespread panic. By being honest with the students and staff about what was happening, Principal D managed the crisis, maintained a sense of calm and demonstrated a core leadership value in action. Principal D is thus what Leithwood (2012), would call an ‘expert’ school leader who “remain[s] calm and confident in the face of unstructured problems” (p. 46).

Other participants focused on major crises. Two principals shared stories about the sudden passing of colleagues. Here’s how Principal B described the experience:

The most significant problem was when I had a colleague die unexpectedly….It was just terrible….I had the immediate need to get through the school day. I knew if that information had leaked, my colleagues might not have had the capacity to take care of the kids in their care for the rest of the day…. Between 11:00 that morning and 3:30 that afternoon, I had to then start letting people into this news, because I needed them to help me. I needed to write a letter to the families, which I decided I wanted to seal in an envelope with the parents’ names and address on it, rather than send it by e-mail. We told the kids they couldn’t open the envelope….I had to break the news to the people who
were closest to her – her teaching partners - but do so in such a way that they didn’t then have to go back and be with children….I had to get the kids safely through the day and out to their parents – I had to have the capacity to do that. And then I had to figure out an appropriate communication plan for the rest of my colleagues….In the classic hierarchy of running a school, you keep the kids safe first, then you keep the adults safe….It was an unbelievable day.

Smith and Riley (2012) explain that “[l]eadership in times of crisis…is about dealing with events, emotions and consequences in the immediate present in ways that minimise personal and organisational harm within the school community” (p. 69). Principal B referred to the ‘immediate need’ of the experience and described dealing with the situation in a methodical manner driven by the value of caring about the children. Principal F, the other participant who shared a story about the tragic passing of a colleague, had previously spoken about valuing integrity as “behav[ing] in a particular way”. This kind of integrity was evident in the re-telling of the event when Principal F said, “part of it is, of course, somebody has to be strong and somebody has to be able to say, ‘Okay folks, we’re going to get through this and this is how we’re going to do it’….the emotional times I had were private times”. Principal F provided a general insight into dealing with times of crisis by noting that, as an independent-school principal, “you have to be a crisis manager. You can never prepare for crises but you can manage them; you get through them”. Whether the crises were major or minor, it seems from their commentary that the principals in this study got through such times by applying their personal leadership values.

When we look at how the principals spoke about being courageous, following ‘guiding lights’, and taking the appropriate amount of time in situations related to staff, students and crisis, it is clear that making decisions is not only one of the very public things that independent-
school principals do, but also one of the practices that most reveals what they value and how values influence practice. In the Ontario Leadership Framework, Leithwood (2012) helps us understand this connection with the following remark:

Expert school leaders, as compared with more typical school leaders, rely more on a consistent set of values they are able to articulate quite clearly. They use these values as substitutes for knowledge in responding to those unstructured problems about which they might have little relevant knowledge. (p. 45)

Here is Principal B’s final insight about the fundamental importance of making final decisions as a principal:

I am very cognizant of the responsibility that we hold with these kids – this is their student-hood and they only get one go through that student-hood. Decisions I make will influence and inform what that experience looks like. My job is to make it as good as it can be.

Navigating Change and Planning for the Future

A particularly intriguing public dimension of the independent-school principalship that emerged from that data was navigating change and planning for the future. In order to understand how leaders of independent schools drive change and chart a course for the future in environments anchored in the past and tied to tradition, their strategies for creating change, managing change and planning for the future will be considered.

Creating change. DuFour (1991) notes that “[t]he contribution to change has been described as the fundamental task of the leadership function” (p. 23). Another crucial element of the public dimension of independent-school principalship that emerged from the commentary provided by the principals was creating organizational change. Principal G had this to say about bringing about change in general:
Another thing is that I really believe strongly in Michael Fullan’s work on pressure and support – and by pressure I just mean accountability. It’s a balance between the two. That’s a principle that I’ve lived by forever….you’ve got to do both together and really integrate them. Because, if you want to bring about change, that’s the best solution – and it really works! It takes time.

This is Principal G’s second reference to the work of Fullan (see 2001, 2011); the first reference was included in the earlier consideration of how the principals engaged in the process of learning through informal study. Clearly, Fullan’s (2001, 2011) work on change leadership had a significant effect on how Principal G thought about creating change in the school in general, as it has surely done for many educators. When study participants, including Principal G, spoke about particular instances of creating organizational change, they did so in terms of shifting the focus and re-structuring.

**Shifting the focus.** Three of the seven principals spoke about creating organizational change by shifting the focus within the school culture. For Principal G, that shift involved the school’s Strategic Goals:

I really believe strongly in accountability to Strategic Goals, so I submit all of my Strategic Goals to the Leadership Team and the Board, and I expect, every year, to report on the progress that I’ve made towards achieving those goals. And that’s what I expect my team to do as well. There wasn’t really a culture of that here before, so that’s been a change.

Principal F spoke about shifting the focus of power in the school in two separate ways. In the first, Principal F worked on changing how the role of the principal was regarded, as described here:
This school was – and I don’t mean this to be a criticism, just an observation - very much a ‘hands-on’ organization and when you have had one Head in the building for as long as the previous Head was here – a very talented and knowledgeable individual – it’s almost inevitable that he becomes the school and the school becomes him. So, I’m really trying to empower people so that doesn’t have to happen and they can make decisions for themselves. Initially, I found that the previous style really meant that decisions didn’t get made anywhere but in [the principal’s office]….In the first little while here, I was being asked to make decisions about really trivial things, because, I think, that is what had happened.

In the second, Principal F worked on shifting the focus of power away from the most-senior leaders in the school to the ‘middle managers’, as described here:

   Here we have a really big push on making the Department Head the pedagogical leader – not just leading the pedagogy, but leading in performance, instructional design, all kinds of things, which hasn’t always happened and has been left to [the most-senior academic leader] or [the divisional leader].

Principal F further explained this shift by noting this:

   for some of those Heads of Department, it’s been a change in their responsibilities…. As we look at our Strategic Plan, it is going to hinge on the middle managers, the Heads of Department, really driving the plan forward, and so we need to give them the responsibilities and allow them to manage and lead.

In the following passage, Principal G shared what it was like to shift the way that members of the school community spoke about the students:

   the discourse in the school spoke strongly about really bright students, highly intelligent, and I actually was not comfortable with that. It was a really dominant narrative here. It’s
not good for the kids – it’s not good for their attitude or for their outlook about themselves. It actually adds to their stress and their likelihood to be subject to anxiety and depression. So, that whole dialogue had to be changed. It just has to be upfront and tackled; we are trying to change the language – it’s been an ongoing refrain and I think it’s beginning to change. What we want to talk about is the progress and the effort – that side of things. So, that has been explicit, specific and done with conscience. That was something I wasn’t comfortable with.

Principal C shared yet another example of using language to shift the focus; here, the tactic was to rename a group. Principal C said, “Our group used to be called the Management Team, but, to me, ‘management’ means you are managing, you are taking care of things, as opposed to leading. So, I changed the title to the Leadership Team, because I believed that each one of the individuals in that group led their own particular area that they were responsible for”. Echoes of Leithwood’s (2006) associations of management with stability and leadership with improvement (see p. 180) can be heard in Principal C’s comment. All of these examples about language, power and progress suggest that shifting the focus within independent-school culture is an important strategy principals use to create organizational change.

