

The Effect of School Closure on Principal Leadership

by
Grant Peter Lenarduzzi
M.A., Gonzaga University, 1985
B.Sc., Simon Fraser University, 1979

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

in the
Educational Leadership Program
Faculty of Education

© Grant Peter Lenarduzzi 2010
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Fall 2010

All rights reserved.
However, in accordance with the *Copyright Act of Canada*, this work may be reproduced, without authorization, under the conditions for *Fair Dealing*. Therefore, limited reproduction of this work for the purposes of private study, research, criticism, review and news reporting is likely to be in accordance with the law, particularly if cited appropriately.

Approval

Name: Grant Peter Lenarduzzi
Degree: Doctor of Education
Title of Thesis: *The Effect of School Closure on Principal Leadership*
Examining Committee:

Chair: Geoff Madoc-Jones, Limited Term Senior Lecturer

**Dan Laitsch, Associate Professor,
Faculty of Education
Senior Supervisor**

**Dr. Larry Sackney, Adjunct Professor,
Faculty of Education
Committee Member**

**Dr. Michelle Pidgeon, Assistant Professor,
Faculty of Education
Internal/External Examiner**

**Dr. Peter MacMillan, Associate Professor,
School of Education,
University of Northern British Columbia
External Examiner**

Date Defended/Approved: December 13, 2010



SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

Declaration of Partial Copyright Licence

The author, whose copyright is declared on the title page of this work, has granted to Simon Fraser University the right to lend this thesis, project or extended essay to users of the Simon Fraser University Library, and to make partial or single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or other educational institution, on its own behalf or for one of its users.

The author has further granted permission to Simon Fraser University to keep or make a digital copy for use in its circulating collection (currently available to the public at the "Institutional Repository" link of the SFU Library website <www.lib.sfu.ca> at: <<http://ir.lib.sfu.ca/handle/1892/112>>) and, without changing the content, to translate the thesis/project or extended essays, if technically possible, to any medium or format for the purpose of preservation of the digital work.

The author has further agreed that permission for multiple copying of this work for scholarly purposes may be granted by either the author or the Dean of Graduate Studies.

It is understood that copying or publication of this work for financial gain shall not be allowed without the author's written permission.

Permission for public performance, or limited permission for private scholarly use, of any multimedia materials forming part of this work, may have been granted by the author. This information may be found on the separately catalogued multimedia material and in the signed Partial Copyright Licence.

While licensing SFU to permit the above uses, the author retains copyright in the thesis, project or extended essays, including the right to change the work for subsequent purposes, including editing and publishing the work in whole or in part, and licensing other parties, as the author may desire.

The original Partial Copyright Licence attesting to these terms, and signed by this author, may be found in the original bound copy of this work, retained in the Simon Fraser University Archive.

Simon Fraser University Library
Burnaby, BC, Canada

STATEMENT OF ETHICS APPROVAL

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this work, has obtained, for the research described in this work, either:

(a) Human research ethics approval from the Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics,

or

(b) Advance approval of the animal care protocol from the University Animal Care Committee of Simon Fraser University;

or has conducted the research

(c) as a co-investigator, collaborator or research assistant in a research project approved in advance,

or

(d) as a member of a course approved in advance for minimal risk human research, by the Office of Research Ethics.

A copy of the approval letter has been filed at the Theses Office of the University Library at the time of submission of this thesis or project.

The original application for approval and letter of approval are filed with the relevant offices. Inquiries may be directed to those authorities.

Simon Fraser University Library
Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, BC, Canada

Abstract

School closures have been the focus of educational research in the past; however, the perceived effect of this critical event on the school leader has been marginally investigated. A principal's leadership has been proven to be influential in determining the effectiveness of the learning environment. Succession pressure on maintaining effective school leadership is increasing. Understanding the school leader's experience of living through a closure process will help to sustain and enrich the leadership capacity that is already in place.

This study examined the perceived effects of school closure on the principal's leadership. A qualitative, narrative analysis approach was used. Six principal narratives and two superintendent narratives formed the basis of data to examine the professional, personal, and structural aspects associated with experiencing a school closure.

The school closure experiences were examined using three lenses. Jürgen Habermas' perspectives on communication style, and system and lifeworld, helped clarify the positioning of the principal in the event, to understand the positions taken, and the dialectic approaches of the Board and school community. Carl Weick's ideas of sensemaking supported analysis of how principal's created a perspective for working through the school closure. Albert Bandura's ideas on self-efficacy assisted with the analysis of the principals' leadership change.

Leadership change was identified. Principals who experienced a school closure demonstrated an enhanced (a) sense of self-efficacy, (b) role awareness and craft knowledge, and (c) conflict resolution skills. The principals were aware of the tension of allegiances to both district and school community. School leaders felt that the school closure was a critical event in their life, but they continued to be professionally motivated. Principals viewed their role in school closure primarily as a caregiver for students and staff, and a facilitator of information. Advice is offered for future school

closure considerations in areas such as preparatory knowledge, support, and communicative practices.

With little previous research, this study generated valuable knowledge into educational leadership and professional development for school leaders, and perspectives and practice for Boards and senior managers.

Keywords: Educational leadership; school principal; efficacy; closure; critical narrative

*This work is dedicated to Jacqueline Lenarduzzi,
a very wise person who modelled life-long learning,
and who always provided unconditional love and support for others in her life.*

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the faculty and staff for their supervision, personal support and affirmation of this study.

Special appreciation and thanks go to Dr. Larry Sackney, who worked closely with this project. His expertise in educational research was invaluable. His wisdom was even greater, knowing and modelling the importance of patience, care and relationship. My gratitude also goes to Joanie Wolfe for her support and expertise in bringing this document into its present form.

Table of Contents

Approval	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	vi
Table of Contents	vii
List of Tables	x
List of Figures	x
Chapter 1. Background and Purpose of the Study	1
Introduction	1
Personal Context and Motivation	2
Purpose	4
Research Questions	4
Definition of Terms	5
Limitations and Delimitations of the Study	6
Potential Significance of the Study	8
Organization of the Dissertation	9
Chapter 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework	10
Introduction	10
Insight into School Closure Environment	11
School Closure Background in Canada	11
International Studies Reveal Similar Closure Themes	13
School Closure Policy	16
Provincial School Closure Policy	17
British Columbia School Districts	19
Legal Challenges to School Closures in British Columbia	19
Conflicting Allegiances and Role Conflict of the School Leader	22
The Importance of Principal Leadership	24
School Leaders Experiencing Critical Incidents	25
Theoretical Framework	27
Communicative Action Theory	28
System and Lifeworld as Representative of the Board and Public	29
Positioning of the School Leader	31
Disturbance and Pathology in the Lifeworld	32
Understanding the Use and Acceptance of Law by School Communities	32
Sensemaking	34
Self-Efficacy	37
Contribution to Understanding	39
Summary	39

Chapter 3. Research Design and Methodology.....	41
Introduction	41
Rationale for Method.....	41
Study Design and Methodology	44
Narrative Analysis	44
Critical Incidents.....	48
Selection Process and Participant Demographics	49
Data Collection.....	53
Interview Protocol.....	53
Data Analysis	55
Validity.....	58
Ethical Considerations	61
Summary.....	61
Chapter 4. Presentation of Data.....	63
Introduction	63
School Closure as a Critical Event.....	64
School Closure as a Critical Event for Principals	64
Significant Stages within the Closure Experience	66
Principal Attachment to the School	68
Health Implications	68
Concerns of the Principal.....	70
Professional Obligations.....	70
Personal Concerns.....	72
Emotion-laden Working Environment.....	75
System, Lifeworld, and Allegiance	77
Leadership Changes Related to the School Closure Experience	80
Efficacy.....	80
Professional Engagement	81
Role Awareness and Craft Knowledge.....	82
Conflict Resolution Skills	83
Sensemaking in the School Closure Event.....	84
Superintendent Views on How School Closure Affects Principal Leadership	88
Superintendent Opinions Regarding Initial Findings	91
Further Findings from the Study.....	93
Summary.....	97
Chapter 5. Summary and Conclusions	98
Summary of Study.....	98
Purpose of the Study.....	98
Theoretical Framework.....	99
Methodology.....	100

Discussion.....	100
How is principal leadership affected by the closure of his/her school?	101
How was the school leader involved in the closure process?	104
In what ways is the school leader's professional outlook altered due to living the experience of a school closure?.....	105
Were any practices or stages of a school closure process more significant to the school leader?	106
What evidence may inform future professional development of school leaders?	107
Implications for Theory, Practice, and Further Research.....	109
Implications for Theory	109
Implications for Practice	113
Boards of Education	113
District Managers	116
Principals.....	118
Implications for Future Research	119
Caveats.....	121
Final Reflection	122
References.....	123
Appendices.....	130
Appendix A. Recruitment Email and Consent Form.....	131
Appendix B. Interview Protocol	133
Appendix C. Interview Question Matrix	136
Appendix D. Concept Occurrence.....	138
Appendix E. Organization of Categories into Themes	139
Appendix F. Superintendent Interview Protocol.....	140

List of Tables

Table 1.	Participant Demographics.....	51
Table 2.	Interview Protocol Connections to Investigation Questions and Theoretical Frameworks	54
Table 3.	Examples of Key Phrases, Condensed Meaning, and Category	56

List of Figures

Figure 1.	Breakdown of Categories and Themes.....	57
-----------	---	----

Chapter 1.

Background and Purpose of the Study

Introduction

One cool judgment is worth a thousand hasty counsels.
The thing to be supplied is light, not heat.

(Woodrow Wilson, 1916)

In the past decade, over 100 public schools have been closed in districts throughout British Columbia, Canada. Government data indicated a continuation of the two precipitating forces for school closures, enrolment declines and increasing fiscal pressures (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008). In British Columbia, where this study occurred, school closure and consolidations are expected to continue as controversial agenda items for Boards of Education (Board).

Leadership in education is a worthy area of study. Instructional strategies, effective learning environments, and school culture have been extensively investigated. The importance of the school leader, the principal, for creating an effective learning environment and a positive and ethical culture has also been established. Emerging research is illustrating how a variety of critical events in an educational leader's career can impact their leadership (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, 2004; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998; Trider, 1999). Literature searches regarding the effect of school closure on school leadership resulted in little information coming forth.

Search for closure research resulted in a number of studies from the 1970s and onward. Closure studies from a variety of different countries identified similar contentious issues and effects that Canadian jurisdictions are undergoing from school

closures. Heated closure debates center around educational programming, finances, consultative processes, and sense of community (Egelund & Laustsen, 2006; *Mercer v. Greater Victoria School Board, 2003*; Rural and Community Trust, 2003; Valencia, 1984; Witham, 2000). The social and emotional costs for students and the community have also been investigated (Moray, 1985; Witten, McCreanor, Kearns, & Ramasubramanian, 2001). Realizing the importance of effective learning environments, how principal leadership is impacted by a school closure was an area that still had need for investigation.

Personal Context and Motivation

Having been a professional educator for more than three decades, with over two decades of varied leadership positions at the school and district levels places me in a unique position to conduct this research. A rich background for deliberation and perspective into this study's topic has been acquired through the accumulation of 17 years of school-based administrative experience and the past six years as a senior manager.

My last assignment as a school-based principal found me in a professionally and educationally vibrant middle school. However, in May of the 2002/2003 school year, I and most of our school's staff attended a public Board meeting, held in a school gymnasium. At this meeting, the Board systematically voted on sixteen separate by-laws, each representing a closure consideration of every school in the district. The result of the Board meeting was that five school communities were legally closed at one business session. These decisions also precipitated a complete grade reconfiguration across the entire school district.

Prior to the school closure decisions there was negligible meaningful opportunity for school leaders to participate in any rational or meaningful dialogue about closures or supplementary options. The process and resultant decision generated feelings of loss and no sense of control. Strong emotions were manifested within me and the school communities that were affected. The dominant municipal government in the district

supported a court challenge centering on process failures on behalf of its citizens (*Civitarese v. Kootenay-Columbia School District*, 2003).

Ironic circumstances quickly materialized for me professionally. Without a school to lead I was placed into a district administrative position at central office. Two immediate tasks were associated with my new position. Firstly, I was to coordinate the transition processes of closure and reconfiguration. This involved the adjustments in resources, facilities and instructional materials for the five closed school communities and the remaining eleven schools that would be undergoing reconfiguration. Also, uniquely, I was to observe, provide feedback where necessary, and notate the legal proceedings of the court challenge on behalf of the school district.

Prior to this critical event in my life, I served two terms as a school Trustee and had worked at a policy level. Being involved in the educational system as a Trustee generated an appreciation of, and participation in rational debate and group decision making. System-wide decisions which resulted in structural and operational change were difficult Board-level decisions and the importance working with well developed policy was clearly made evident.

In my latest position as Assistant Superintendent of a larger school district in the Metro-Vancouver area of British Columbia I was once again managing school closures. My past experience clearly positioned me to appreciate the difficulty that a school closure brings to both a community and the staff, particularly the principal. My endowment of great empathy and understanding for the situation did concede me a modest degree of credibility with the school communities.

As a manager carrying out the business of the Board, I work within the policy guidelines that are in place. For all school districts, the community controversies that permeate the closure process continue to be predictably problematic. The approach by which this type of system change is managed continues to be a major source of anxiety for Trustees and senior managers and also generates much unease for the schools and communities.

The importance of quality learning experiences and the need for effective and ethical leadership made this study concerning school closure and leadership one that I cared about greatly. Besides knowledge concerning principal leadership, this study revealed understandings of policy, praxis, and public engagement. To maintain the character, respect and vigour of their building principals, districts should manage the closure processes with rationality and dignity. Being sensitive and attentive to this intent will provide greater potential to maintain the leadership capacity within the districts as schools closures are considered.

It is from the multiple horizons of a committed school leader, past researcher and author, district manager, and experienced Board member that this study is undertaken. These personal perspectives allow me to feel the emotions, identify the contextual cues and interpret the circumstances that emerge from the school closure environment.

Purpose

In previous studies that examined aspects of school closure, a variety of significant factors surfaced that influenced the publics' reactions to closure. These included administrator background, time as a principal, years of service, and ethnographic setting (Egelund & Laustsen, 2006; Goddard, 1997). The purpose of this study was to examine a principal's perception of how their leadership was changed as a result of experiencing the closure of his or her school.

Research Questions

Two issues exposed the need for an analysis of the effects that the school closure milieu has on educational leadership: the paucity of related literature and the confirmed importance of school-based leadership for school effectiveness.