**Re-structuring.** Re-structuring was the second means of creating change apparent in the data. Two participants spoke about re-structuring individual departments by firing and hiring. Here’s how Principal B explained it:

In the past few years, I have cleaned out departments and rebuilt them, or cleaned out departments, put in a new manager and said, “Off you go – it’s all yours”….Bad hires are just killers. They will cost you sleep, they will cost you money, they will cost you culture.
Principal G spoke about how re-structuring a department by hiring changed the way that department was perceived by the students:

We have totally revamped our Student Services Department in the last two years…. we have support for students who learn differently or might have special needs. We have a social worker…[and] we also have an intern….And that’s something special - the social workers don’t just do one-on-one counseling; they work with groups of students on peer-to-peer initiatives. There’s real support for kids….Now the Student Services Department is all welcoming and open – and it wasn’t like that two years ago. That was the number one change that had to be made.

Other principals shared stories of re-structuring the management structures of their schools. For Principal G, that meant having a “slightly larger Academic Team” of 9 individuals, so that “different people have leadership”. For Principal F, it meant reducing the number of senior administrators, as described here:

I have stream-lined the organization so that I have one Vice Principal now, as opposed to two. I think there was some ambiguity before about who was responsible for what, so now I have one person.

This principal further described what happened in connection with this change, and upon the retirement of another senior-level administrator:

we took [the job of the administrator who retired] and broke it into pieces and appointed an Academic Director, to look after the academic pieces and to support the Vice Principal, and created a Dean of Students post, so we sort of re-imagined the structure.

By re-structuring at both the whole-school and department levels and shifting the focus of certain elements within their school cultures, the independent-school principals engaged in the very public leadership dimension of creating change within their organizations. They became what
Murphy and Beck (1994) would call “organizational architects…[who] cultivate organizational structures that not only respond to but also shape the directions of change” (p. 12).

Managing change. In addition to creating change, managing change emerged as another aspect of the public practice of navigating and planning. In this area, the principals again revealed the importance of relying on their leadership values. Principal G even said, “you always have to keep in mind what is driving you”. The use of the second-person singular here is intriguing; Principal G seems to be providing not only advice to me as a student of educational administration and an aspiring educational leader, but also assistance to the wider audience so that they might achieve a deeper understanding of exactly how independent-school principals manage change.

In the following passage Principal D talks about the implementation of a new professional development initiative:

We were very open….Last year, we had a…pilot program…. Everyone knew in advance that we were going to have a pilot. The following year, we would bring [others] on board…. we knew there were front-runners, the ones who could ‘drive the bus’….

We’ve been very clear years in advance about what we are trying to do. Principal D here models what DuFour (1991) suggests when he asserts that “[i]t is the responsibility of the principal to convey [information about staff development initiatives] honestly and consistently” (p. 43). Principal G, who valued the motto “always listen; never assume” talked in general terms about putting that idea to work when working with “someone who was really afraid to try something new, because they had tried something before and it didn’t work”. Principal D experienced a particularly difficult period of change in which staff had to adjust to new guidelines about assessment and evaluation issued by the provincial Ministry of Education; here’s how Principal D explained working through that situation by relying on trust:
Trying to get people’s heads around moving in a new direction, especially when you are dealing with assessment and evaluation, can be difficult….To me, building trust is of paramount importance and we had done a lot of things to build that trust beforehand. So, when we experienced this issue, it was a challenge, but we had a foundation there….We took on this challenge as a whole faculty, saying, “If we’ve got to do this, let’s do it and do it together – it’s the way we’ve always done it – and move forward”.

Here Principal D illustrates what Sergiovanni (2005) means when he says that “[a] trust-first approach to strategy development and implementation doesn’t mean getting everyone on board before implementation” (p. 119). Principal D’s use of the hortative phrase ‘let’s do it and do it together’ is also interesting, as it not only urges action rather than commanding it, but also reflects the principal’s commitment to teamwork. Later, Principal D noted that “if you have a track record of supporting people through change, then future change becomes easier”.

**Planning for the future.** Although most of the public leadership practices that emerged from the data kept the principals’ time and energy focused on the present, one practice revealed in the commentary directed their attention decidedly to the future. As they shared their ideas about improving both the physical plant and the human resources at their schools in line with their Strategic Plans, the participants indicated that planning for the future was another important public dimension of independent-school principalship.

Three participants spoke about plans to improve and expand the physical layout of their schools. Principal C recalled how such a plan had unfolded in the past:

We went through a master planning experience – and I use the word “experience” purposefully….That was a very interesting experience, because, of course, we are in the middle of a neighbourhood and people aren’t happy when a school is going to grow. And that planning experience wasn’t to grow the population of the school; it was to expand
the facilities, because the program had really outgrown the facilities. So...the East Wing was completed, with a beautiful Dining Hall and Early Learning Centre. Through the years, we’ve added a big double gym and changed the facilities around.

Principal F spoke about plans to “re-shape the building” that included moving the principal’s office to a more prominent position, to correct the problem of it being “physically buried” in its current location; these comments reflect Deal and Peterson’s (1994) assertion that “[t]he principal’s office...communicates a message through its location, accessibility, decoration, and arrangement” (p. 31). Principal D revealed, “We’ve also got campus plan design – hopefully there will be a building campaign in the near future”. As this last comment illustrates, the principals tended to speak in discreet terms about ‘campaigns’ for expanding their physical plants, often in terms of building relationships with different constituencies, rather than in terms of soliciting money.

Improving the human resources at their schools with an eye to the future was also of concern to the principals. Commenting on the new organizational structure at the school, Principal F said, “Well, I’m not going to be around forever...the school needs to be in good shape across the faculty and staff when the time comes”. Principal D spoke about one of the school’s professional development foci in terms of future planning: “we want to move in an [information technology] direction...and it aligns with what we think is going to benefit [the school] and put it in good stead for the next 10 or 15 years”. The internal leadership development program that Principal E spoke about can also be seen as a means of improving human resources to benefit the school in the future. As Principal C said when describing individual counselling with members of the Leadership Team, “succession planning is so key”; Hargreaves (2005) would certainly agree, given his claims that leadership succession is a
“pervasive crisis” (p. 164) in the education system and “[o]ne of the most significant factors affecting the life of a school and the sustainability of its improvement efforts” (p. 164).

In line with such comments about developing leaders, three participants offered general advice for their schools’ future principals. Principal B’s comment was particularly insightful:

For aspiring Heads, I would say, make sure it’s a good fit – you can inform and you can influence, but you cannot change, fundamentally, a school. It better feel right when you go in. Schools will evolve, but they will never – they shouldn’t - change completely.

Principal E offered this important perspective: “I don’t really feel like I can turn around to an aspiring leader and say, “O.k, here’s what you do”; I don’t have a guidebook”.

Whether in regard to the people or physical space of their schools, the principals spoke about their plans for the future in relation to the school’s Strategic Plan. For example, when describing a plan to expand the school’s community involvement, Principal C said, “It’s about taking these opportunities and making them real-world learning opportunities as well – which aligns perfectly with the mission and Strategic Plan”. In the following comment about working with the Strategic Plan, just as Principal D did in an earlier comment about having difficult individual conversations, Principal C uses hypophora to raise and then answer a question:

Then, when we talk about engagement with regard to the Strategic Plan, we are all engaged in the Strategic Plan. What does that look like? Different individuals on the Leadership Team may be working with different groups; they may be tasked with a particular strategy or project that’s being implemented.

Principal C described the general planning process at the school by saying, “If something works with our Strat Plan, we will consider it; if it doesn’t, then we won’t”, later expanding on this idea by noting, “I often use the image of an umbrella; our Strategic Plan would be the umbrella. Everything that is necessary hangs below that umbrella and if it doesn’t fit, it doesn’t go”.

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Similarly, Principal G stated, “for me, being guided by our Strategic Goals…is really how I run”. Four principals spoke about the incredible responsibility they felt for the Strategic Plan. Here’s how Principal A put it: “the most important task is being the steward of the Strategic Plan, and making sure that that plan is being implemented”. Principal F expanded on this same idea with the following remark:

I think my biggest task is to work with the Board in ensuring that the Strategic Plan is carried out, that it’s agreed upon and adopted, that it’s resourced, that there’s a convincing buy-in from everyone for it, and that I keep on sort of ‘evangelizing’ about where we are trying to get to.

Indeed, Baker, Campbell and Ostroff (2016) highlight strategic responsibilities as one of the three key types of responsibilities of independent-school Boards, along with fiduciary and generative (p. 575). As can be seen in the following passage, Principal E described the work of planning for the future in relation to the Strategic Plan as ‘strategy’:

I think there’s truth though that the practices that are essential to leadership are when you are working at a strategic level; the definition of ‘strategy’ that I remember from the ones I’ve pulled together is ‘the choices you make that differentiate you from your competition to ensure the long-term sustainability of the school’. That’s strategy and that’s the job of a leader: to develop and deliver strategy. What are the choices you are making? Are you having this type of program or that type of program? Are you asking people to pay these fees? Are you paying these salaries? Those are the practices and choices that you have to be making on a day-to-day basis to implement the strategy so the school keeps going. That is essential to leadership.

According to Baker, Campbell and Ostroff (2016), “Leaders who make effective strategic thinking a high priority will serve their schools well — both today and in the long run” (p. 586).
It was clear from the participants’ commentary that planning for the future was a crucial part of the public dimension of the independent-school principalship, and one for which the principals felt particularly responsible.

**Tensions Related to Practices and Values**

As the principals talked about the public ways in which they practised leadership and enacted values, they revealed several underlying tensions related to these two elements. Such strains have received some attention from scholars (see Marshall, 1992; Cranston, Ehrich, & Kimber, 2006), but not in a Canadian, independent-school context. Principal B claimed that tensions are beneficial, noting that “[t]here are very necessary tensions in schools all the time and they are very good for schools. I always use the example of the violin strings or the guitar strings: they only work in tension, they only play music in tension”. The musical analogy creates a pleasant image, but careful analysis suggested that tensions related to practices and values were a significant source of stress for the principals in this study. They spoke about four types of tensions: school values versus school practices; school values versus leadership practices; school practices versus leadership values; and leadership values versus leadership practices.

Principal G reported on a tension between school values and school practices. The strain was between the school’s commitment to the value of equity and its practice of requiring a mandatory contribution to a particular school program from all families newly admitted to the school. Even though the program in question also ultimately aimed to achieve greater equity, Principal G saw the admission practice as “antithetical” and “really out of sync”, so it was ended and several related reforms were instituted.
Cranston, Ehrich and Kimber (2006) have studied tensions between school values and leadership practices in Australian independent schools. Principal B talked about this kind of strain by saying this:

as an organization, I think that the word that describes us best is “family”. Family members don’t fire each other, right? But I have to remove bad teachers from classrooms or bad staff from the school. That’s a conflict, for sure.

Here, the tension was between the school’s emphasis on community and Principal B’s practice of making difficult staffing decisions. Principal A also described a tension between competing school values and leadership practices; in this case, the school values, as expressed by certain members of the Board, conflicted with the principal’s leadership practices of planning for the future and building strong relationships with alum. Here’s how Principal A explained it:

We have one quite bright Board member who has said, “We have a parcel of land behind the school and there seems to be no immediate or long-term use for it. Real estate is going up, interest rates are low; we can get [a substantial amount of money] for that land”. So his idea is to sell the land, get the money and put it in a trust, as an endowment trust with separate oversight from the Board, so that it has some perpetuity to it. We have 2 alums on the Board who are saying, “I think we need community discussions about it, because many of the alums are going to be very upset about this”….And as I’m listening to these alum talk, I realize that they are thinking in a very parochial and provincial way; they are not thinking about the best interests of the school and they are not being good governors….And if I were to say, “It’s not your concern”, that would be construed as an incendiary statement that would excite enmity; they would say, “You don’t understand”. It would be impolitic.
Principal A’s use of the word ‘impolitic’ here is worth noting; recently, Crow and Weindling (2010) have drawn attention to “the continuing significant role that politics plays in the school leaders’ actions and the importance of political learning for the socialization of these leaders” (p. 139). In this situation, the competing values of the Board members were tradition versus sustainability, and the principal was caught in between, aware of the pressing need to plan for the future of the school and the political need to maintain positive relationships with alum as members of the school’s ‘extended family’.

Four of the seven participants spoke about situations in which school practices conflicted with their personal leadership values. Principal G’s value of supporting the students so that they might make their own choices was tested by a longstanding school practice. Here’s how Principal G described the tension:

it’s been a balancing act to provide the appropriate supervision and support that will allow [the students] to take independent initiative, but within an atmosphere where staff and faculty are accountable and not ignoring students. It felt to me like the balance was too far. They did these grade trips in the spring; every grade, without school support, would go on a weekend trip and sometimes there weren’t any parents [going on the trips]. They would have the buses line up here and it was just awful. So, I just said, “No, we cannot do this. If you want to do it, it’s against my advice”. I brought the lawyer in to talk to parents and students and I said, “The school with have nothing to do with this and you may not bring your buses here”…That kind of thing just had to be stopped….The kids actually need direction; they need the adults. They truly, truly do.

In this particular case, the strain between the principal’s leadership value and the existing school practice was too great; Principal G made the decision to end the school practice of unsupervised spring trips. In another situation involving tension between school practices and leadership
values, the importance that Principal A placed on the centrality of learning at the school seemed to be contradicted in what that principal acknowledged was “one of the cherished rites of the school”. Although the details of the ritual were supposed to draw attention to the values of the school, Principal A did not see them as relevant or appropriate, remarking, “When I first looked at [that particular] rite…, I thought, this is not appropriate; it probably wouldn’t have been appropriate a hundred years earlier!” Recognizing the importance of the tradition for both current and past students and aware that the previous principal had tried unsuccessfully to bring an end to it, Principal A ultimately reached a compromise that maintained an emphasis on the centrality of learning; here’s how Principal A described that compromise:

I think in any institution that calls for the political art, you have to prioritize things, so I will live with [the ritual in question] as long as we are making sure that the [students] are getting into engineering at [university].

In the next example of a tension between values and practices, the value that Principal B placed on children and learning was strained by the school’s business practices – namely, the practice of charging substantial tuition fees. Here’s how Principal B described it:

We had a situation in which a family was unable to pay the tuition, and they had been really pulled along for a long time while they tried to manage their financial situation. Ultimately, they weren’t able to pay, and I had to tell them that their children were not able to come back to school….My inclination and value system would have said, “Let those [students] come back to school!”….None of it was hard-hearted or mean-spirited, of course, but it came down to a conversation in which I said that I would stop them at the door on the first day of school – “They can’t come”. It was really hard and it was so not me. There was nothing good in it for the [students]; it was only the right thing to do for the business of the school.
This particular tension is reminiscent of the conflicted thinking highlighted in the previous chapter that more than one principal expressed when talking about the ‘business side’ of independent schools. Still in the realm of tensions between school practices and leadership values, two participants talked about a strain between Board practices and personal integrity. Principal E described a situation about a staffing decision and noted that “[the Board] felt we should handle the situation in ways that I didn’t always agree with”. Also with regard to a staffing situation, Principal A found the actions of a Board member so “egregious” that the situation was reported to the Chair of the Board and Principal A was considering seeking advice about next steps from the national association for independent schools.