Most school closure policy stresses the instrumental design to which the legal body, the Board, and senior management must adhere. District policies in British

Columbia revealed a high level of consistency in providing a basic regulatory framework by which the Board notifies publics, shares information, and works towards the associated, legitimized board decision. Where the policies were diminutive is in the development of the rational and personal discourse for the sharing of views and respecting relationships (*Mercer v. Greater Victoria School District, 2003*). The school leader is a fulcrum point from which many of the educational relationships and communication revolve. A primary function of the principal is to develop a positive climate and ethical culture for the school community, within which instruction can be progressive and effective.

An analysis of the closure decision process in conjunction with the involvement of the school-based leader offers a solid operating stage for school districts to support ethical community relationships, effective learning environments, and in maintaining and enhancing principal leadership, even in difficult educational circumstances. This investigation developed capital for the professional and sensitive handling of the complexities that a school closure debate consistently creates.

The overriding question of the investigation was:

“How is principal leadership affected by the closure of his/her school?”

The generic question was addressed through the following sub-questions:

1. How was the school leader involved with the closure process?
2. In what ways is the school leader’s professional outlook altered due to living the experience of a school closure?
3. Were any practices or stages of a school closure process more significant to the school leader?
4. What evidence may inform future professional development of school leaders?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms were defined:

- *Critical event*: an interruption in the expected behaviours and developments in one's life that produces strong emotions and a need to "make sense" of the situation (Weick, 1995; WorksafeBC, 2002).
- *Leadership*: the abilities and attitudes an educational leader has, or believes he has, allowing him to carry out the Ministry of Education mandate, the Board expectations, school community goals, and a personal educational philosophy.
- *School closure*: a facility, with an enrolled body of students that is organized for educational purposes, which ceases to operate and is removed from government listings, as such an entity.
- *School leader*: the principal or administrator-in-charge of a school. It may also encompass when referenced in the narratives and associated data, colleagues who are in educational leadership positions (principals, vice-principals, district administrators).
- *Self-efficacy*: one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific circumstances (Evans, 1989).
- *Sensemaking*: developing a set of understandings, perspectives, and responses to explain and respond to an unusual event (Weick, 1995).
- *Wounded leader*: an educational leader who, as a result of a critical event, felt a personal and/or professional disorientation or chronic tension, relating to such areas as mission, abilities, reputation, or self-worth, eliciting a range of physical, emotional, or behavioural reactions (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004).

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

This study was delimited to the retrospective and personal understandings that six school principals and two superintendents had about the closure process and resultant decision for the closure of their assigned school. These leaders came from districts that would be classified as mid-sized districts (5,000 to 20,000 student population), as compared to many smaller, rural districts, or the few larger, urban districts (20,000 to 65,000 student population) that are found in British Columbia. Through semi-structured interviews the personal, lived experiences provided access to, and analysis for understanding the leaders' perceptions of their involvement, their leadership, and related professional development as a result of the participation. It was

not this study's intention to critique the decisions, reactions, or abilities of the persons associated with the school closures.

Omissions may exist with any retrospective narrative account, but collectively considered, content validity is amplified with member checks and sound methodology. The study was limited to the descriptions and understandings of a school leader's individual reflection and reaction to his/her particular school closure. Data collections were limited by the respondents' ability to recollect events. Simple causal relationships were unlikely.

The study was bounded by participant selection. Participant selection was not large. Only eight selected participants were interviewed and the selection was not random, but participation was volitional. The six school leaders had experienced a closure within the past 7 years and each continued to be an educational leader, a principal, in the same district. The interview data reflected the unique situations of six school leaders and two superintendents, in four school districts in British Columbia. Thus, the study did not possess the ability to generalize and claim representativeness in other contexts across all districts in the province.

The theoretical frameworks of communication theory, sensemaking, and self-efficacy were used to assist in analyzing the data. This restriction and the associated data would be open to other interpretations.

The in-depth examination that qualitative, narrative data demands restricted the scope of the present study. These limitations were accepted. There was no attempt to take into account such areas as gender affects in leadership, educational leadership ability, district size, or urban versus rural contexts. Another limitation was that only principals and superintendents were asked for their views, and not those of the publics with whom they were associated, such as parents or teachers. The focus of this study was on school-based leadership as it was related to experiencing a school closure. The inclusion of these questions above would have been beyond the reach of the researcher in this study.

Potential Significance of the Study

It was anticipated that school closure was a critical event in the life of a school leader and that it had an effect on that individual's professional life. School leaders are an integral component of the district's administrative team and also serve as a reserve for senior management positions. Evaluating this assertion was deemed to an essential element of the study. It was further anticipated that the collective ethos and process surrounding a closure consideration could impact school administrators and their professional development. Maintaining the well being of school leaders promotes strong school leadership. Therefore, a need existed to understand how school leaders were affected by such decisions.

School districts in British Columbia are experiencing succession pressures in the area of administrative leadership. Fewer applications are being submitted for school-based administrative positions. Generally, applicant's experience level is lacking in either years of practice, or in its depth and breadth. In conjunction with the diminishing interest in pursuing educational leadership positions, it is anticipated that significant numbers of public education administrators in British Columbia will be exiting the profession over the next 5 years (Cooper et al., 2006). Knowing the succession situation, it is even more critical for districts and the education system in general, to keep current educational leaders positively engaged and motivated to produce effective learning communities. School closures are controversial and emotional issues. Districts need to mitigate any possible actions that may result in instability for the affected administrators' personal and professional well-being.

Senior management positions, which have high demands for time and energy, are also generating less interest from school-based and central office administrators. With fewer applications to select from, positions at the senior management level are being filled by less experienced people (Cooper et al., 2006). In a time when administrative resources are waning, the educational system needs to retain, maintain, and enhance the educational leadership capability that districts already have in place. Educational research is increasingly focusing on the emotional side of leadership (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). The story of a

principal's lived experience allowed for the exploration and greater understanding of how school leadership was affected by school closure. Keeping more leaders working, and working effectively for the learners' benefit is a worthy goal.

School leaders are strategically placed within the dynamic education environment. Their service to society is a critical component for establishing and proliferating the health and quality of schools. The power of researching lived experiences is well documented (Charmaz, 2006; Manen, 1990). This study adds to the information regarding the skills and attitudes of school principalship.

Organization of the Dissertation

This chapter outlined the purpose of the study and provided background information as to why this study was relevant for the continued and expanded reflection on educational leadership. Chapter 2 examines the scholarly writing that provided the background and theoretical framework for this study. The topics reviewed were the areas of leadership effectiveness and obligations, impacts of critical events, school closure research, policy and legal cases, and the theoretical frameworks of communication theory, sensemaking, and self efficacy. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology that being a qualitative, narrative analysis of school leaders experiencing school closure. Chapter 4 discloses and discusses the data that resulted from the collected evidence. Chapter 5 offers a summary of the results and related discussion. Further, it discusses how this information may inform and assist leaders and districts in planning and managing leadership potential.

Chapter 2.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The school principal plays a key role in creating an effective academic and ethical social community (Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Lashway, 1996; Leithwood, 2006; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Reeves, 2009; Sergiovanni, 2006, 2009; Strike, 2007). The importance of the school leader as a component for educational success has also been replicated across international settings (Anderson, 2008; Ylimaki, Jacobson & Drysdale, 2007; Zame, Hope & Respress, 2008). Effective leaders continue to be sought and school leader succession is an escalating challenge to manage (Cooper et al., 2006; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Olson, 2008; Phillips, Raham, & Renihan, 2003; Reeves, 2009).

Recognizing that the school leader is critical to the school welfare, it would be expected that a school closure would provoke tension in his or her professional and personal life. Knowing how pivotal the principal's position is to the school community and district culture, it is important to fully understand the impact that school closure has on the school leader.

In recent decades, school closures have occurred around the world. As noted in the first chapter, closures and district reconfigurations will continue to be the business of Boards of Education in North America, particularly the setting of this study, British Columbia. Realizing that the closure process is difficult to conduct, Boards need to rely on sound practices for conducting consultation and decision-making processes pertaining to school closures.

Studies have looked into the various social, financial, and educational ramifications of school closure (Moray, 1985; Witten et al., 2001). These investigations have examined the social dynamics of the process; the post-decision environment; and the effects on students, parents, and community (Egelund & Laustsen, 2006; Hargreaves, 1997; Valencia, 1984; Witten et al., 2001). Research is lacking in the examination of the effect that the school closure process, and the event itself, has on the school principal.

A school leader operates within a unique set of circumstances during a school closure. In order to comprehend these circumstances, it is necessary to collect and examine data from the school leader. This literature review examines the environment that a school leader lives within during a school closure consideration and decision. The review provides an historical background of school closure research across different jurisdictions. An examination of provincial and local policy displays the instrumental expectations for the business of school closure. Analysis of legal challenges to closure decisions follows the section on policy and serves to reveal the facets of the closure discourse which produce disharmony. The school leader will be examined from (a) the perspectives of conflicting allegiances, (b) the importance of the school leader, and (c) the impact of experiencing such a critical event in one's professional career. Finally, this chapter outlines the theoretical framework from which the lived experiences will be examined.

Insight into School Closure Environment

The following section reviews closure studies that occurred in Canada and related impacts. International studies revealed similar themes.

School Closure Background in Canada

In Canada, a number of researchers found the catalysts for school closure were economic downturn and declining population (Bushrod, 1999; Goddard, 1997; Jakes,

1984; Ostro, 1978). Ostro looked at the decision making process and the duration of the closure consideration. With reference to the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, she explained how continued declining enrolment necessitated a policy to involve the public in making recommendations to the Board, which held final authority. The policy included a building capacity trigger (60%) to initiate the public meetings and subsequent recommendations on closure. It was also recognized that principals would require support in the closure process. Jakes (1984) examined the closure policies that Ontario districts developed as a result of a provincial government mandate in 1981. He found that the policies were well developed in regards to decision-making criteria but were less complete regarding factors to be considered in closure decisions and in strategy implementation.

Trider (1999) studied significant events in a school district, such as reconfiguration, and he demonstrated that these events are “turbulent” situations for employees (p. 10) and that leader and administrator awareness is essential for success. These incident examples also included school closure. Trider explained how a Board’s actions may cause further damage to a situation and that potential negative impact on district employees needs to be considered. He stated that “system leaders must not ‘burn bridges’ as they implement change” and “system leaders must remember they are not the only employees buffeted by the turbulent environment” (p. 10). This study discussed the issue of critical district events and possible effects on employees. What remained inconspicuous was insight into the effect these incidents had on educational leaders.

In Nova Scotia, Goddard (1997) surveyed 113 principals to assess the common perceptions school leaders had during district reconfiguration. The common theme of depopulation being linked to closures was identified, stating that “since the mid-1970s, rural depopulation, together with the continuing out-migration . . . has exacerbated the situation, with many smaller schools being closed or amalgamated” (p. 3). Amalgamation of school districts in Nova Scotia (22 reduced to 7) was also part of the study’s context.

Goddard's (1997) analysis addressed issues around principal leadership in closure and amalgamation of districts. From the survey data he identified the developing leadership role that involves "the political and economic aspects of school management" (p. 12). Goddard noted "that those administrators with the greatest experience were the ones who were experiencing the most stress and angst with the proposed changes in governance" (p. 13). His study was one of a few that delved into the aspects of principal leadership in conjunction with school closure and system reconfiguration. Possible leadership themes for professional development were presented and five areas of in-service were suggested for principals: governance, role clarification, personnel, technology and curriculum, and students. Connected with the role clarification was the area of communication practice amongst principals to offset the isolation felt by principals.

School closure studies particular to British Columbia were not immediately obvious. British Columbia had 152 schools (7%) closed in the previous 8 years to 2007/2008. British Columbia's demographics for student population decline (8%) related to the number of operating schools (BC Ministry of Education, February, 2008). The pace of school closures tightly followed the decline in the number of students. The government demographic data suggested that school closures, repurposing, or realignments can be anticipated by the majority of British Columbia school districts over the next few years due to continued enrolment decline and fiscal pressures.

The process of a closure consideration is a business area of the Board and is directed by the policy directions that a district has in place. Policy determines so much of the interaction, communication, and the decision-making in school closure considerations and therefore warrants an examination.

International Studies Reveal Similar Closure Themes

International studies investigating school closure exhibited the recurring theme of depopulation and fiscal pressure. The emotional tension of the closure experience was also evident in the international research.

The school consolidations occurring in British Columbia reflect what happened during the 1970s and 1980s across Europe, New Zealand and the United States of America (Ebmeier, 1986; Egelund & Laustsen, 2006; Hargreaves, 1997). From a long-term historical perspective, school closures are happening concomitantly throughout the Western world.

When communities in Europe, New Zealand, and the United States laboured through closures or amalgamations; community rifts, angry debates, mistrust, and accusations were common experiences. In most education system contractions, communication practices and transition planning were also associated concerns. The public is routinely dissatisfied with the degree of consultation and are worried for the successful transition of students (Egelund & Laustsen, 2006; Moray, 1985; Witten et al., 2001).

Hargreaves (1997) summarized data from eight European countries and found that a dominant theme was the “continued rural depopulation, subsequent school closures and in some cases consequent inter-community animosity” (p. 2). She further added, “the number of small schools across Europe has fallen dramatically in the last few decades, as rural areas have become depopulated and economic factors have taken their toll of small schools” (p. 3).

Egelund and Laustsen’s (2006) work on the large number of closures in Denmark over the past decades was relevant to this study. They retroactively investigated school communities 3 to 13 years after the closure experience. Egelund and Laustsen established the background for their study by explaining how the demographic conditions which previously resulted in the expansion of schools in the mid-1900s had reversed to generate closures. Denmark closed almost 4,000 of its 5,500 schools over the past 7 decades, mostly in rural areas (p. 429).

Egelund and Laustsen’s (2006) work revealed no data of increased migration out of the community due to school closures. Their work illustrated that different types of communities, depending on their contextual position, exhibited characteristic reactions to a school being closed. Egelund and Laustsen labelled the three different community categories that emerged from their data as (a) the “lively local society,” (b) the “dying

local society,” and (c) the “small island community” (p. 433). The least resistance to school closure was found in a dying community, one that was characterized with low population and low infrastructure. The bitter closure processes were found in lively communities, which were connected to nearby communities with higher populations, and had transportation, infrastructure and economic activity. In the small island communities the school closure was a “hard blow” but “the protests were mainly motivated by the loss of the cultural and social centre” (p. 437), as the community realized the limited educational opportunities for the children in such a small school setting. In BC, community reaction to closure also varies and community types identified by Egelund and Laustsen may be a frame for that observation.

Egelund and Laustsen (2006) felt that “very few systematic attempts at mapping the effects of school closure on the local societies have been performed” (p. 438). Not apparent in the European closure studies was a focus on the educational leaders.