The commentary of three of the principals revealed that sometimes there can be tension between one’s own leadership values and leadership practices. Here’s what Principal F had to say about a tension between valuing people and the practice of making final decisions:

there are occasions when, as a Head, you have to behave in a way that you might wish you didn’t have to….So, for instance, it’s not nice to do or nice to talk about, but when you have to let someone go, which you have to do, from time to time, the human, caring person in me wants to say, “Look, I’m going to let you go for all of these reasons, but I know you have a young family and you need to find another job, so I’m not going to announce it until the summer. So, you’ve got three months; if you can keep your mouth closed, I can keep my mouth closed”. Now, I’ve done this in the past and it hasn’t always worked out so well, because they can’t keep their mouth closed! I now feel that really, the only way I can do this is to say, “I’m sorry, but you’ve got to go today”. And, it’s horrible. I really hate doing it, because people want to say good-bye… I know it’s upsetting for everyone…. I really agonize over it and wish there were other ways to do it…. it certainly goes against how I would like to treat people.
In Principal E’s story about terminating the employment of a staff member under pressure from the Board, a tension between the value of integrity and the practice of making final decisions became apparent. Here’s how Principal E concluded that story:

letting that staff member go was the right thing to do, in my mind – I knew that that person wasn’t doing the job I wanted them to do - but I don’t feel that letting that person go because I was being forced to, by the ultimatum from the Board member, was the right thing to do. Maybe I was being slow to respond and the Board was just giving me a kick in the right direction, I don’t know….I didn’t feel it was good governance practice. I didn’t like the ultimatum part of it.

The accounts of both Principal E and Principal F illustrate well Leithwood’s (1995) claim that “[v]alues function implicitly in one’s problem-solving by acting as ‘perceptual screens’ in the choice of what to think about” (p. 122). Echoing the work of Cranston, Ehrich and Kimber (2006) that comments on “the complex and challenging nature of the ethical dilemmas facing school leaders” (p. 116), Principal A shared the following situation in which it seemed that leadership values, school values and leadership practices were all in tension:

Frankly, virtually after every Board meeting, when I go back into the school to execute the overall policies of the Board, I am often doing things that I think are wrong. And these are things that I think aren’t only not aligned with my values; they aren’t aligned with the school values as well. I’m in a situation right now where we have to make decisions about the budget; we’ve set our tuition, but now we have to figure out who’s going to be working at the school next year….So, the Board is saying to me that they see people in the school as units of utility and they call this an FTE – a Full Time Equivalent – and they don’t distinguish between the quality of one FTE and another. But they do distinguish between how much they are paid, so if someone in Year 2 is worth $9, 000
per course, but someone else is worth $16, 000 because of where they are on the grid, the
Board wants to apply their dismal science to figure this out. And sometimes I’ll say,
“That person who gets $16, 000 is worth every dime!” and other times, I’ll say that the
person with only 3 years experience is really very bright and could do the job better. But,
it’s this lack of Kantian ethics that doesn’t see people as ends in and of themselves. The
Board just doesn’t see the work in the school that way – whether it’s me, the senior
admin team, the teachers, and I’m not even sure, ultimately, the kids….they are now
saying to me…“you need to get rid of 2 teachers.” And I’m saying, “Wait, hold
on….might we not find other economies?” They are caught up on this number, and I’m
saying it’s a false distinction….There are other ways of getting around this.

In this situation, the focus on learning prized by the principal and the school value of knowledge,
as well as the principal’s commitment to integrity, and the leadership practice of making final
decisions all seemed to be in tension with the Board’s budgeting practices and sense of fiduciary
responsibility.

In her study of the value-based dilemmas faced by public school principals, Marshall
(1992) claimed that “the elements built into the system of schooling generated the dilemmas” (p.
381). When we look at the four types of tensions described by the principals in this study, we
can extend this argument to the realm of independent schools. All of the tensions described
above had to do with distinctive elements of independent schools, such as admissions practices,
tuition fees, Board practices and school rituals. Elements of the very environments in which the
principals lead created tensions that constituted a significant part of the public dimension of their
leadership.
Conclusion

Overall, as the principals spoke about the many public aspects of their role, using a variety of rhetorical strategies to do so, they revealed a great deal about their understanding of their leadership values and practices. Knowledgeable about and respectful of their schools’ histories, and keenly aware of the importance of alignment between their values and those of their schools, these independent-school leaders played a vital role in shaping their schools’ foci in the present and directions for the future. Following relentless schedules that kept them occupied well beyond the limits of the regular school day, the principals devoted remarkable amounts of time and energy to such pursuits as being visible in the school community, teaching, communicating by various means, building strong bonds with numerous constituencies, collaborating, navigating change and planning for the future. In doing so, they enacted a combination of authentic, contingent, distributed, instructional, managerial, moral, servant and transformational leadership practices. Murphy and Beck (1994) help us further understand this finding about study participants’ variety of leadership practices with their claim that principals “must adopt leadership strategies and styles in harmony with the central tenets of the organizations they are seeking to cultivate” (p. 10).

The final decisions made by the principals in situations with staff, situations with students, and during times of crisis were often value-based. As they lived leadership in their particular contexts, the principals encountered four types of value-related tensions: school values versus school practices; school values versus leadership practices; school practices versus leadership values; and leadership values versus leadership practices. Arising from certain defining aspects of independent schools, like tuition-based funding and governance by a non-profit Board of Governors, these tensions were inescapable for the principals, leaving them emotionally distressed, caught between opposing forces.
Although Principal A insisted that “the details of a principal’s day are mostly prosaic…it’s not very glam stuff”, the findings of this chapter suggest quite the opposite. The public dimensions of the independent-school principalship are clearly multifaceted, fascinating and worthy of our attention.
Chapter 6: Conclusions, Limitations, Implications, Suggestions for Future Research

In this final chapter, the study’s conclusions are reviewed in relation to its research questions, its limitations and implications are described, and suggestions for future research are made.

Conclusions

This study of how independent-school principals understand and talk about their leadership values and practices set out to address the following research question and sub-questions:

*How do principals of independent schools in Ontario understand and talk about their leadership values and practices?*

1) How do they describe their leadership practices?

2) What do they perceive to be their leadership values?

3) What alignments and/or tensions appear to exist between their leadership values, practices and stated school values?

It offers several key findings in response to these questions. First, this study found that independent-school principals were extremely knowledgeable, reflective and thoughtful leaders, keen to share their knowledge and help craft a deeper understanding of leadership in their schools. They came to the principalship from various paths of experience, learning from role models and mistakes made along the way important lessons that shaped their values and their practices. With this finding, the study meets the need identified by Greenfield (1995) to know more about the personal qualities of leaders.

Second, the principals were somewhat confused about the meaning of the term *values*, but they knew what they stood for and talked about their leadership values in various ways, emphasizing the importance of honesty, integrity, caring for children, learning and positive
relationships. They also knew what their schools stood for, and how important alignment was
between the values of the school and the values of the leader, often playing key roles in shaping
the various iterations of value statements at their schools. By drawing connections between
leaders’ values and those of their schools, this study heeds Begley’s (2011) call for “a balanced
appreciation of the relationships among personal values, professional values, organizational
values, and social values” (p. 356).

Third, this study found that independent-school principals described their leadership
practices in ways that reflected elements of authentic, contingent, distributed, instructional,
managerial, moral, servant and transformational leadership. Several of the elements found to be
significant in their practice, such as teaching in different ways, building relationships, and
working with others through collaboration and delegation, align with the ideas emphasized by
Leithwood (2012) in the Ontario Leadership Framework. Although some of the principals found
the variety in their work invigorating and all found the job ultimately rewarding, others spoke
about feeling exhausted and overwhelmed as they struggled to balance a variety of competing
priorities and meet the expectations of all of their constituents. Here again, the study meets the
need identified by Greenfield (1995) to know more about the daily actions and behaviours of
leaders.

Fourth, this study found a very strong link between what independent-school principals
do and what they believe. Values influenced virtually all aspects of their practice, from how they
built relationships to how they made decisions, navigated change, and charted course for the
future. With this finding, the study builds on the work already done concerning the relationship
between values and practices (see Begley & Leithwood, 1990; Gold et al., 2003; Warwas, 2015)
and addresses the need identified by Richmond (2004) to understand the power of values to
influence action.
Fifth, this study found that, despite the principals’ insistence on the importance of value alignment between a school and its leader, there was a significant tension between values and practices faced by the principals, with the sources of tension being some of the defining elements of independent schools, such as the governance and tuition-based funding. With this, the study extends to the sector of independent education an insight about leadership dilemmas in the public system identified by Marshall (1992). It also aligns with the work of Gronn and Ribbins (1996), as well as Notman and Henry (2011), who have all highlighted the importance of studying leaders in their contexts.

Finally, this study found that independent-school principals spoke about their leadership values and practices in ways that not only emphasized their understanding of the elements of danger, duty, performance and power inherent in their roles, but also revealed them to be complex individuals behind the façade that their roles might suggest, at times confident and authoritative, and at times cautious and uncertain. The study therefore reinforces the idea already suggested by the work of others (see Bogotch & Roy, 1994; Bredeson 1985; Gronn, 1983; Kelchtermans, Piot, & Ballet 2011; Lowenhaupt, 2014; Newberry & Richardson, 2015; Schechter & Firuz, 2015) that a closer examination of language can lead to a deeper understanding of who leaders are and how leadership is enacted.

In general, with its focus on leadership experiences in independent schools in Canada, this study not only complements the analyses of Decoux and Holdaway (1999) and Dawson (2004), but also offers the kind of detailed consideration called for by Allison, Hasan and Van Pelt (2015). By exploring leadership practices and values in Ontario’s independent schools, it also offers a point of comparison with work already done in this area concerning public and Catholic schools in the province (see Zupan, 2012; Pollock, Wang and Hauseman, 2015).
Limitations of the Study

There are at least four limitations of this study that must be acknowledged. First, this is a study relatively limited in scope, concerning only a small group of principals of independent schools in Ontario. Although this sample size was influenced by issues of access and practical concerns regarding travel distances, it does limit the transferability of the findings, meaning that the views expressed by the participants in this study may not reflect the views of all principals of independent schools in the province or of principals in independent schools in other Canadian provinces. The suggestions for further research will serve to reduce this limitation.

Second, this study is limited by its reliance on the interview as the primary research instrument. Although the study’s focus on how principals understand and articulate their own leadership practices and values made the interview the most appropriate research tool, it is possible that in recounting their experiences and sharing their reflections during the interviews, participants presented consciously-constructed versions of themselves. Once again, the suggestions for further research will serve to reduce this limitation.

Third, this study is limited, because although it set out to explore how the principals of independent schools in Ontario understand and talk about both their leadership values and practices, the data revealed more commentary on practices than values. When asked to identify and describe their leadership values, the participants in this study were somewhat confused by the terminology. In their descriptions of practices, they did not make explicit their values or the connection between values and practices. The suggestions for further research will also serve to reduce this limitation.

Finally, the researcher’s dual role of researcher and independent-school teacher may be perceived as a limitation of this study. As an educator in the independent-school system with previous knowledge of the schools included in this study and a diploma in independent-school
leadership, I acknowledge the potential biases I bring to my research concerning the leadership practices and values of independent-school principals in Ontario; however, as noted in Leedy and Ormrod (2013), many qualitative researchers (and I would include myself among them) claim that “[a]lthough objective methods may be appropriate for studying events in the physical world…an objective approach to studying human events…is neither desirable nor, perhaps, even possible” (p. 139). In line with this thinking, Merriam (2009) claims that "the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (p. 15, emphasis in the original), further explaining that “the human instrument has shortcomings and biases that might have an impact on the study” (p. 15). Importantly, Merriam (2009) also notes that “Rather than trying to eliminate these biases or ‘subjectivities’, it is important to identify them and monitor them as to how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data” (p. 15). During the interviews for this study, I differentiated for participants my roles as researcher and independent-school educator, always keeping our conversations focused on the research topic. Through my many years of teaching and learning in and about independent-school environments, I have acquired a deep understanding of the world of independent education; this understanding helped me make sense of the data collected and present it in a balanced and coherent manner. Thus, my unique perspective proved to be a source of strength, rather than weakness, and reinforced the idea that “the researcher’s ability to interpret and make sense of what he or she observes is critical for understanding any social phenomenon” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p. 139).

Although the limitations described above should be considered when evaluating the findings of this study, the data will still provide insight into the leadership of independent schools in Ontario that will prove useful to both researchers and practitioners.
Implications

This study was exploratory in nature and aimed to bridge the gap between theory and practice; as such, it has several important implications for different members of the intended audience.

For students and researchers of educational administration, this study may suggest the potential inherent in studying not only the relationship between leadership values and practices, as previously explored by scholars like Begley and Leithwood (1990), Gold et al. (2003), and Warwas (2015), but also the language of leadership, as recently illustrated by the work of Kelchtermans, Piot and Ballet (2011), Lowenhaupt (2014), Newberry and Richardson (2015), and Schechter and Firuz (2015). It may also raise awareness of independent schools and, in line with the work of Bérard and Murphy (1993), who argued for independent schools to be more widely used as sites for teacher training, prompt recognition of independent schools as potential sites for future research.

For the participating principals, this study may serve as something of a mirror, providing insight into and validation of their experiences, which, in turn, may shape their future actions. For instance, the principals may choose, if they have not already done so, to articulate the values that inform their practice to members of the school community, as suggested by Moorhead and Nediger (1991, p. 15). Having engaged in the process of reflection for this study and achieved a greater degree of self-knowledge, the principals may follow Begley’s (2006) suggestion and next “strive to develop sensitivity to the values orientations of others in order to give meaning to the actions of the students, teachers, parents and community members with whom they interact” (pp. 584-585).

By offering something of ‘guide book’ in the detailed description of the principals’ leadership practices, this study may also provide principals of other independent schools with...
advice and inspiration that could inform and improve their own practice. If they choose to engage in a more reflective leadership practice, as encouraged by Begley (2000), they must do so cautiously, because, according to Begley (2000), there is also the “possibility that procedural knowledge selected in pursuit of an end, organizational or otherwise, combined with jurisdictional power, and informed by values analysis processes, might be used for amoral, manipulative, or instrumental purposes” (p. 238). This study may even open up avenues of conversation between independent-school principals so that they might share their experiences, practices and values, and ultimately achieve a greater sense of camaraderie and unity. Although annual meetings are already in place for principals of independent schools that belong to CAIS, this study clearly suggests a need for a more formal and consistent network of support.