In New Zealand, Witten et al. (2001) did extensive analysis by interviews of closure affects on the school community. The qualitative narrative approach delved deeply into the resulting societal changes and the social-emotional “well being of children and their care givers” (p. 308). The investigation looked at the market, social, and educational values of a school community. The closure study primarily focused on non-educational aspects, the theme of personal and emotional health being dominant. Witten et al. (2001) found that people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who had fragile social networks, were feeling affected the most. While not specific to the school leader, the investigators found that social-emotional health and social isolation were negatively influenced by the closures. In New Zealand, cynicism about school closure process was another strong theme. It was perceived that the Ministry of Education prescribed and conducted a contrived consultation process.

In the United States of America (USA), there was a concentration of school closure evaluations in the 1980s after the enrolment declines in the 1960s and 1970s (Valencia, 1984). The digest written by Lutz (1990) discussed the dramatic decline in the number of rural schools and school districts in the USA. Weldy (1981) and Thomas (1980) focused their examinations on the processes and central concerns involved in

school closures. Fredrickson (1981) provided insight for policy development when he stressed the importance of facility and program planning, and communications. Much of the data and deliberation from the USA studies were streamed towards creating rational recipes, tied to quantitative data of enrolment and finances, for instrumental closure processes.

A collective examination of closure studies in the United States was conducted by Valencia (1984). Valencia's analysis revealed that (a) most school closures occurred in disadvantaged communities, (b) resulted in social costs such as decreased student and parent engagement, and (c) that cost savings could not be substantiated, or were minimal. Pointing out little benefit of school closure, Valencia's policy paper is often cited by proponents for small schools.

In Utah, Thomas (1980) used his situated experience as a superintendent to write a concise, yet comprehensive review of the main issues to address in a school closure process. He brought forth the key issues to be considered in "the hope that educational opportunities can be improved in the midst of conflict, confrontation, and consolidation" (p. 21). Thomas discussed ideas for policy development, leadership traits, and obligations, the fears to be cognizant of, and positions around educational programming. His work is a worthwhile initial reference for Boards or senior managers who are considering closures, or realignments. Student welfare and educational programming were parental fears. For employees, their key apprehension was job security. System support, fairness, and equity were also dominant themes in Thomas' work.

School Closure Policy

School closure policy will be reviewed from both a Canadian provincial and a local district perspective. Examination of the similarities, differences, and the instrumental procedures of school policy provides additional contextual background for this study.

Provincial School Closure Policy

School closure is the critical event connected to this study on school leadership and the consideration and decision to close is directed by policy. Understanding policy is relevant. The policy that Boards of Education work within to arrive at closure decisions forms a part of the composite texture of the environment in this investigation. Public education in Canada is not a federal responsibility. The individual provinces provide guidance for related policy across Canada and some resultant variation occurs.

Easton (1965) explained “a political system can be designated as those interactions through which values are authoritatively allocated for a society” (p. 21). This perspective on politics allows policies to be observed in relation to (a) with whom the authority and power resides, (b) what values or resources are identified, and (c) what communicative practices are organized at the state level. Three provincial school closure policies, Prince Edward Island (PEI), Alberta, and British Columbia are discussed.

The Prince Edward Island (PEI) School Act (1988) “School Closure Regulations” leaves the final decision to the Lieutenant Governor. This final decision comes after a Board makes a closure decision based on a detailed process, which is provided in the provincial government policy. The PEI policy details a list of what factors need to be considered in a school closing process, such as demographics, effects on both the educational programs, and the related costs. Community interests outside of education must also be given consideration in regards to local developments and to what effect the closure would have on the community. A detailed report on the above factors is completed as a first stage. After the report is received, the Board may make a motion to initiate the public dialogue. Access to the report; a specific time period for public input, final decision date, and a post-closure, follow-up transition report are all predetermined in the provincial policy. The PEI policy sets out the instrumental framework for public input and mandates the inclusion of broad community involvement. This state policy identifies the specific values to be considered.

The Province of Alberta School Act (1997) “Closure of School Regulation” stipulates the instrumental design for school closure by detailing the guidelines for public

notices, motions, and parent letters. The notice to the parent community shall include attendance information, capital plans, transportation, cost analyses, alternative uses, and at least one public meeting. Within the Alberta policy, the authority to make a closure decision rests at the Board level.

The British Columbia (BC) School Act “School Building Closure and Disposal Policy” (2008b) has two subset Ministerial Orders: “School Opening and Closure Order” (2008c) and the “Disposal of Land or Improvements Order” (2008a). The overarching policy statement declares that Boards “must engage in broad consultations and in enhanced planning” (2008b, Policy Statement, para. 2) and also consider the expanded mandate for a Board of Education, mentioning such areas as early learning, industry training, community services, and demographics.

The “School Opening and Closure Order” replicates expectations found in the policy regarding “fair consideration of community input and adequate opportunity for the community to respond” (BC School Act, 2008c, p. E-96). The provincial policy stipulates these “musts” in general terms with no associated specifics. This situation leaves the individual community-based Boards to develop, implement and apply a closure policy that they feel is contextually appropriate. The “Disposal of Land or Improvements Order” (BC School Act, 2008a) reflects capital considerations around building usage, efficiencies, and market value. This order also replicates the broader topics to be considered as mentioned above.

BC policy for school closures places final decision authority with the local Board of Education. It also mandates what areas need to be taken into account and who should be consulted. The provincial policy is not specific on what communicative practices or guidelines should be used by the Boards to manage the expectations that are laid out in the policy and orders. The order does imply that the details of the public dialogue are to be accounted for in the local development of closure policy. The locally developed district policies are to take into account (a) the publics’ need to be heard, (b) the access to information, and (c) the ability to question.

British Columbia School Districts

School closure policies from four British Columbia school districts were examined. The districts were Mission (2008), Comox (2007), Prince George (2003), and Kootenay-Columbia (2008). These districts did not form the basis of the data in this study, but each district had conducted closure processes in recent years. In relation to the instrumental and communicative design, the sampling of school closure policies demonstrated some variations. Alignments that did exist amongst the policies were in the area of administrative procedures that acknowledged economics, demographics, notification, information sharing, a public meeting, and a time period.

Of the four, two local policies covered the concepts of mandate clarification, openness, inclusiveness, and respectful environment. One policy had a firm decision date, initiated transition procedures, and specific criteria for closure consideration. Missing from all policies were organizational principles that addressed the areas of neutrality, the equity of actors, process rules, and decision reconsideration.

Policy is the legislative authority of Boards of Education. School closure policies are significant pieces of legislation which detail the framework established for public discourse and participation. When a community is unhappy with a closure decision it is upon the policy's wording, process, and implementation that the public focuses when reacting to, and analyzing the consultation and its conclusion. If a community feels that the policy was not adhered to in the expected manner, then the legislative authority of society, the legal system, is occasionally asked to intercede.

Legal Challenges to School Closures in British Columbia

Over a hundred school closures have occurred over the past decade in British Columbia with few legal cases developing from these decisions. Case documents and the judicial breakdown of the circumstances, with the benefit of third-party objectivity serve to explain (a) policy and their application, (b) the decision-making process, (c) the

involvement of the public sphere, and (d) the obstacles and frustrations inherent in the closure consultative process. In the three British Columbia cases, two central themes were apparent.

In reference to the process, the judges identified a minimal threshold to satisfy the public consultation requirement and the court had limited ability to encroach upon the legitimate business decisions of Boards. The court's jurisdiction only had the capacity to assess the handling of process (*Civitarese v. Kootenay-Columbia School District*, 2003). Justice McEwan referenced *Dingman v. Upper Grand District School Board* (2000) which explained, "it is not within our power to second guess the financial and political decisions of elected officials who act within their legal jurisdiction" (para. 38). Referring to the brevity of policy obligations, Justice Koenigsberg (*Mercer v. Greater Victoria School District*, 2003) pointed out simply that, "There is no doubt that Policy 3711 does include a public consultation process. In my view, that is all that the order requires" (para. 89).

Being cognizant of the level of obligation, each of the three British Columbia cases did emphasize that there still existed an obligation for the school districts to adhere to the principle of "procedural fairness" (*Comox Valley Citizens v. Comox Valley School District*, 2008). Procedural fairness could play a role in the court's judgement as explained by Justice Johnston when "the elected body has adopted policy that requires it to follow a particular process" (*Comox Valley Citizens v. Comox Valley School District*, 2008, para. 31).

The low duty threshold did not nullify a school district's obligation to act in accordance with generally held expectations for public discourse. The same understandings for public involvement and rational discourse were repeatedly evident in the judges' comments. Madam Justice Koenigsberg (*Mercer v. Greater Victoria School District*, 2003) supported this belief with the understanding that there were requirements for full disclosure of all facts and information considered by the school board with respect to proposed school closures and buttressed this understanding of the public sphere interaction with:

The essence of procedural fairness is in the context of a school closure decision is that the affected parties be afforded timely disclosure of relevant information and a full opportunity in the circumstances, to develop and present their viewpoints, such that they have had a legitimate opportunity to attempt to influence the Board's decision. (para. 93)

Justice Johnston (*Comox Valley Citizens v. Comox Valley School District*, 2008) added greater depth to the responsibilities associated with public consultation when he connected the duty of fairness to a "fair opportunity to participate in decisions that affect their rights, privileges or interests" (para. 49), and goes on to say "that the Board have an open mind and that the consultative process is meaningful" (para. 66).

Trying to explain the public frustration, Justice Johnston stated that, "the frustration and anger that the parents of the schools chosen to be closed have revolves around a feeling of unfairness. . . . This sense of frustration was fuelled by the very short timeline" (para. 97), and that "all of this only explains in part the high level of emotion" (para. 99).

In consultation processes, along with the parents, students, and community members, it is common for the school-based administrator to attend and often facilitate discussions at community meetings or at the school level. When school communities feel frustrated or upset with a school closure, they have each other for support and the recourse of legal action, even though seldom used. During this critical time, the principal may also feel distressed. What philosophical foundation or perspectives would school leaders rely on when they are feeling conflicting allegiances and role conflict in their leadership? How a school leader makes sense of his or her frustration and professional dilemma may relate to the depth, or type of effect, that the closure comprises.

Conflicting Allegiances and Role Conflict of the School Leader

The school principal that is facing a closure decision is positioned within professional dilemmas concerning (a) educational philosophies and (b) professional allegiances. Debate around school closure has attached to it the rationale that educational program enhancements will be generated by the proposed closure and building consolidations (Witten et al., 2001). This consideration clashes against the appreciation of learning in a smaller, personal setting, and allegiance to that tight community. Do the benefits of a smaller school community outweigh the value of improved services and programs that are found in larger schools? Should the school leader come out in support of a particular position? How would the principal handle the arguments in a balanced manner?

The affected principal in a closure process also experiences the dilemma over accountability of action. The school community expects loyalty and voice from its leader. The management position is for the school leader to support and carry out the business of the Board. Ylimaki et al. (2007) found that in time of instability the school community relied on the principal, stating:

But when schools become less stable and take on the characteristics of a "frontier culture," community members may seek strong formal leadership in order to reestablish coherence and direction. Because principals are formally assigned the role and responsibilities of leadership, it is to them that most turn when schools confront instability. (p. 365)

How a principal demonstrates support for the school community while at the same time being accountable to legislated obligation is a difficult precipice from which to operate. In this regard, Lashway (1996) wrote:

Having moral obligations to society, to the profession, to the school board, and to students, they find that it often is not clear what is right or wrong, or what one ought to do, or which perspective is right in moral terms. (p. 1)

These dilemmas center on the principal's obligation to both community and district. The principal may wish to speak out on behalf of the school community, its value and importance—to demonstrate fraternity with the school community. Nevertheless, the ability to speak out on the school's behalf is restrained by the obligation to abide by the norms of legitimate authority as stated in the School Act (BC School Act, 1996) and by a personal employment contract, requiring the principal to be loyal to managing the business of the Board.

Strike's (2007) assessment of these allegiance incongruities provides some direction. A paradox initially exists with Strike's concepts of community and legitimate authority. He stated that "the role of the educational leader is to create good educational communities" and "require that we create intellectual communities in our schools where free and open debate is cherished and protected" (p. 19). Initial interpretation may affirm a principal's intuition to align with school, parents, and community supporters, perhaps wishing to speak out in "free and open debate" to support the school. Nevertheless, further in his work Strike wrote on the theme of legitimate authority and that democratic principles trump educational considerations. He makes this clear in the following declaration:

These parents have argued that they have a right to be the primary decision-makers concerning the school that educates their children. They have said that you, the principal, are accountable primarily to them and have implied that their views trump those of the school board and the state legislature. They do not. The fundamental expression of democracy in our society is the commitment to the sovereignty of the legislature. Here the relevant legislatures are the school board and the state legislature. To respect democracy is to recognize their sovereignty over education in their jurisdictions. (Strike, 2007, p. 106)

An educational system would not knowingly act to lessen a principal's effectiveness and morale. Maintaining the school leader's engagement and motivation would be important for creating successful student learning.

The Importance of Principal Leadership

The principal plays an important role in creating an ethical and effective learning and working environment (Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Leithwood, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2008; Sergiovanni, 2006, 2009; Strike, 2007). Definitions for this educational leadership role have varied.

Common descriptors for successful leadership approaches include transformational, ethical, reflective, effective, and sustainable. Each of these descriptors is supported by a body of writing. There exist terms for leadership style, such as coercive or democratic. There are classifications for leadership dimensions, such as political or symbolic. There are management theories that try to explain leadership practice, such as classical, scientific, principle-centered, or servant leadership. Leadership has been described as a craft, as an art, and as a science (Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Leithwood, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2008; Sergiovanni, 2006, 2009; Strike, 2007). The elusiveness of a consistent definition or description for educational leadership is evident and this ambiguity may be due to the many responsibilities and facets associated with school leadership. Researchers have shown that educational leadership requires a blending of both abilities and attitudes for creating an optimal school environment, as principals work towards attaining the many expectant goals for the multiple publics they serve (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Renihan, 2008; Sergiovanni, 2006, 2009; Strike, 2007).

Impediments are mounting for the management of leadership in school districts. Examples of these obstacles are (a) succession planning for stable and effective school leadership, (b) an increasing demand for accountability and performance, (c) the expanding mandate, (d) fiscal restraints on schools and education, and (e) the increasing turnover of school leaders (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Lashway, 2002). School closures result in succession problems for both the district managers and the affected school leaders. The district managers need to proactively contemplate and decide on placement shifts for school administrative staff. Coincidentally, the school leaders experience an assignment change, an alteration within their assignment, or an exit from the educational leadership profession.

Educational jurisdictions cope with the above significance and exigent pressures. It is striking to observe the convergence of these multiple struggles at one time period. Thus, this study is both relevant and needed for the management of leadership in present day school districts. Effective school leaders provide unquestioned value, but it still remains unexplored as to how these same leaders are affected by the critical event of closing their school.

School Leaders Experiencing Critical Incidents

There is limited research that has utilized the critical incident approach with school leaders with the exception of Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, 2004; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998). Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski had used narrative analysis in educational research previously, but it was from 1998 to 2000 when they turned their attention to extracting insights into the emotional element of educational leadership. This analysis was done by documenting the stories of leaders who had experienced a critical incident in their professional life. The critical incidents cited by principals were events such as losing a position, being publically criticized, or working through a staff rebellion. Using the above cited situations as critical incident examples, it is argued that a school principal experiencing a closure process is representative of living through a critical event and a potentially harmful emotional scenario.

Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, 2004; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998) completed four narrative studies investigating critical incident affects on leadership, culminating in their book *The Wounded Leader: How Real Leadership Emerges in Times of Crisis* (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002). The investigators positioned their observational framework from previous works that were based on studies of people living with a serious illness (Kleinman, 1988; Frank, 1995). In alignment with the studies on serious illness, the investigators found that three types of reoccurring stories emerged from school leaders: (a) restitution, (b) chaos, and (c) quest (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002).

The “restitution” narrative is a hopeful and calming one in that the leader feels that the problem will be rectified and life will get back to normal. The “chaos” narrative displays a dismal perspective in that the leader feels “trapped in the crisis and does not see a way out” (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, p. 97). The materialization of a “quest” narrative signifies an optimism and hopefulness. The description for this third type of story results from expressions in the story that sees the critical incident as “a way to change and grow, even if the problem is not fixed” (p. 97). It will be valuable to assess what conditions were in place to assist in the elicitation of such an optimistic attitude in school leaders experiencing difficult circumstances.

Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998) coined the term “wounded leader,” which is a term that may appear harsh to an individual unfamiliar with it. Phrases such as “loss of essential spirit” (p. 19), “a disorienting” (p. 15), “the endemic and chronic tension” (p. 16), and “loss of control, powerlessness” (p. xii) elicited a finer connotation of the term. The importance of emotion and feeling in the educational leadership dialectic was repeatedly brought to the forefront.

Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002) emphasized the importance of “situated knowledge” (p. 96). The authors’ examination of the topic further evolved the reoccurring themes into which the feelings of wounded leaders fell. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) imparted strong credence to the work and the themes that surfaced and said:

Leadership succession, like leadership itself, is acutely emotional in nature In their research on wounded leaders, Richard Ackerman and Pat Maslin-Ostrowski note that there is “no simple language or vocabulary in the workplace to speak of feelings of leadership isolation, fear, vulnerability and loss.” (p. 85)

The researchers remarked on the need for a supportive climate for affected leaders and the need to inject emotions and feelings into the leadership discourse.

In 2004, Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski expanded their examination of the “emotional dimensions of leadership” (p. 311). They recognized that “the stakes are

high because such emotional health, in the best case, will potentially lead to sustained and effective leadership of schools” (p. 311). This research extension supported the necessity for sustaining the leadership capacity that districts’ already have in place. Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski further buttressed their position by stating, “in an era of high-stakes testing, accountability demands and shifting reform agendas, we are experiencing an epidemic of leadership loneliness and burnout” (p. 319).

In *Sustainable Leadership*, Hargreaves and Fink (2006) noted the emotional aspect in leadership development when they affirmed:

Paradoxically, it is precisely when leaders feel most isolated, vulnerable, or powerless, as well as when they feel valued and loved, that they most need to share these feelings with rather than hide them from their colleagues and their community. (p. 86)

The work of Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002), and Hargreaves and Fink, have started a small conversation in the investigative area of educational leadership being affected by a critical professional incident. This study investigates how a school leader’s abilities and attitudes are affected by the unusual event of a school closure.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework assists with understanding phenomena. The complexities related to the dynamic situation of a principal having his or her school closed does not lend itself well to a linear or diagrammatic framework for explanation. Establishing a theoretical framework is required to interpret how a school leader makes sense of the convolutions that exist within a school closure.

A number of intricacies became evident in the literature. Some of the dynamic attributes that were displayed by the literature review are: (a) the duality of communities involved in school closure, those being the district or Board, and the school community and the public-at-large; (b) the prominence of policy and due process; (c) the sense of

disconnect and the pathological responses that may be associated with experiencing a critical incident; and (d) the necessity of dealing with confrontation and dilemmas.

The theoretical framework derived for this study assists in making sense of the complexities, in determining what the data expresses, and making visible and tangible what is experienced in that abstract reality. Three theories connected to communication, sensemaking, and efficacy will be utilized. Together, these frameworks will provide the philosophical grounding, the structure and the guidance for describing and understanding the communication, events, and reactions inherent in this study.

Jürgen Habermas' (1987) *The Theory of Communicative Action* provides insight into the communicative processes, the nature of divergent communities and intentions, understanding the emergence and nature of conflicts, and the use of Law in closure decisions. *Sensemaking in Organizations* from Karl Weick (1995) helps illustrate how individuals and systems interpret and make sense of life's interruptions in order to guide actions to establish a new equilibrium, provide vocabularies for interpretation of the incident's environment, and display the value of narrative stories in making sense of unusual situations. Albert Bandura's (1997) *Self-efficacy: The Exercise of Control* supplies insight for interpreting the feelings of principals and how self-efficacy was (a) affected by a critical event, (b) was contributory to related responses, and (c) for appreciating resultant negative or positive attitudes.

Communicative Action Theory

Jürgen Habermas' (1987) ideas regarding communication and the use of law in relation to school closure support the understanding of the behaviours and interplay of the *system* world and the *lifeworld*. In particular, how the school leader is positioned and potentially compromised between the two in relation to a school closure process is made evident. The theory provides a perspective to more fully understand the intent and actions of both the district and the community.

System and Lifeworld as Representative of the Board and Public

The two worlds, the system and lifeworld, provide a comprehensible lens for observing the actions and interplay between the public and the Board. The Board of Education, being a state authorized administration, represents the system world. The community (students, parents, staff, and municipality) represent the lifeworld. Each world has an alignment to a representative communication style. The system is a goal-oriented body, sanctioned by the government, with a predominant focus on instrumental action. The lifeworld, the general public that interacts with the Board, has common understandings of society and strives for relationship-based communicative action that optimally results in understanding and consensus (Calhoun, 1992; Eriksen & Weigard, 2004; Finlayson, 2005; Habermas, 1984, 1987).

The communicative approach of the lifeworld is oriented towards involvement and reflection, as consensus of understanding is strived for amongst all the actors. This type of communication, which favours involvement, expects some disagreement in the dialectic and requires sufficient time. The public supports this approach to discourse with claims of validity and democracy.

The instrumental action of the Board operates within the structures that itself or the government establishes. The strategic instrumental actions are oriented towards preselected goals. Claims of being a legitimate authority and working for the common good of society reinforces the Board's approach to decision making. Habermas (1984, 1987) breaks down the system world into the two subsets of money and power. Each subsystem has motivations that steer them. Money would be represented by the economy-market system that has goods and services as goals. The power subsystem corresponds to government sanctioned bodies that are responsible for providing civil services; the Boards of Education being analogous to this portrayal.

The approaches of the two worlds in reaching a decision or consensus have opposing intents and styles. The natural tension or conflict resulting from this opposition should not be unexpected by the actors in the community or school district. Habermas recognized that systems are necessary to perform functions that complex modern

societies require in order to continue to function. Habermas, in his paper, “Further Reflections of the Public Sphere” (as cited in Calhoun, 1992) stated:

But the presumption that society as a whole can be conceived as an association writ large, directing itself via the media of law and political power, has become entirely implausible in view of the high level of complexity of functionally differentiated societies. The holistic notion of a societal totality in which the associated individuals participate like the members of an encompassing organization is particularly ill suited to provide access to the realities of an economic system regulated through markets and of an administrative system regulated through power. (p. 443)

The Board, which regulates the democratic participation of its publics, needs to be cognizant of the inherent tension and the need for balance of input. How a system such as a Board of Education and the senior managers with a definitive intent and orientation can create an accepted legitimate consultative atmosphere presents a professional quandary. Too much input in broad fora would derail the required timelines and decision-making. Organizing the right amount of input in a manner that the public accepts and views as legitimate is a high-level management skill that requires a foundation of trusted relationships. A balance of input and participation needs to be strived for. Finlayson (2005) explained the benefit of this balance, “when formal political institutions are open to the right degree of input from below, their decisions, policies and laws will tend to be rational and to find acceptance” (p. 113).

Boards struggle to achieve this democratic communicative balance in controversial considerations such as school closures. It is common for the public to view the process as contrived (*Comox Valley Citizens v. Comox Valley School District*, 2008; *Mercer v. Greater Victoria School District*, 2003). This sense of orchestrated consultation is evident in legal judgments and is recognized by Habermas scholars. Finlayson (2005) is direct in his criticism:

The current style of government . . . is to delegate decisions to bureaucratic elites ‘informed’ by experts. . . . Manufacturing popular consent is the last step in a chain of otherwise bureaucratic decisions. The tendency is not to promote open and transparent decision-making institutions, but to slough off procedures of communication and discourse

from the political process altogether for the sake of expediency, moral 'clarity' or some other supposed benefit. (p. 120)

Calhoun (1992) more demurely pointed out the potential process manipulation:

The public sphere becomes a setting for states and corporate actors to develop legitimacy not by responding appropriately to an independent and critical public but seeking to instill in social actors motivations that conform to the needs of the overall system. (p. 26)

Another contributing factor to the perceptions of a contrived discourse may be the teleological nature of school closure. The districts, just by bringing forth the closure consideration, have indicated they are seeking a direction, or at a minimum, are contemplating one. The titles of the district policies indeed use the words "School Closure." This teleological approach makes it more imperative for the policies to establish sensible instrumental and communicative design to manage a legitimate process and decision. Eriksen and Weigard's (2004) elaboration on this approach is that "instrumental design presupposes communicative design, because there is a need for normative discussion of the common parameters that are required in order to decide" (p. 205).

Positioning of the School Leader

The Aboriginal phrase "walking in two worlds" aptly connotes the school leader's predicament. The principal operates in both the system and lifeworld. The school leader spends most time in the school community, building relationships, and working independently, separate to the system. The principal is also a legally associated member of the governing authority, the Board, and is obligated to manage the business of the Board. The district management and the school community are seldom uncertain of their obligations, with each group viewing themselves solidly in their respective worlds. The principal's unique position generates a dilemma in a closure decision. The school leader is in the delicate position of balancing obligations to both the district and community.

The literature review and the purpose of this investigation reveal considerations of the principal's involvement which are: (a) the role, and participation during a closure process as it is being carried out, (b) the principal's relationship with the Board, the school community and other leaders, and (c) how the experience has impacted on the school leader's ability to continue on as an effective leader after a closure process.

Disturbance and Pathology in the Lifeworld

On certain occasions, Boards of Education strive to work closely with its educational community constituents. This sporadic imbedding in the school community may create a feeling of colonization, perceiving an administrative control over a public space, creating feelings of distrust and harm. Habermas asserted that when the expectations are disturbed, or colonization of the people operating in the lifeworld occurs, pathologies can arise (Finlayson, 2005; Habermas, 1987). Habermas directly pointed out that “disturbances in reproduction are manifested in their own proper domains of culture, society, and personality as loss of meaning, anomie, and mental illness (psychopathology)” (p. 142). Finlayson (2005) observed that “this tendency for the system to colonize the lifeworld leads to greater fragility and to disequilibrium or instability” (p. 56). Some of the pathological results from these disturbances to the lifeworld are “withdrawal, alienation,” “crisis in orientation and education” (Habermas, 1987, p. 143), “demoralization,” and “feelings of helplessness” (Finlayson, 2005, p. 57).

The situation highlights the possible disturbance that the school leader may feel. The school community is the prevailing lifeworld in which the principal operates—a community with many interactions and personal relationships. When a school leader loses his or her school, the lifeworld is disturbed. Thus, there could be occurrences and degrees of the pathologies described above.

Understanding the Use and Acceptance of Law by School Communities

In school closures where the lifeworld disturbance is intense or a sense of injustice is strongly manifested, the community sometimes proceeds to legal recourse. This legal arbitration is a natural transition when observed through the Habermasian lens. Law is recognized as an impartial interpreter, a system that balances input,

mandates respect amongst participants, and is viewed as a democratic establishment of society.

But the legal code not only keeps one foot in the medium of ordinary language, through which everyday communication achieves social integration in the lifeworld; it also accepts messages that originate there and puts these into a form that is comprehensible. . . . To this extent the language of the law, unlike the moral communication restricted to the lifeworld, can function as a transformer in the society-wide communication circulating between system and lifeworld. (Habermas, 1996, p. 81)

The legal system has the legislative ability to take the arguments of the public discourse, interpret these, and form judgments that the public is more apt to accept. The public views this “democratic *self-legislation* [italics in original]” as being “derived from the principle of popular sovereignty” (p. 454).

When moving to legal action the public willingly forfeits their customary style of communicative action as “they participate in the production of law only as *legal participants* [italics in original]; it is no longer in their power to decide which language they will use in this endeavor” (Habermas, 1996, p. 455). The public reverts to and relies on a system that is perhaps more constrained than the one they were unsuccessful in. This forfeiture is offset by engaging in a venue that they honor and that has an ethos of equality and objectivity (Habermas, 1996).

The Theory of Communicative Action (Habermas, 1987) and *Sensemaking* (Weick, 1995) share some porous, conceptual boundaries. The conceptual crossovers construct a comfortable allegiance for the two theories. The striving for consensus and understanding that is evident in the lifeworld is similar to the understanding of consensus in sensemaking. The linguistics and constructions found in the sensemaking vocabularies parallel the communicative styles within communicative action. The duty of law to arrive at an objective interpretation is analogous to what individuals and organizations endeavour to do in making sense of life’s interruptions. Just as the law utilizes past incidents in its interpretations, the frames in sensemaking identify with past moments.