For members of the independent-school community who regularly interact with principals, including other administrators, teachers, parents, and Board members, this study may increase understanding of the principalship through its presentation of the complexity of the principals’ experiences. For independent-school administrators and teachers aspiring to the principalship, this study may provide insight into the practices and values of leaders at that level, which, in turn, may influence decision-making. Board members may use the findings about the principals’ relationship with the Board not only to inform their own practice, but also to shape development and training efforts.

For practitioners outside the independent-school community, this study may raise awareness about both independent schools in Ontario and the principals who lead them, effectively working to replace uniformed criticism with informed understanding. For parents who may be considering independent education for their children (see Van Pelt, 2007; Holmes, 2008), this study may influence that decision, by illuminating the little-known ‘inner-workings’ of independent schools in Ontario.
Perhaps the most significant implications of this study are for designers and facilitators of existing or future independent-school leadership training programs and initiatives. With findings that illuminate the reality of independent-school principalship, this study may very well inform, enhance and shape such programs’ content and delivery. Participants in this study not only engaged in, but also commented on, reflection as a tool for achieving greater self-knowledge, especially when that reflection focused on values. Making reflection on values a key component of such leadership training programs would be a good first step. Indeed, according to Bolman and Deal (1994a), leadership training programs “will need to reinforce in potential leaders the importance of values, symbols, and symbolic activity and how these can be shaped and encouraged to give meaning and purpose to collective endeavors” (p. 93). Along similar lines, Avolio and Gardner (2005) argue that “a leader’s self-awareness is an appropriate starting point for interpreting what constitutes authentic leadership development” (p. 324). Begley (2008) asserts that “[g]enuine forms of leadership begin with the understanding and thoughtful interpretation of observed or experienced processes by individuals” (p. 24). Hodgkinson (1991) encourages a ‘values audit’, meaning “a reflective and contemplative effort which seeks to bring into the light of consciousness the range, depth and breadth of one’s preferences, conditioning and beliefs” (p. 136). The Leadership Institute offered by Canadian Accredited Independent Schools (2016a) is the national training program for independent-school educators. Established in 2000 (Thomson & Lafortune, 1999, p. 599), this program has recently been enhanced with the Next Step Program (Canadian Accredited Independent Schools, 2016b) and complemented by the Principal’s Qualification Program with an Independent School Focus offered by one of the leading universities in Ontario (York University, 2016). Although some consideration of values may already be part of these endeavours, those who create and shape independent-school leadership training efforts may consider placing a greater emphasis on values and involving
experienced principals who have already ‘audited’ their own values directly in the processes of design and delivery - or more actively, if they are already involved to some degree.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study lays the foundation for several different avenues of future research. First, since this study was qualitative in nature and relied mainly on the interview as a research instrument, future research on the same topic that uses a greater variety of research instruments may prove beneficial. For instance, studies based on both interviews and observations may prove informative; the potential of such research was demonstrated by Bogotch and Roy (1994), who used observation and interview to explore “both the espoused and enacted values” (p. 238) of a principal. Although one of the foremost experts in the study of values and educational administration, Begley (2000), asserts that qualitative methods are best suited to the study of values (see p. 239), researchers may also wish to pursue mixed method studies, like Warwas’ (2015) recent contribution.

Second, this study may prompt further exploration of the motivations behind principals’ identification and description of their leadership values, as called for by Begley (2000). Although the principals in this study began to identify and describe their values, and to share the motivations behind their values when they spoke about previous experiences and tensions related to values, there is certainly more work to be done in this area.

Third, by illustrating the importance of the language of leadership, this study may encourage future work that continues to explore not just what leaders say but how they say it, and how their language may differ when speaking to different audiences.

Fourth, since this study focused on how the principals understood and talked about their values and practices, future studies may investigate how other constituents in independent-school communities, including teachers and board members, understand and talk about the principal’s
values and practices. One of the participants in this study, Principal E, even said, “[i]t would be better if you asked other people about me”. According to Bolman and Deal (1994a), “[s]uperiors, subordinates, and peers often have a different view on a leader’s strengths and weaknesses – but often diverse viewpoints converge into some recurring patterns” (p. 89). Of course, it would also be beneficial for those same constituents to have the opportunity to reflect on and explore their own values and practices. Thus a fifth avenue of research that may prove particularly useful in advancing our understanding of values and practices in independent-school contexts would be a study of Board Chairs, similar to that of James et al.’s (2012) study of Chairs in independent schools in the United Kingdom.

Sixth, since this study was limited to Ontario, future research may explore the same phenomenon in independent schools in other Canadian provinces, in order to forge an understanding of the independent-school principalship on a national level.

Finally, given the emphasis on the ‘business side’ of independent schools in the data collected for this study, research into possible relationships between independent-school leadership and business leadership may prove illuminating as well.

**Concluding Remarks**

Forty years ago, Gossage (1977) said, “the ideal [independent-school] head is a sort of Superman or Wonder Woman in an academic gown, who can move mountains, find pots of gold at the end of the rainbow, and keep everyone smiling” (p. 3). This qualitative study of the leadership practices and values of seven independent-school principals in Ontario suggests that, in many ways, save perhaps the academic gown, this description still fits today.

Data derived from 60-90 minute interviews conducted twice with each principal and analyzed in connection with the relevant literature about independent schools, leadership, leadership practices, leadership values, and the language of leadership indicated that the
principals understood and talked about their leadership practices and values in terms of personal reflections and public dimensions.

In their personal reflections, the principals shared their understanding of leadership as linked to service, passion and management, but they also admitted that leadership has a lot to do with nervousness and loneliness. They spoke about their work as all-consuming, overwhelming and yet deeply rewarding. In comparing independent schools to public schools, they revealed an important paradox: working without the kind of regional and provincial support available to their public-school counterparts, independent-school principals experience feelings of isolation and loneliness in school communities that promise personal attention and care for students. The principals shared stories about lessons learned from a variety of experiences and mistakes, emphasizing the importance of these elements in the development of leaders. They admitted to being confused about the term values, but still spoke confidently about what they believed in reference to what they had experienced. By sharing their thoughts about learning and reflection, they also highlighted these endeavours as important parts of the experience of being an independent-school principal.

In speaking about the public dimensions of independent-school principalship, the participants proved to be very knowledgeable about their schools’ histories, missions, visions and values. They talked about serving as symbols of their schools, aligning their values with those of the organization, and the parts they had played in shaping expressions of those values. The principals’ comments about the dizzying array of leadership practices they enacted revealed that, on a daily basis, they faced the impossible task of balancing the demands of various constituencies, all while maintaining a respect for the past, being restricted in authority and autonomy in the present by the Board of Governors, and developing a plan for the future. Their actions were directly linked to their beliefs and they confronted a variety of value-based tensions
that arose from defining elements of independent schools. Those tensions took a significant toll on the principals, causing doubt, frustration and uncertainty.

Careful consideration of how the principals talked indicated great complexity in their identities as leaders: at times, they seemed to be protective guardians, efficient managers and skilled experts, keen to exert their authority, tell their stories, and encourage others, but at others, they seemed to be cautious participants, uncertain of their expertise.

With all of its findings, this study is well situated in conversations about the language of leadership, the relationship between leadership practices and values, and the contexts in which leadership is practised. It builds on and extends the work already done on independent-school leadership in Canada, thereby adding to a limited knowledge base, and recommends research in several possible directions, including the motivations behind leadership values, the language of leadership in different settings, and the values and practices of other constituents in independent schools. The implications of this study, linked as they are to conversations about leadership preparation and succession planning, reflect the study’s exploratory nature and ultimate aim of bridging the gap between theory and practice. Although studying the relationship between what leaders do and what they believe is a complex endeavour, it is essential in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of living leadership.
References


Appendix A: Email Introduction

Dear ________,

My name is Jaime Malic and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. ________ recommended you to me and suggested that I contact you.

Under the supervision of Dr. Carol Campbell, I am conducting research for my doctoral dissertation concerning the leadership practices and values of principals in independent schools in Ontario. The name of my research project is “Living Leadership: Exploring the Leadership Practices and Values of Independent-School Principals in Ontario”. The purpose of my research study is to understand and describe how principals of independent schools in Ontario understand and describe their leadership practices and values.

I will be interviewing 6-9 principals from 6-9 independent schools in Ontario. Participants who agree to be part of my study will be interviewed by me twice within approximately two months. Each interview will be conducted at a location deemed mutually convenient for the participant and researcher; if participants wish to be interviewed outside the workplace and regular work hours, those requests will be accommodated. Each interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes, and address approximately 10 questions concerning leadership practices and values.

If you think that you might be interested in participating in my study, I suggest that, if possible, we meet briefly in person within the next 2 weeks, so that I may provide you with an information letter, further information about the study, and a consent form to sign. Obtaining these documents in no way obliges you to participate in the study. Participation is completely voluntary.

Please let me know, by replying to this email, whether or not you would like to meet in person to obtain further information about my study and, if so, when and where would be most convenient to do so within the next 2 weeks.

Thank you very much for considering participation in my study.

Sincerely,

Jaime R. Malic
Appendix B: First Follow-Up Email Response

**OPTION 1:**

Dear _______.

Thank you very much for your reply to my initial email introduction. I am so pleased that you are interested in learning more about possible participation in my study.

I have reviewed your suggestions for when and where we might meet within the next 2 weeks, so that I may provide you with an information letter, further information about the study, and a consent form to sign. As I indicated in my introductory email, obtaining these documents in no way obliges you to participate in the study; participation is completely voluntary.

The date and time that works best with my schedule is __________ at _____ a.m./p.m. As you suggested, I will meet you at __________.

I look forward to meeting you in person soon.

Sincerely,

Jaime R. Malic

**OPTION 2:**

Dear _______.

Thank you very much for your reply to my initial email introduction. I understand that you do not wish to obtain further information about my study or to participate in it.

I appreciate your consideration of my initial request and ask that you contact me at this email address should you think of another independent-school principal in Ontario who might be interested in participating in my study.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jaime R. Malic
Appendix C: Second Follow-Up Email Response

Dear ________,

Thank you very much for confirming that you are interested in participating in my study. I hope that you have had a chance to review the information letter, further information about the study, and consent form that I provided to you when we met recently in person on (date of first meeting in person).

I would now like to arrange a time to pick up the signed consent form and, if possible, hard copies of your school’s current prospectus and publications, like school magazines, from within the last two years that are publically-available and distributed to alumni, parents and faculty. These documents may be available from a particular department in your school, such as Admissions or Advancement. Please indicate, by replying to this email, the date by which you will have the signed consent form ready to be picked up, where I can pick up that signed form, and where I might obtain hard copies of the school documents described above.

I would also like to schedule the first of our two 60-90 minute interviews, for a time and place within the next month that is mutually convenient for both of us. Please review the list of possible dates and times provided below, consult your own schedule and then either let me know directly, by replying to this email, or by having your assistant email me at this address to indicate the date, time and place that works best for you. I am happy to meet with you before or after work hours and away from the school, if you prefer.

(list of possible dates and times to be indicated here)

Thank you very much for taking the time to review all of this information.

I look forward to hearing back from you soon about the signed consent form and school documents, and then meeting for our first interview.

Sincerely,

Jaime R. Malic
Appendix D: Email Reminder

Dear ________,

On *(date email introduction was sent)*, I sent you an email introducing myself and my doctoral study concerning the leadership practices and values of principals in independent schools in Ontario. I hope that you have had a chance to read that email and review the information provided therein.

If you are interested in learning more about my study and perhaps participating in it, please reply to this email within the next week to let me know when and where would be most convenient for us to meet briefly in person within the next 2 weeks, so that I may provide you with an information letter, further information about the study, and a consent form to sign. As I indicated in my introductory email, obtaining these documents in no way obliges you to participate in the study; participation is completely voluntary.

If you are not interested in obtaining further information about my study or possibly participating in it, please reply to this email at your earliest convenience to indicate this.

If I do not receive a reply from you within the next week, I will assume that you do not wish to obtain further information about my study or participate in it.

Thank you very much for considering participation in my study.

Sincerely,

Jaime R. Malic
Appendix E: Informed Consent Letter

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UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

From Researcher Jaime R. Malic

Dear Participant,

Thank you for considering participating in my research project. As I noted in our first contact, I am a doctoral student in the Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Under the supervision of Dr. Carol Campbell (contact information provided below), I am conducting a study to understand the leadership practices and values of principals in independent schools in Ontario. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information that you will need to understand what I am doing, and to decide whether or not you choose to participate. Participation is completely voluntary, and should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time.

Because of administrative and ethical issues related to research done in universities, this letter is a form letter; I have filled in comments, ticked appropriate boxes, and included sections specific to this study. At the end of the letter, you will find a place to indicate whether or not you wish to participate. Please check the appropriate boxes, sign, and provide the date. Return one signed copy to me and keep the other for your reference.

The name of my research project is “Living Leadership: Exploring the Leadership Practices and Values of Independent-School Principals in Ontario”. The purpose of my research study is to understand and describe how principals of independent schools in Ontario understand and describe their leadership practices and values.

What, essentially, I am doing is interviewing 6-9 principals from 6-9 independent schools in Ontario to determine how they understand and talk about their leadership practices, their leadership values, and their schools’ stated values. I am selecting participants according to specific criteria, including level of formal leadership, type of school, gender, length of experience and institutional affiliations. I am seeking out principals only, from a mix of single-gender and co-educational independent schools that offer instruction from Kindergarten or Grade 1 to Grade 12. I require all participant schools to be members of the Conference of Independent Schools of Ontario, but not necessarily Canadian Accredited Independent Schools. I would like participants to represent both genders and different lengths of experience, but I will require participants to have been in their roles as principal for at least one year, in order to provide sufficient experiences upon which to reflect. Due to potential issues of access, I will only be
including principals of Christian, inter-denominational, non-faith-based or university-affiliated independent schools.

Your part in the research, if you agree, is to participate in two interviews with me within approximately two months; each interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes, address approximately 10 questions and, with your permission, be recorded using a digital voice recorder. I may also take handwritten notes during the interviews. These interviews will be conducted at a time and place that is mutually convenient for both the researcher and the participant. If you wish to be interviewed outside the workplace and regular work hours, I will accommodate that request.