Sensemaking

When the normal flow of events does not happen, disequilibrium occurs. The person is activated to generate a new sense of equilibrium. Sensemaking occurs when an individual notices an interruption in the normal “flow of events,” spots “discrepant cues,” and develops “plausible speculations” retrospectively to explain the incident and to make sense of it (Weick, 1995, p. 2). Weick expounded the usefulness of sensemaking for the researcher by saying:

What is unusual about the topic of sensemaking is that it is grounded as much in deductions from well-articulated theories as it is in induction from specific cases of struggles to reduce ambiguity. This is a decided advantage for investigators because there is a core set of ideas that holds this perspective together. (p. 13)

Weick (1995) has illustrated where sensemaking has been utilized and proven useful in multiple research settings, providing specific citations for:

naturalistic inquiry, . . . grounded theory, . . . critical incidents, . . . case scenarios, . . . interviews with people, . . . work diaries that capture political structures, . . . field observations, . . . and participant observation for story-telling used for sensemaking. (p. 172)

In sensemaking:

A good story holds disparate elements together long enough to energize and guide action, plausibly enough to allow people to make retrospective sense of whatever happens. . . . The ‘patterns’ that a story develops result in more order and sense in the future. . . . The stories are templates. They explain. (Weick, 1995, p. 61)

With supportive research, Weick’s (1995) sensemaking theory explains how stories are not abstract, but generate “frames, ideologies, paradigms, and traditions” (p. 131).

In public education, Weick’s sensemaking theory has been used in relation to school mergers and decentralization (Smith, 1984; Zwijze-Koning & de Jong, 2009). In research at higher education settings, sensemaking has been used to examine institutional change (Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Tyler, 2005).

In making sense of an incident, “frames tend to be moments of past socialization”; being ways to explain past events, and “cues tend to be present moments of experience,” perceptions of present moments (Weick, 1995, p. 111). Sensemaking results when past explanations and present moments are connected. Frames, explanations of the past experiences, make sense for present circumstances. Sense and meaning are formed when the two elements of past and present moments are related with a connection.

Six “vocabularies” are used for creating the sensemaking connections between past and present moments, “to inform sensemaking” (p. 109). These vocabularies are: (a) Ideology, vocabulary of society; (b) Third-order Controls, vocabulary of organizations; (c) Paradigms, vocabulary of work; (d) Theories of Action, vocabulary of coping; (e) Tradition, vocabulary of Predecessors; and (f) Stories, vocabulary of sequence and experience. Of these six, three vocabularies seemed applicable to the purpose of this study, these being: (a) Ideology: Vocabularies of Society, (b) Paradigms: Vocabularies of Work, and (c) Theories of Action: Vocabulary of Coping. Each of these vocabularies presents a means for looking at dialogue, reasoning, and interpretation.

The Ideology vocabulary refers to “emotionally charged beliefs, values, and norms” that guide decision-makers (Weick, 1995, p. 111). Different organizations, such as occupations, sciences, industry and teaching would have certain content ideologies specific for their operational discussions and coherence. The Paradigm vocabulary refers to understandings in the work environment. With references to researchers such as J. Van Maanen and Barley (1984), and Pfeffer (1982), paradigmatic organizational controls for addressing interruptions in the normal flow of events are explained as “standard operating procedures, shared definitions of the environment, and agreed-upon systems of power and authority” (p. 118). Weick’s (1995) own concise summary explains that:

For the purposes of sensemaking, paradigms can be defined as sets of recurrent and quasi-standard illustrations that show how theories of action are applied conceptually, observationally, and instrumentally to representative organizational problems. Collections of illustrations or stories, held together by a theory of action, provide a frame within which cues are noticed and interpreted. (pp. 120-121)

Theories of Action represent conceptual frameworks. Flowcharts, diagrams and stimulus-action responses are representative of this “vocabulary of coping” (p. 121). This “vocabulary of coping” provides filters for what is noticed and the actions for responding to changes in the environment are provided, with the idea of creating order.

The sensemaking framework presents seven properties by which it is recognized, these being (a) Identity Construction, (b) Retrospective, (c) Enactive of Sensible Environments, (d) Social, (e) Ongoing, (f) Focused on Extracted Cues, and (g) Plausibility rather than Accuracy. Of the seven properties, “Individual Construction” and “Ongoing” present interesting perspectives for this study (Weick, 1995).

Individual construction builds from the premise that an individual is a multifaceted being, existing as a “parliament of selves” (Weick, 1995, p. 18). Many backgrounds and experiences develop our sense of self. Incidents in our lives have the power to interrupt and dislodge this sense of who we are. “Sensemaking is triggered by a failure to confirm one’s self,” and “sensemaking occurs in the service of maintaining a consistent, positive, self-conception” (p. 23). When a school leader experiences the critical incident of school closure it would be expected that this would initiate a sensemaking action about their purpose or actions in the situation. The degree by which a leader’s self-perception is built upon his or her leadership position may play a role in the degree of interruption or disequilibrium that is felt.

In individual construction the logic of the operator, the principal, differs from the logic of top-level managers. Senior managers’ logic is derived “from projects defined by steps and procedures” (Weick, 1995, p. 27) and this management logic is different for the operators who work in the situational setting of the project. This difference of logic presents an interesting perception to be aware of within the narratives of the principal, who is operating in the situation.

The “Ongoing” property refers to sensemaking being an ongoing process in life. When people experience a shock, an interruption in their life, they will act to resolve the disconnect that results. Weick (1995) described organizations as “tension organizations” in that they are always in “the active management of transitions” (p. 72). These

transitions, analogous to school closure and related reconfigurations, cause tension for individuals and the sensemaking process is initiated.

The shock aspect related to ongoing sensemaking is parallel to this investigation's intent and to the work on emotional aspects of leadership by such researchers as Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, 2004; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998). To reemphasize, Weick (1995) stated:

When people reach a threshold of dissatisfaction with their current conditions, they experience a 'shock' and initiate action to resolve the dissatisfaction . . . including how people make sense of when they leave a steady job . . . or face administrative turnover in response to state budget crisis. (p. 84)

Sensemaking theory provides perspective for this study. This theory (a) confirms the value of a story, (b) presents avenues for response analysis and the interpretation of dialogue, and (c) recognizes the logical difference of the situated operator in comparison to the managerial decision-makers (Weick, 1995).

The "Ongoing" property expressed in the sensemaking theory illustrated the multifaceted nature of a person forming the sense of self. A sense of self also has implications as to how an individual approaches an unusual incident interruption in his or her life. This concept of engagement related to self-belief is additionally evident in the *Self-efficacy* theory. The sensemaking trait of organizational behaviour resulting in individual impact shares a resemblance to the "mutual demoralization," or "enhancement" characteristic found in self-efficacy theory. Where self-efficacy has most potential for this study is in regards to the type and degree of reaction of a school principal in a school closure circumstance (Bandura, 1997).

Self-Efficacy

Albert Bandura's (1997) ideas regarding self-efficacy equip this study with another means for interpreting a school leader's reaction to a school closure. In his dialogue with Evans (1989), Bandura's discussion and stories demonstrated how

“people’s self-beliefs in their capabilities enable them to exercise some control over events that affect their lives and how self-beliefs translates into human accomplishments, motivation, and personal well-being” (p. 53).

Bandura (1997) and Evans (1989) explained how self-efficacy affects (a) choices and actions, (b) motivation, (c) thinking, and (d) vulnerability. When a person believes that he/she can handle a situation, he/she chooses to be engaged and become active in the event. If a person believes the situation is beyond his or her capability, more avoidance of the situation occurs. High efficacy feelings generate higher levels of effort to persevere in difficult situations. Principals’ narrative stories are an opportunity to portray efficacy levels as it relates to their approach to the closure environment—their engagement level, and the positive or negative impressions of how leadership was altered from the event.

Choice behaviour reveals self-efficacy levels (Evans, 1989, p. 54). A person with high self-efficacy belief creates positive guides and thinking for performance. This person devotes more time and attention to deal with a problem. With low self-efficacy, a person develops a negative situational guide, and pays less attention, and worries more. Resiliency and responses to difficult situations are related to the degree of self-efficacy. Bandura affirmed that levels of efficacy are related to vulnerability, affecting psychological well-being. Low efficacy results in more susceptibility to stress and depression. Conversely, high efficacy generates a “high sense of coping efficacy,” and “also perceptions that one can exercise control over one’s own consciousness” (Evans, 1989, p. 54). Bandura added to the discourse on behavioural choice and remarked that “a sense of humor also helps endurance” (p. 56).

Self-efficacy theory explains “mutual demoralization” as a situation where efficacy decreases in individuals who are in an organization that exhibits low efficacy over time. Improving efficacy also appears from being involved in organizations that demonstrate high levels of efficacy over time, which is termed “mutual enhancement” (Evans, 1989, p. 67). These “mutual” relationships open a window for the examination of a leader’s self-efficacy perceptions in relation to the character of the district.

Self-efficacy theory provides awareness for actions that displays confidence and beliefs, and engagement. A principal's choices, reactions, and attitudes toward (a) him or herself, (b) the school closure process, and (c) the district's handling of the scenario may be influenced by self-efficacy, and also reveal the nature of it.

Contribution to Understanding

This study investigates the leadership of school principals being affected by school closure incidents. Encompassed within this experience is the interplay of communication, relationships, emotions, communities, and conflict. The theories of communicative action, sensemaking, and self-efficacy assisted to interpret the attitudes and actions of the school leader. Communicative action theory offered in-depth thoughtfulness of the leader's professional positioning and the emotional nature of discourse found in school closure considerations. Sensemaking revealed what ideologies, frames, and stories guided a leader's action to rectify the disconnect he or she felt. Self-efficacy provided insight into the attitude and engagement level of the school leader.

Each of the theories contributed to the understanding of the lived experience of school closure for a principal. Habermas' (1987) work supplied a component for understanding the communication of the participant publics, how the principal straddled the two worlds, system and lifeworld, and the resultant tensions. Weick's (1995) ideas also probed into the tension of organizations, but the main contribution was for assessing how principals made sense of their situation. Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) presented a means for understanding the participants' feelings and their ensuing reactions.

Summary

This chapter reviewed several resources that dealt with the attributes connected to this proposed study. It discussed the issues involved with school closures, those

being (a) school closure findings from multiple jurisdictions, (b) an assessment of related policy, (c) theoretical perspectives on communication and law in relation to the closure dialectic, (d) an examination of legal judgments in school closures, (e) the conflicting allegiances for school leaders in the closure process, (f) the importance of the leadership and succession of principals, and (g) the impact of critical incidents on school leaders.

School closure research in different jurisdictions showed that similar precipitators and responses to closure reoccur. School closures will continue to be dominant business of school districts and it is important to have optimum process and communicative practices in place. The literature review indicated that school leaders have not received noticeable examination as a part of school closure studies.

The importance of principal leadership and leadership succession pressure was documented. The delicate balance of multiple allegiances that principals experience in a closure process was also considered. The societal, personal, and management issues of a school closure process were evident in the literature. Attention was given to the school leaders' emotions, especially the emotions surrounding a critical event in their professional and personal life. These factors were identified through the literature as significant areas for education and leadership research. This study assessed how school leaders are affected by a school closure process and decision.

The theoretical framework was presented to assist with understanding and interpretation. *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas, 1987) developed an awareness of the complexity of the principal's position in school closure. *Sensemaking* (Weick, 1995) provided a lens for analyzing how principals came to terms with the event. *Self-efficacy* (Bandura, 1997) supplied a means of analysis for examining the principals' perceptions of their leadership change.

It was anticipated that a school closure affects the building principal's leadership. Assessing this issue was important as these individuals affect student learning, and make up the reserve potential for senior management teams. It would benefit school districts to maintain the health of educational leadership that is presently in place.

Chapter 3.

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter details the appropriateness for narrative analysis for investigating organizational change and critical events. It explains the iterative analysis approach common to this qualitative design. Information on the participants and their selection is given and concerns around validity and ethical concerns are discussed.

This study contributed to the literature on the leadership of school-based administrators. It examined principal narratives, to gather data on the perceived effects on school leadership. Data analysis determined themes that answered the research question.

Rationale for Method

Narrative analysis has come to be a prominent design for understanding a lived experience. To illustrate this, Mitchell and Egudo (2003) compiled a review of 100 studies across multiple disciplines that used narrative analysis to understand and make sense of the circumstances and actions in personal and organizational life. The 100 articles that were reviewed covered diverse topics of inquiry across the organizational, management, education, and leadership domains. The authors confirmed that “the approach is said to enable capture of social representation processes such as feelings, images, and time. It offers the potential to address ambiguity, complexity, and dynamism of individual, group, and organisational phenomena” (p. 2).

Critical events in a person's life have been studied using the narrative analysis method. Serious medical circumstances, such as terminal illnesses, have been explored (Frank, 1995; Kleinman, 1988). Narrative analysis was the sole method employed in the studies of Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, 2004; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998) which looked at how school leaders made sense of critical events in their careers.

This present investigation assessed how a principal's leadership was affected as a result of a school closure, which was an experiential, lived event. Personal narrative analysis was chosen as the most suitable design to gain a rich understanding of the experience. Additionally, interviews are particularly useful in exploring fields where there is not a wealth of knowledge as their open-ended format allows for the unconstrained exploration of the topic (Richards, 2005; Seidman, 2006).

Other designs for qualitative investigations exist. Observations would have been well suited to determine behaviour in a situation and a survey method would suit a correlation study. A quasi-experimental method could assist with assessing the effect of a dependent variable. For gaining understanding of a person's experience it is best to talk to that person, and "interviewing, in most cases, may be the best avenue of inquiry" (Seidman, 2006, p. 11). Seidman (2006), in alignment with Ferrarotti (1981) also affirmed that:

The primary way a researcher can investigate an educational organization, institution, or process is through the experience of the individual people, the "others" who make up the organization or carry out the process. Social abstractions like "education" are best understood through the experiences of the individuals whose work and lives are the stuff upon which the abstractions are built. (p. 10)

The semi-structured interview method allowed for the witnessing and probing of visual and verbal cues which are limited in other methods. Scholars have pointed out that narrative analysis using semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to delve into situations more deeply in order to illuminate similarities and differences. The narrative analysis method, with semi-structured interviews, is accepted and commonly used in educational research (Charmaz, 2006; Riessman, 1993; Seidman, 2006).

Fine's work (as cited in Halsey, Lauder, Brown, & Wells, 1997) utilized parent narratives to refine her investigations in the eastern United States regarding the "power, authority and control . . . within debates about parental involvement in public schools" (p. 461). Using narratives Fine goes to a "broad-based conversation about urban public school reform" (p. 460) which illustrated another use of narrative investigation applied to the realm of educational policy.

Making extensive use of narratives from principals, Waslander and Thrupp's study (as cited in Halsey, et al., 1997) examined the effects of market choice on secondary schools in New Zealand. Wells and Serna (as cited in Halsey, et al., 1997) used "semi-structured tape-recorded interviews with principals" (p. 719) to unravel the complexities of social and political behaviour in racially mixed schools.

Narrative analysis is well suited for bringing forth the subjective to a level of understanding for others and for exploring social and communicative interactions. Referring to Radnitsky (1969) when addressing the appropriateness of narrative methodology, Egelund and Laustsen (2006) stated, "the aim of qualitative research is to give the best interpretations of the subjective perceived reality; to provide what metascientists term 'understanding'" (p. 433). Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2008) strongly emphasized the potential of discourse analysis and argued, "in order to understand social interaction and cognition, it was necessary to examine how people communicated in everyday situations," and "studies that use discourse analysis techniques can provide a critical rereading of processes that have been taken for granted that occur in social interactions" (p. 591).

A qualitative study applying an iterative narrative analysis allows insight and knowledge to be developed about a particular experience. In larger studies, narrative analysis based on semi-structured interviews allows for conceptualizing the data into concepts and theory (Charmaz, 2006; Richards, 2005). The small sample size of this study would not generate "grand" or "formal" theory, but has potential for "substantive" theory to be constructed from the data. Substantive theory is the most common in qualitative studies as it is "local to your data," generating understandings that are "particular to the substance of the data" (Richards, 2005, p. 129). Substantive theory is

defined as an “explanation of a delimited problem in a particular area, such as family relationships, formal organizations, or education” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 189). Charmaz explained how the building of “levels of abstraction directly from the data” develops “an abstract theoretical understanding of the studied experience” (pp. 3-4), and that a semi-structured interview process “permits an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience, and thus, is a useful method for interpretive inquiry” (p. 25).

For this study relating to investigating how school leadership is affected by school closure, a semi-structured narrative interview approach was appropriate because this methodology attained the desired depth of reflection and information.

Study Design and Methodology

This study used a bottom-up, narrative analysis approach. The bottom-up approach develops the codes from the key words and phrases that are identified in the narratives and does not start by applying a predetermined list of codes. This approach is particularly useful where there is minimal research to draw upon initially. The design generated data from events that had already taken place. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to produce the principal narratives. The participants each had experienced the closing of their school and were still employed as principals in the public school system of British Columbia. The narratives underwent repetitive coding and interpretation (Lapan & Quartaroli, 2009; Richards, 2006; Seidman, 2006). The analysis, a repeated comparison of conceptualized knowledge from the participants, allowed the construction of understanding on how the school closure experience influenced the principal's leadership approach.

Narrative Analysis

Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed “grounded theory,” an iterative analysis of information from personal stories. Strauss later came to endorse a systematic coding approach versus Glaser’s emergent technique. This study is not based in “grounded

theory,” but did apply the bottom-up coding process, analogous to Glaser’s intent, where cyclic rereading and coding of the data allows for “letting the codes or labels emerge directly from the words or images from the text” (Lapan & Quartaroli, 2009, p. 266).

Research supports the use of narrative approaches in general and also in relation to school reform and change. Manen (1994) acknowledged this development when he stated:

The significance of the explosion of narrative methodology in North American educational research is probably not so much that a new research methodology was developed but rather that—under the labels of “narrativity” and “biography”—a form of human science inquiry is now being legitimated in leading research institutions and journals. (p. 19)

Manen (1995) reflecting further back recognized that:

Schon (1987) had also suggested that professional education undervalues practical knowledge and grants privileged status to intellectual scientific and rational knowledge forms that may only be marginally relevant to practical acting. . . . Professional practices of educating cannot be properly understood unless we are willing to conceive of practical knowledge and reflective practice quite differently. (p. 33)

He went on to express that, “there is nothing provocative to the idea that reflection is central to the life of an educator” (p. 33). Schon and Manen have helped establish the credibility of using narratives in educational research during the past 4 decades.

Narratives serve to uncover greater perceptiveness and reality of the trends and situations that quantitative data may only suggest. Personal and professional narratives allow for a more kinaesthetic and probing appraisal of real-life situations. Manen (1995) acknowledged this in educational settings when he stated:

The concept of the teacher as a reflective practitioner is, in part, a response to the sense that a technical theory-into-practice epistemology does not seem sensitive to the realization that teacher knowledge must play an active and dynamic role in the ever-changing challenges of the school and classroom. (p. 37)

Smith (2009) noted that Schon's work had much to do with "reflection-in action to professional activity" (p. 1). Schon's work was influential in displaying the educator reflecting while in action as opposed to reflecting on action. Narrative analysis encompasses some similarities to Schon's work in that it reflects on action and searches out what the person was feeling at the time of action. Smith (2009) referred to Schon's work to highlight the power of personal stories with statements such as, "He sought to offer an approach to an epistemology of practice based on a close examination of what a (small) number of different practitioners actually do" (p. 2), and "Donald Schon's . . . great contribution was to bring 'reflection' into the centre of an understanding of what professionals do" (p. 9).

For guidance on how interviews can be used, the types of interviews, and in what contexts, Robson (2002) provided detail on the narrative interview methodology. He presented content on how the interviewer should conduct his/herself, with particular emphasis to semi-structured interviews, content of the interviews, and questioning. Additionally, Robson illustrated a sequence for interviews, specific question types, and advises against long or multifaceted questions. Warm-up introductory questions, followed by the main purpose questions, closing with "straightforward" questions, and leaving "risky" questions until the later stages (p. 277). He recommended that interview length be in the range of 30 to 60 minutes (p. 273). Robson demonstrated how to recognize non-verbal data and related probes, plus how to display frequency through basic graphs and tables. Finally, he confirmed using interviews in multi-method designs, and the acceptance of interviews as a sole approach for gathering data (p. 270).

An overview of survey methods and specific direction for forming and analyzing qualitative data from narrative methods was provided by Lapan and Quartaroli (2009). The iterative, cyclic nature of the investigation requires extensive time and repeated analysis. Lapan and Quartaroli supplied direction on methodological approach that "helps the researcher identify patterns" (p. 273). They recommended (a) coding terms to imitate closely what they are describing, (b) the materializing of patterns, and (c) how patterns gather into central categories. These core categories, or themes, are what ultimately provide insight and understanding.

Riessman's (1993) book is cited often as a resource for qualitative research methodology, and for conducting narrative analysis. She emphasized the transcription descriptions, coding examples, and nonverbal cues. Riessman brought forward the distinction of focusing on themes to build coherence and not being influenced by the narrator's goals, or narrative effect (p. 67). She reinforced the use of "member checks" to validate the obtained data and that "it is important that we find out what participants think of our work, and their responses can often be a source of theoretical insight" (p. 66).

Richard's (2005) book, *Handling Qualitative Data: A Practical Guide*, provided specifics on methodological practices and insight and assurance of the generation of knowledge from the conducting narrative investigation. In this resource are illustrated an extensive number of diverse examples on all aspects of the qualitative investigation, such as a variety of coding techniques and the methods for reporting out. The author gives reassurance for the critical stages of creating theory and demonstrates "ways of finding and of testing ideas about what's going on in your data" (p. 164).

Descriptive coding is a word or phrase representing a property or attribute taken from the narrative. These may be such things as gender or a demographic descriptor. Topic coding refers to the subject or concept that the narrative is demonstrating, such as staffing, or parent involvement. Analytical coding requires interpretation and describes what is going on in the statement. "Informal notice" is an example of an analytical code which marks a possible connection of gossip and rumour to a potential school closure consideration. It is the analytical coding which develops understanding of the material. Richards felt that over description risked reducing analysis and noteworthy suggestions on reporting out were: (a) avoiding the overuse of long quotations; (b) not getting distracted from your writing task due to repetitively rereading data; and (c) initiating writing your first draft in your own voice to reduce writing block. Information regarding Richard's suggestion on finding and testing of ideas is further explained in the Data Analysis section.

A student of Strauss and Glaser, Charmaz (2006) presented a perspective on the history, development, and state of the qualitative research approach. The author

expressed a succinct definition related to grounded theory as “methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves” (p. 2). The methodological approach demonstrated by Charmaz (2006) aligned with Glaser’s open-ended, bottom-up approach to conducting qualitative research. Early and advanced memo-writing techniques, analogous to descriptive and analytical, were given prominence support generating theories from the data. Specific suggestions for self-questioning were provided to cultivate memo-writing, clustering of topics, and free-writing to develop understanding.

Researchers favour narrative analysis for investigating the lived experience (Charmaz, 2006; Lapan & Quartaroli, 2009; Richards, 2005; Seidman, 2006). The resources and advice pertaining to interview design and the questioning style were congruent and aligned with what was conducted in other interview-based, narrative analysis studies (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998; Witten et al., 2001; Ylimaki et al., 2007). The use of small sample sizes, the sequencing of interviewing, data analysis and theme emergence, along with reporting out styles were common reoccurring aspects of narrative analysis found in the resources and research.

Critical Incidents

For the purpose of this study, a critical event is defined as an interruption in the expected behaviours and developments in one’s life that produces strong emotions and a need to “make sense” of the situation (Weick, 1995; WorksafeBC, 2002). When a critical event occurs in the principal’s life, in this case experiencing school closure, the individual needs to interpret the circumstances and deliberate on possible explanations and understandings.

There is limited scholarly work in the area of critical incidents regarding school leaders. “The wounded leader: Looking for the good story” (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998) was a study that looked into the effects that a critical event had on educational leaders. The two researchers analyzed the narratives of seven educational leaders, utilizing and making the most of a “small, but rich sample of stories” (p. 5).

Their analysis of the personal stories generated three main themes for the narratives, those being “quest, restitution and chaos stories” (p. 5).

In Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman’s (1998) study the leaders held either school or district-based positions. The critical incidents that the leaders experienced were varied, with event examples such as loss of position and public criticism. Three follow-up studies on educational leaders experiencing critical incidents were conducted. The same methodology was used for all four studies and the total number of participants within the four studies accumulated to 65. The entire work illustrated consistency about the emotional impact of critical incidents in leadership positions. The thematic types of narratives emerged coherently throughout all studies.

The present study produced a retrospective understanding of how a critical event affected education leaders, and was not intended as an intervention or technique for critical event debriefing. The researchers were looking at how the leaders “make sense of his or her experience” (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998, p. 4). Research procedures that were similar to this study were (a) purposeful sampling, (b) demographic information was generated from the interview, (c) two independent readers helped with findings, (d) member checking was used, and (e) small sample size and single method were identified as limitations. Participant selection, an interest for this study, was not specifically explained, stating that participants “were identified as having experienced a crisis or critical event in their leadership practice” (p. 3).

Selection Process and Participant Demographics

Participant selection was purposeful in that it sought participants from a specific context to gain understanding in a specific experience, this being school closure. Identifying potential participants, practicing public school principals who had their school closed, proved to be problematic. A list of closed schools in British Columbia was used to identify schools and principals that underwent closure. Nevertheless, once a school is legally closed the Ministry of Education delete references to that school. The school and principal contacts cease to exist on the school listings from previous years.

Potential research sites were identified from the public list of closed schools in British Columbia which also assisted in identifying related senior manager contacts from among the 60 public school districts. The district senior managers were asked if the district was willing to participate in this research. Four public school districts expressed willingness to participate. Formal approval to conduct the research in the district was obtained based on district policy. The district superintendents were invited to participate as interview participants, and asked to identify which principals may be asked to be a participant. Identified district superintendents and principals were contacted until two superintendents and six principals agreed. In one situation, a participant was suggested for participation in the investigation by a fellow doctoral candidate. The appropriate district manager was then contacted for introduction to the study and approval to proceed.

Following district ethics approval, email contact with participants occurred for introduction (see Appendix A), invitation and confirmation of participation, and for establishing an interview date. The email script was for introductory purposes and not as a recorded consent. A formal consent form was signed by each participant at the commencement of the interview (Appendix A). Participants were contacted after the interview session on two occasions, once for verification of the transcript and the other for feedback on findings.

Presently active principal leaders were interviewed. Each of the principals had experienced the closure of their school within a 7-year retroactive period. The range of school-based experiences varied. The participants were from middle-sized school districts consisting of a range of demographic contexts. There was not a concern for representativeness as diversity was sought, not homogeneity. A nesting of the school's community demographics was described by the principal to ascertain the general demographics of the community and its response to the closure process.

Of the six school principals, four were female and two were male. Ages ranged approximately from 40 to 55 years. The two senior managers were male and were aged mid- to late-50s. The experience of the school principals varied. The stated tenure in position of a principal represents what it was at the time of closure. Not considering

previous vice-principal administrative experience, five of the principals were in their first placement as a principal. This groups' experience ranged from one to four years at the school, with the average experience being three years. The sixth principal (P6)¹ was in a third principalship, having 10 years of experience, but only in the first year at the school being closed. Socioeconomic status information was derived from discussion with the principal (see Table 1).

P3 had a unique placement experience. In the first of 3 years at the school, there was a Board consideration for closure, which was not carried out. In the third year at the school, P3 was still present when the Board approved the school closure. Some of this context is evident in quotes by P3.

Table 1.

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Career Stage	Tenure in Position (years)	Principal Placement	School Socioeconomic Status
P1	F	Middle	2	1	Low
P2	F	Middle	4	1	Low
P3	M	Late	3	1	Mixed/Middle
P4	F	Middle	1	1	Low
P5	F	Late	2	1	Mixed/Middle
P6	M	Late	1	3	Low
S1 ^a	M	Late	6	Various	
S2	M	Late	5	Various	

^a S1 masks the identity of the Superintendent; S stands for the word Superintendent, and 1 refers to that Superintendent being the first one to be interviewed.

¹ P6 represents a mask for the identity of the participants, where P stands for Principal and the digit refers to the participant being one of the six principals to be interviewed.

Typically, sample sizes are smaller in qualitative narrative analysis design. Richards (2005) addresses sample size with the following:

Well-designed qualitative research projects are usually small, the data detailed and the techniques designed to discover meaning through fine attention to content of texts and images. These techniques take time and do not need large samples. . . . Granted, most researchers go through a period where they feel they have too much data. (p. 20)

Similar sentiments are stated by other researchers in that small sample sizes can develop categories, concepts and themes in educational investigations (Charmaz, 2006, p. 18). The smaller sample size is characteristic of this type of research, which has a high demand for time and resources on the researcher.

Stelck's (2008) doctoral thesis conducted one lengthy interview with two participants and post interview checks. Wright's (2003) doctoral thesis had three participants in her narrative study. The investigation of Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (1998) interviewed seven school leaders in a series of three short interviews. Ylimaki et al. (2007) interviewed thirteen participants, twice. Kearns, Lewis, McCreanor, and Witten (2008) collected 29 narratives from two shorter interviews (40 to 90 minutes). For this single-investigator doctoral study, a total of eight participants were interviewed once for a period of 40 to 80 minutes, in April, 2010.