In the transcripts and my final report, names and identifying information about you and your school will be changed; however, you should be aware that there is still a slight risk that you might be recognized by others in the final study. The digital voice recordings and transcripts of those recordings will be stored on an encrypted data key. All data (recordings, transcripts, handwritten notes) will be kept for a two-year period under lock and key in my home office, and only I and my supervisor will have access to it; after the two-year period is over, all data will be properly destroyed and disposed.

Potential benefits you might derive from participating in this research project include an opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue about educational leadership, and an increased awareness or understanding of how you perceive yourself as an educational leader.

Potential benefits the scholarly community might derive from your participation in this research project include increased knowledge of the practices and values of leaders in the little-known sector of independent education in the province, inspiration for studies of the leadership of independent schools in other provinces, and suggestions of broader avenues for future research in the field of educational administration.

Attached to this letter you will find the following section, which will give you more information:

Section A. Please make a point of reading the section carefully before signing the final page.

Should you have any questions about the interview process, or this study in general, please feel free to contact me at jaime.malic@mail.utoronto.ca or at 647-989-2607.

Should you have any questions related to your rights as a participant in this study or if you have any complaints or concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant, please contact the University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

Please keep a copy of this letter for your records.

Thank you.
Sincerely,

Jaime R. Malic
1042 Eager Road
Milton, ON L9T 6T1
(647) 989-2607
jaime.malic@mail.utoronto.ca

**Supervisor Contact Information:**

Dr. Carol Campbell
Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education
252 Bloor St. West
Toronto, ON M5S IV6
416-978-1266
carol.campbell@utoronto.ca
Appendix E, Section A: Further Information for Participants

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UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

This study involves you participating in two interviews with me. The interviews will be informal; each will last approximately 60-90 minutes and address approximately 10 questions. The first interview will be based on a guide; the second interview will be a more open interview, based on your responses in the first interview. With your permission, I will be recording our interviews using a digital voice recorder and taking hand-written notes.

Areas I hope to touch on include your school’s mission and stated values, your professional background, your leadership practices, and your leadership values. You will have the option to not answer any interview questions about which you feel uncomfortable. At no time will value judgments be placed on your responses.

Examples of questions that I have in mind for our first interview, but may or may not ask depending on priorities that emerge and how dialogue evolves are:

- Tell me a bit about your school, including its mission and stated values.
- Describe a typical day for you as principal; what do you spend most of your day doing?
- What do you consider to be your key leadership practices as a principal?
- How would you describe your values as a leader?

Once the recordings of the interviews have been transcribed, the original or raw data will be stored under lock and key in my home office. Only I and my supervisor will ever have access to this raw data. In the transcripts, names and other identifying information about you or your organization will be systematically changed. Identifying codes that could connect you or your organization with the changed names will also be kept under lock and key in the place designated above. The timing for the destruction of the recording and/or the raw data is two years after collection.

As interviewee, you may request a copy of the transcripts of one or both of your interviews by checking the appropriate boxes on the next page. I will then email the transcript of interview to you after the interview has been completed and transcribed. Any section which you request to have deleted from the transcript of your interviews will be deleted. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and, if you choose to do so, you may request that the entire transcript of your interview(s) be destroyed. If you wish, I will share major aspects of my preliminary analysis with you and, if you wish to, you may have the opportunity to provide feedback. I would share this information with you by emailing you with key ideas, and offering my availability to meet with you at your convenience if you wish to discuss the findings.
If you wish, a hard copy of the final report will be made available to you, to be delivered by me in person; you may indicate on the next page if you wish to receive this copy of the final report. A copy of my dissertation will also be available in the OISE library.
I have read this document and any enclosed documents. I understand what is being asked and the accompanying conditions and promises. I understand the nature and limitations of the research. I understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time.

I agree to participate in the ways described. ☐

I consent to having my interviews audio-taped and transcribed. ☐

I would like a copy of the transcript of Interview #1. ☐

I would like a copy of the transcript of Interview #2. ☐

If I am making any exceptions or stipulations, these are:

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

I would like a copy of the final research report. ☐

OR

I do not wish to participate in the research. ☐

________________________________________ (Signature)

________________________________________ (Printed Name)

________________________________________ (Date)
## Appendix F: Interview Guide for Interview #1 of 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question / Sub-Q</th>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Interview Questions (10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What alignments and/or tensions appear to exist between their leadership practices, values, and stated school values?</td>
<td>Stated School Values</td>
<td>Tell me a bit about your school, [name of school], including its mission and stated values.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Professional Background</td>
<td>Tell me a bit about yourself as an educator; what experiences have you had in your career in education?*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do they describe their leadership practices?</strong></td>
<td>Leadership Practices</td>
<td>Describe a typical day for you as principal of [name of school]; what do you spend most of your day doing?*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Can you tell me a bit more your daily interactions? With whom do you interact and about what?*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What do you regard as your most important task(s) as principal and why?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Think back to a time when you encountered a significant problem as principal of this school; tell me about that time and how you solved that problem.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What do you consider to be your key leadership practices as a principal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What do they perceive to be their leadership values?</strong></td>
<td>Leadership Values</td>
<td>What would you say are the core values that guide your daily practice?*</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How do these values inform your actions; can you provide a specific example?*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How would you describe your values as a leader?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is there anything else you would like to add to this first conversation?

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this first interview. I will transcribe this interview and send to you, via email, key quotations and any key themes I see emerging from the transcript.

I will be contacting you again, via email or phone, shortly after sending that first email, to provide you with the opportunity to clarify any of your comments and discuss themes to be explored in the next interview, which will take place on ________ at ________.

**Note:** Responses to questions marked with an asterisk (*) will be used to formulate questions for the second interview.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question / Sub-Q</th>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Interview Questions (10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do principals of independent schools in Ontario understand and talk about their leadership practices and values?</td>
<td>Leadership Practices</td>
<td>In our last conversation, you told me about your experience(s) as ______. Do you believe that this/these experience(s) have shaped your current practice here at [name of school] as principal? If so, in what way(s)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Among the daily practices you described in our last conversation were ______. Which of these practices do you find the most rewarding and which do you find the most challenging? Why?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>You mentioned your interactions with ______ in our last conversation. Can you tell me a bit more about how you build relationships with different constituents as the school principal?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Which of the practices that you are involved in do you consider to be essential to your leadership?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Are there other practices that take your time but you do not consider as key to your leadership?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What alignments and/or tensions appear to exist between their leadership practices, values, and stated school values?</td>
<td>Leadership Values</td>
<td>In our last conversation, you described the school’s stated values as being ___ and your core values as being ___. How closely are your own leadership values aligned with the school’s stated values?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stated School Values</td>
<td>Have you ever experienced a time as principal of this school when your values were in conflict with the school’s stated values? If so, tell me about that time and how you resolved the conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership Practices</td>
<td>How important do you think it is for the values of an independent-school principal to align with the school’s values? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership Values</td>
<td>In your description of dealing with the problem of ______, you said that you solved that problem by ______. You also indicated that the values of ____ informed your actions when you ______. Have you ever experienced a time as principal of this school when what you had to do was in conflict with what you believed – that is, when your practice did not align with your values? If so, tell me about that time and what you did.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on your experience and understanding of leadership, how do you think independent-school principals can best negotiate times of tension between their leadership practices, values, and stated school values?

Is there anything else you would like to add to this conversation?

Thank you very much for sharing your experiences and thoughts with me in this second interview.

Would you like to receive a transcription of this interview?

Thank you once again; I am very grateful for your participation!