Six principal interviews (see Appendix B) formed the first set of narratives. Following the completion of the principal narratives and development of initial findings, two senior managers from two of the districts, one superintendent and one assistant superintendent, were interviewed in an unstructured manner to generate data. At the end of the interview portion, the superintendents were asked to comment on the initial findings from the principal narratives and for the purposes of triangulation. The superintendents were (a) present in the district during the closures and (b) still active senior managers in the district. The sample size for this investigation is similar to the above studies and is appropriate, as "practical exigencies of time, money, and other resources also play a role, especially in doctoral research" (Seidman, 2006, p. 55).

Data Collection

The interviews took place during the month of April, 2010. There was one interview session per participant and the interview sessions lasted within the range of 40 to 80 minutes. Twelve questions were generated by: (a) the author with the guidance of Dr. David Berliner and Dr. Karen Witten, (b) supervisor input, (c) feedback from three academic researchers in Education, one superintendent, two school-based administrators who experienced school closure, and (d) a pilot interview with a retired principal who had his/her school closed. The collective feedback resulted in: (a) word and phrase changes within the questions, (b) the original number of questions being reduced from 16 to 12, and (c) organization of the questions into four layers within the Interview Protocol. The digital recordings were transcribed within 24 hours of the interview and the data underwent constant comparative analysis.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol was developed from specific suggestions from: (a) academic resources, (b) the senior supervisor, Dr. D. Laitsch, and (c) Dr. Witten, a researcher who had extensive background in conducting school closure narrative investigations. The interview format was organized around four layers (a) interviewee background, (b) closure process and principal involvement, (c) implications for the principal, and (d) reflections and suggestions.

The interview questions (see Appendix B) are germane to the research questions and there was intent to have the interview questions align to the purposes of the investigative questions and the theoretical frameworks being used. Table 2 illustrates these connections. While all interview questions are intended to enlighten the overarching investigative question, the checkmark indicates when the question has a direct correspondence to the relative research question. Interview Question Matrix (Appendix C) provides further details to illustrate the relevant connections and balance of the interview protocol.

Table 2.

Interview Protocol Connections to Investigation Questions and Theoretical Frameworks

Interview Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	#
Research Question			√	√	√	√	√		√	√			7
Sub-question 1	√	√	√	√									4
Sub-question 2				√	√	√	√	√					5
Sub-question 3	√	√	√	√						√			5
Sub-question 4			√								√	√	3
Communicative Theory	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√		10
Sensemaking	√	√	√			√				√			5
Self-efficacy				√	√		√	√	√				5

The interviews began with a brief historical context of the author in relation to school closures and the intent of the research. The participant was then asked to confirm participation. Early questions were intended to build relationship and to attend to feelings with more pointed questions following. This question progression was used by Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (1998) and replicated in studies and supporting documents already referenced in this chapter.

No interview formulae were presented by qualitative researchers, but general guidelines and principles were clear. The “listen lots—talk little” approach, and piloting the interview prior to use, was consistently recommended. Probing needs to occur when a statement is not understood, or when terms are ambiguous. Awareness of the verbal and non-verbal language coinciding with each other, or differing, was stressed, such as a matching of the physical appearance with the confidence of the terminology being used. Providing the participant with time to reflect, being patient, and subtly refocusing the participant to the topic were characteristics of good interview technique (Charmaz, 2006; Lapan & Quartaroli, 2009; Richards, 2005; Robson, 2002; Seidman, 2006).

Throughout the interview field notes were made on such items as emphasis, character change, and key words used. The digitally audio-recorded interviews were

transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were checked for accuracy through comparative listening and reading of the interviews. Memo-writing occurred throughout the study to assist the progression of concepts and understanding.

Data Analysis

The data analysis procedures were traditional to the methodological approach—iterative until saturation, comprised of repeated systematic analysis of the information to generate commonalities and concepts (Charmaz, 2006; Lapan & Quartaroli, 2009; Richards, 2005; Riessman, 1993; Seidman, 2006). Narrative analysis is characterized by nonlinear examination of the data by looping and webbing. Nevertheless, the macro-process can be conceptualized as being in three stages—the interviewing, coding and theorizing, and verification.

The iterative nature of analysis pertains to the repetitive reading and coding of the transcribed material. The open-ended, bottom-up approach refers to there being no predetermined code labels. Codes were words or phrases that were applied to the content in the narrative. There were 44 code applications and code development progressed throughout the analysis, and code terms related to the “descriptive,” “topic,” or “analytical” types (Richards, 2005, p.128). Through the use of coding, the data was organized, sorted, and compared as categories. Repeated word and phrase occurrence were searched for within and amongst the narratives. Broader topics related to the research questions were initially coded and then grouped into more specific concepts. The coding served to develop common concepts. Lapan and Quartaroli (2009), Richards (2005), Charmaz (2006), and Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2008) demonstrated escalating methods for developing the data, and for explaining and displaying the findings. This study primarily used a concept occurrence matrix for analysis, as well as concept webbing.

Richards (2005) emphasized how to manage the qualitative data and how to then make sense of it. Advice regarding the management of data included (a) techniques for reading and highlighting text, (b) developing routine to regularly revisit the records, (c)

categorizing codes, and (d) organizing the categories. Table 3 demonstrates how the assessment of the data progressed to categories.

Table 3.

Examples of Key Phrases, Condensed Meaning, and Category

Key Phrases	Condensed Meaning	Category
The role of the principal in the closure is an incredibly precarious one. You are on a tight-rope and it is a very fine line that you walk as a principal, because one side of the rope is the care, the concern, the compassion for the community in which you work; you know you want to help them because their parents, they are lovely parents. They want to do the right thing for their school and keep it open. But on the other side of the tight-rope you're quite cognizant of the fact that you are an agent of Board and that you need to toe and represent the party line.	The difficulty of balancing the two roles of serving the Board and the school community	Allegiance
If it was this school being closed, my attachment to this community, especially after the number of years that I have been here would be far different from the feeling that I had at (the closed school).	Principal indicates that emotional attachment to the school would increase with time.	Attachment
I don't think you could go through it and not get stronger. Well, you could. It could do you in, because there are so many conflicting emotions and so many conflicting interests that are pulling at you. I think I got better at dealing with conflict, because that had always been an issue for me.	Improved confidence in handling difficult situations.	Efficacy

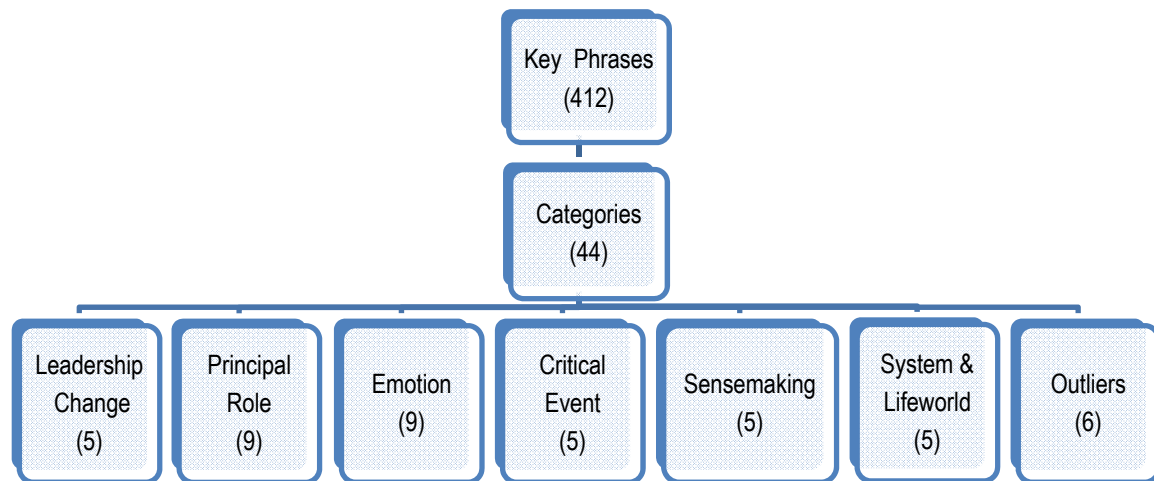
Richards (2005) also stressed using all three types of coding but cautioned against being overpowered by the descriptive and topic coding and stressed the working with analytical memoing to generate understanding. Richards encouraged the researcher to challenge both text that was of interest and the similarities and differences that arise in the data as to why these were of interest.

Developing idea and concept categorization strategies preceded arriving at understandings. Cataloguing exercises such as telling another colleague the story, making a presentation of the data, and pictorial displays of the information were conducted. To develop understanding and theory, six strategies were highlighted by Richards (2005). "Cataloguing categories" (p. 108) occurred throughout the

management of data and transformed through to a conceptual structure. “Modeling” (p. 131) by displaying relationships, pictorial representation, and drawing, helped to “simplify and discard the noise” of the large quantity of data. Figure 1 displays the resultant themes that emerged from the data.

Figure 1.

Breakdown of Categories and Themes



More than one category is sometimes associated with a concept. For example, the concept of Role-Caregiver, would be representative of two categories, a caregiving role to students as well as the caregiving role to staff. Concept occurrence (see Appendix D) showed recurrence of concepts amongst the narratives and supported the development of understandings. Theme development (see Appendix E) was done by grouping categories. For example, the categories of caregiver-student, caregiver-staff, communicator, and manager were grouped under the theme of Principal Role. The theme of Emotion comprised such categories as attachment- parents, attachment-teachers, attachment-school, anger, loss of control, and health.

Richards (2005) illustrated how ideas are brought together from the data even when similar and divergent findings are evident. Richards suggested working with the following constructs: (a) reducing the circumstances to “the essential features,” (b) “analyzing the contributing factors,” (c) using the data to explain a “social phenomenon,”

and (d) “establishing process” to show “why the phenomena studied work” (pp. 131-132). When differences in findings are evident, she advised seeking “an analytical outcome about the differences” using the following strategies: (a) creating a theory to explain why, (b) developing a model of the factors, (c) working with responses that are characteristic of the variety, and (d) applying an “existing theory using your complex data to show the need for more subtle explanations and understandings” (pp. 132-135). In this study, findings were similar between narratives, independent readers, and member checks.

The following developmental tasks were conducted in the narrative analysis: (a) participant selection and notification, (b) transcription and immediate coding following each interview, (c) field notes during the interview session, (d) theoretical memoing as codes emerge, (e) establishing patterns and themes from narrative convergences, and (f) verification by independent readers, member checking and repeated concept occurrence.

Validity

The issue of truth is commonly brought up by critics of narrative analysis. Even amongst narrative analysts there exist two conceptual understandings of what represents truth in the methodology. Some align with the idea that the language “represents reality” and “others . . . take the position that narrative constitutes reality” (Riessman, 1993, p. 22). The Personal Narratives Group (as cited in Riessman) when referring to narrative truth stated, “they give us instead the truths of our experiences. . . . Unlike the Truth of the scientific ideal, the truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor self-evident” (p. 22). Therefore it is not a question of truth as it is the person’s truth that will be witnessed. To validate the trustworthiness of the data in this study the following took place: (a) interview question vetting, (b) transcript verification by participants, (c) member checks on findings, (d) superintendent feedback on findings, and (e) feedback from two independent readers.

Theory development is valid when the results are checked throughout the analysis process (Richards, 2005). Richards explained that the theory is valid when they are (a) “well founded and applicable,” (b) “confirm” and “corroborate,” and (c) are “applicable to the case or circumstances” (p. 139).

Investigator bias was a legitimate challenge. Having experienced school closure, the investigator needed to ensure that the data spoke for itself. Being familiar with the circumstances increased the potential for bias. Allowing the data to emerge from the narratives, and not allowing it to be influenced from personal experiences or latent inner feelings, was a principle overriding the ongoing analysis. The recording, the transcript, and the coding of data served as evidence that bias did not intrude into the process, demonstrating that the interviewer did not direct or lead the commentary in a biased fashion (Seidman, p. 25). A regulating of the potential bias was still required.

Prior to data collection, the interview questions received analysis from three academic researchers, two principals, and one superintendent. The interview format was piloted using a principal who experienced a school closure. The pilot allowed the investigator to (a) test equipment and transcript programs, (b) assess interview procedure, and (c) assess question type and data acquisition.

Researcher triangulation occurred. Two outside researchers were given the data without the summaries or findings. The conclusions derived by the external readers were compared to those of the investigator. In addition, interviews with two superintendents occurred regarding their perceptions on how principal leadership was affected by the closure experience (see Appendix F). Member checking, to add to internal validity, assisted in validating the knowledge generated (Charmaz, 2006; Richards, 2005) and to help reduce the threat of bias (Robson, 2002). Findings were reviewed by the participants to confirm the generated understandings. Participant feedback helped to refine and confirm the findings. Triangulations through two independent readers, two superintendents, and member checking contributed in establishing a convergent validity.

Investigator knowledge also provides benefits. In a smaller study having an understanding of the “contexts and situations” also assists with the constructivist

approach. This situational positioning “means being alert to conditions under which such differences and distinctions arise and are maintained” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 131). Robson (2002) confirms this advantage, saying that “hermeneutics would maintain that the closer one is to the source of the text the more valid one’s interpretation is likely to be” (p. 197). In interview designs the interviewer is recognized as a part of the process (Richards, 2005; Seidman, 2006). Interviewers are also perceived as an effective tool in the study. Seidman (2006) acknowledges this, referencing Lincoln and Guba (1985) when he states that “the human interviewer can be a marvelously smart, adaptable, flexible instrument who can respond to situations with skill, tact, and understanding” (p. 23).

The small sample size and the retroactive inquiry design were challenges. The small sample size reduces the potential to generalize the findings (Charmaz, 2006). Ylimaki et al. (2007) also recognized the issue, stating “findings from these unique social entities are intended primarily to be descriptive and not necessarily transferable to other contexts” (p. 369). The transferability of findings is a standard indication for external validity.

Seidman (2006) provides an alternative perspective to the generalization of results for the qualitative researcher, explaining that “the job of an in-depth interviewer is to go to such depth in the interview that surface considerations of representativeness and generalizability are replaced by a compelling evocation of an individual experience” (p. 51). Seidman points out that the interview researcher can look for two other foci instead of generalizability, those being: (a) “connections among the experiences of the individuals” and “patterns in that experience,” and (b) the intricate ways in which individual lives interact with social and structural forces” (p. 52).

The passage of time may reduce the recall of the participants and time. It also allows for the impact of other experiences to modify the original impacts of the situation (Lapan & Quartaroli, 2009, p.154). This potential reduction in trustworthiness may be partially offset by the specificity of the experiential circumstances and the purposeful sampling (Seidman, 2006, p. 51).

Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval was applied for and granted on April 7, 2010, by the Director, Office of Research Ethics, Simon Fraser University. Ethical considerations are bounded to a certain extent. The nature of the investigation, an interview discussion, was similar to what the professional would experience in daily work. Potential harm to the participants was minimal, but emotions were monitored throughout the interview.

In narrative designs, exploitation of the participants is a concern (Seidman, 2006, p. 13). In this study, exploitation was negligible as the purpose of the study was non-monetary, the researcher's background was professionally similar, and the purpose of the study was for the benefit of fellow professionals.

Summary

The narrative analyses of principals who have experienced the closing of their school demonstrated the capability to enrich the epistemology and praxis on school leadership. It also provided insight into the dynamics of a closure process. Particular to this was how school closure influences principals' perception of their leadership and what factors may have contributed to any changes.

Narrative methodology has built a rich reserve of practice and credibility over the past 4 decades of educational research, with some of it pertaining to the social and personal impacts of school closures. Graduate course work, resource material, and studies continue to bring recognition of the methodology in the Social Sciences. Riessman (1993) pointedly explains that "narrative analysis allows for the systematic study of personal experiences and meaning: how events have been constructed by active participants" (p. 70). Narrative analysis from interviews was chosen as the suitable design to investigate the lived experiences of principals in school closure.

Participants were selected from the use of a closed schools list and with the assistance and approval of senior managers in the school districts. Interviews were

transcribed verbatim immediately following the interview. The data underwent iterative coding until saturation and concept categories and understandings were formed. Validity of the findings was done through (a) member checks, (b) superintendent perceptions and feedback, and (c) independent readers. This approach developed an understanding of the effects that school closure plays on the leadership of school leaders, and insight into the communication and types of incidents that come with closure of schools. The next chapters present and discuss the data and findings in detail.

Chapter 4.

Presentation of Data

Introduction

In this chapter the data from the participants' narratives are presented. The guiding question of the investigation was:

“How is principal leadership affected by the closure of his/her school?”

The sub-questions that provided guidance for the investigation into the deeper understanding of the effects of school closure on leadership were:

1. How was the school leader involved with the closure process?
2. In what ways is the school leader's professional outlook altered from living the experience of a school closure?
3. Were any practices or stages of a school closure process more significant to the school leader?
4. What evidence may inform future professional development of school leaders?

The investigation utilized the narratives of six public school principals who had experience of school closure. Following the data collection from principals, unstructured interviews were also completed with two senior managers, one superintendent and one assistant superintendent, who had managed the closures with four of the principals involved in this investigation.

A count of which concepts were brought forward by the principals was completed (see Appendix D). In total, the six principal narratives produced 97 single-spaced pages with 47,250 words of verbatim material being collected. Descriptive and topic coding occurred with the principal narratives generating 412 key words and phrases for which codes were assigned. The codes were grouped into 44 categories, and themes emerged. The chapter is thematically organized around: (a) School Closure as a Critical Event, (b) Concerns of the Principal, (c) System, Lifeworld, and Principal Allegiance, (d) Leadership Changes related to the School Closure Experience, (e) Sensemaking in the Event of School Closure, (f) Superintendent Views on How School Closure Affects Principal Leadership, and (g) Superintendent Opinions regarding Initial Findings.

School Closure as a Critical Event

Subthemes that described school closure as a critical event were (a) school closure representing a critical event in the life of a principal, (b) significant stages in the closure process for principals, (c) attachment of the principal to the school, and (d) health implications of living through a school closure event.

School Closure as a Critical Event for Principals

As defined in Chapter 1, for the purposes of this investigation a critical event is “an interruption in the expected behaviours and developments in one’s life that results in strong emotions and a need to ‘make sense’ of the situation” (Weick, 1995; WorksafeBC, 2002). Prior to discussion of this section it is important to note that it was evident from the discourses that each principal took pride in their professional responsibilities and expended a great deal of thought and energy in managing the closure process. Principal P6 said it was important to be “treating staff with respect and treating them as humans, and trying to make the move as smooth as possible,” and P4 stated that “when it comes right down to it and it is suddenly your school that it is happening to, you want to do a good job of it.”

The data from all principals displayed exigent circumstances that accompanied the school closure. Nevertheless, data from two of the participants indicated that the closure event was less critical to them in comparison to the majority of the respondents. Both of these principals were in their first year at the school. They still experienced the taxing nature of the situation, one principal stated:

I remember in particular, at one of our principal association meetings getting a little emotional saying, "How tough this was, because not only are you new at the job, but you are having to close the place." It seemed really ominous at that point. (P4)

The other principal viewed the closure as a matter of business and expressed this as:

Well, I did not have a lot of emotional attachment to the building. Again, being there for three quarters of the year when I found out about the decision. And I would suggest to you that helped tremendously because then, I would just have to take care of business. . . . It's closure—means an end. (P6)

The remaining four principals described the school closure as being highly significant. With phrases such as "disaster", "none other", "very hardest" and "heart wrenching" the nature of the closure event was shown to be emotional, challenging, coupled with uncertainty, and incomparable to other events in their lives, as the following statements indicate:

I think it is probably the situation that will have the most impact on my career; because when it begins to happen, you have no idea how it, the uncertainty, in the beginning you are not certain as to how it will evolve . . . to some people they still will look at it as a disaster to their community. (P5)

I have been involved in starting a new school. I have been involved in bringing in new students. And, now, I have been involved in a school closure. I would suggest to you that it has got to be one of the very hardest, heart wrenching experiences for an on-site principal. In

terms of the actual workload, in terms of the heart-tugging moments through the end of that, I do not think there is anything that replicates it. (P3)

It was like none other than I have experienced before. I had never been through such an emotionally charged situation—I had never been through a process like that. I had never been through an incredibly challenging circumstance where people were angry and a lot of people were angry at me. . . . I would say it was unique; I hadn't been through anything like it before. (P2)

P1 expressed the perspective on the closure by saying, "I think it is probably the biggest thing I have had to deal with professionally. I would say it has been the biggest thing I've had to deal with [in my life]."

The statements above express how the school closure was a novel and emotional event in principals' professional life. The narrative data revealed in this chapter, further illustrates the complex nature of the professional and personal circumstances closure precipitates, and how the building principals developed perspective and made sense of a school closure when it surfaced in their lives.

Significant Stages within the Closure Experience

The critical event of school closure occurred over a period of months. Within this timeframe there were incidents and problems that arose, and impacted the principal emotionally. Some specific incidents were noted as being most memorable. The emotionally negative, significant events that surfaced from the data were: (a) actual passing of the motion by the Board, (b) day after the decision, and (c) managing incidents with angry parents.

P4 highlighted the decision moment when saying, "so, when it finally came down to it, we really did not know until the night that the Trustees raised their hands at a board meeting for sure." P6 also emphasized the decision moment by stating, "I think the critical event is going to a board meeting and walking across the parking lot with your wife, knowing both of you are unemployed based on decisions that night made by the

Board.” For P2 a moment with a parent stood out: “I remember one Dad yelling, “Why won’t you answer the question?” And I refused to answer his question because it was a public meeting and it wasn’t my role.” Other principals stated similar emotionally difficult events such as:

The biggest shock was leaving the school board meeting, the night that the decision was made. And then, thinking about coming in the next morning, because I knew, and when I came to (school) the next morning it was a very difficult day to come in to school that day. There were parents in tears, students in tears, teachers crying. . . . There were days when you have very unhappy, abusive parents. (P5)

I guess parents were fairly vitriol against anyone who represented the other side, and in their view I represented the other side because I was one of management’s representatives; . . . So, there were a few stressful moments, a few issues that came up. I didn’t get my house egged or anything like that, but clearly I was not a very popular [person]. (P3)

When queried on a significant event, the principals brought forward six incidents of a negative nature, however, a positive event surfaced as well. Successful work in transitioning the students was mentioned by three principals as something that was very gratifying. P1 articulated, “I was really proud of the work that we did in transitioning the kids.” This satisfaction is also represented in the remark below:

We arranged with the schools to which they were going, events, functions, buddies, and it was about showing the community that we were going to look after their kids, and that we were going to move forward respectfully, thoughtfully, in a caring way. That the district did care about those kids and the district would do whatever it took to make sure those kids and those families felt welcomed at the next school, that this was about the restorative piece, the looking forward piece. . . . When the kids went to the new school and the new staff welcomed them and had buddies, and cards and neat things planned, it was going to be ok and that felt good. (P2)

Principal Attachment to the School

The degree of attachment to the building and the level of emotion felt in the closure process varied amongst the principals. A relationship materialized between length of tenure at the building and the degree of emotional attachment. For the principals who lived through a school closure process in their first year, there was a reduced emotional connection with the school community, as P4 reflected that, “I did not take a lot of things personally, because I was really new. I thought, ‘This cannot possibly be my fault. (laughter) I wasn’t even here! (laughter),” and later explained further that, “What really worked for me, because I hadn’t been there for 15 years. I hadn’t those attachments with the families. So, for me it wasn’t a big personal, ‘Oh, I’m losing my school community” (P4). This experience was similar for two other principals. Principal P6 reflecting that “Ok, it is closed. What we need to do is close this properly” and to comment on attachment was:

If it was this school being closed, my attachment to this community, especially after the number of years that I have been here would be far different from the feeling that I had at [the previous school]. The first time they looked at closure, I had been a brand new principal. (P3)

The remaining three principals were in their first, second and fourth year as school principal. They had quickly established an emotional connection to the school community, such as P5, stating “this was my second year and it was a wonderful school, and I felt really connected to it.” The data indicates the principal tenure at the school to be related to the degree of attachment to the school.

Health Implications

Critical events are stressful and have the potential to impair the person’s immune system function and thereby the health of the individual (Bandura, 1997; Evans, 1989), Stories from five of the principals contained incidents where the health of administrators involved in the closure process had suffered. In two of the situations, these were other administrators, a vice-principal in the building and a principal of a receiving school. In

this smaller sample size, having five related illness stories coming forth was noticeable, demonstrating a possible relationship on the negative health effects found in a school closure scenario. Referring to the receiving principal at a partner school P5 noted that, “the principal [at the school] was ill a few times throughout the year.” The statements below provide added connections to the issue of administrator health to the closure process.

I think your health takes a hit. It is totally stressful; it is emotional. It's public. So, I think there were implications on my health as you went through it. There were a few sleepless nights where you worried about how something could have been put in the paper or what you said on the TV news clip. So, I think health was an implication. (P2)

This is only my second year as a principal; you are getting those irrational thoughts. It just hit me. So, I go over to the board office. I was in pieces. (Superintendent) was just great and I took a couple of days off; stayed home for a couple of days and came back recharged and got back at it again. (P1)

The VP, who was new, there day-in and day-out, sort of the 'nuts and bolts' guy, a nice guy. He was somewhat insulated. He, actually, during a major part of the closure, was off on medical leave. (P3)

The theme of closure as a critical event generated strong emotions, in the principals and in the environment they worked in. The time of, and around the actual decision showed to be significant as well as moments of anger from parents. Principals commented on their respective degrees of attachment to the school. The health of the administrators connected to the closure event surfaced as a concern in the closure of a school.

Concerns of the Principal

The closure event developed matters and moments of unease in both the professional and personal aspects of the principal's life. These concerns became one of the dominant themes to emerge as principals found themselves operating in a tension-filled, working environment.

Professional Obligations

Throughout the narratives there was a repetitive occurrence of pride and responsibility in the principal's professional commitment. All principals voiced a desire to act professionally, to attend to tasks diligently, so "when it comes right down to it and it is suddenly your school that it is happening to, you want to do a good job of it" (P4). A strong sense of professionalism for both the managerial tasks and for the caring of students was clearly articulated by the principals:

From a reputation point of view—so if it closes and [you] find [in] September October that the rumours out there that (the principal) didn't shut the building down well—you know that I'd be a little upset. So, I think it was, "Okay, let's close it. Let's do a good job closing it. Let's put it to rest." (P6)

My role was to make sure that the day-to-day operations at the school continued. To make sure that the personalities were managed and that is the same thing that I do day-to-day in my school right now. (P3)

I think other than shutting the building, probably the biggest thing was the staff, making sure that they were going to be treated appropriately. . . . You know you show respect for everything, show respect for the building, show respect for the community, show respect for people. . . and in treating, treating staff with some respect, and treating them as humans, and trying to make the move for them as smooth as possible. (P6)

For me, one of the biggest ones was my concern for the transition of my students, because we had a very large number of students who

had particular needs, various kinds of needs, not just mainstream or special needs. . . . I was really proud of the work that we did in transitioning the kids. . . . For me, one of the biggest ones was my concern for the transition of my students. (P1)

P2 expressed, "What we would say, on making sure if parents were asking that we kind of gave a very united response about caring and concern for kids, and that was our primary concern for kids."

During tense closure debates, the fears or cautions expressed by the public are: (a) the migration of population from the neighbourhood, (b) students migrating from the district, and (c) students not transitioning well (Ebmeier, 1986; Egelund & Laustsen, 2006). One principal of a closed school in this study, which had a middle SES catchment, said that this warning was voiced. After 1 year, the principal remarked that population migration from the neighbourhood did not materialize. The student exodus from the district was minimal and of the students that did leave the district, it was observed that many returned during or after that first year. This observation aligned with the findings in the prior research mentioned above.

Past research identified that most school closures occur in areas that are identified as lower socioeconomic (Valencia, 1984; Witten et al., 2001). Of the six closures examined, four of the communities were characterized as low socioeconomic populations. Three of these settings had conditions of reduced school capacity, while one of the schools was at capacity. The depopulation of school aged youth may be a natural ramification of older communities experiencing a growing out of the population, or possibly migration. There was no insinuation found that schools were targeted because of a lower SES population merely information that confirmed these catchments were more vulnerable for school closure. The primary professional concerns remained centered on managing the closure in a professional and competent way, and providing the needed care and attention to student welfare.

Personal Concerns

As noted by Thomas (1980), a primary concern for principals was job security. After the closure decision, four principals immediately worried about what would happen in regards to their administrative position. Their statements brought into view a duality of thought—where emotionally job security was a real concern coupled with the related anxiety that goes with not knowing. Rationally, they anticipated being placed in a similar role. The uncertainty of not knowing and the apprehension of losing their career position were overt in their comments.

The biggest one was that I didn't know what was going to happen to me. It was getting to the end of April. I was certain that the school was closing even though the final meeting hadn't happened yet, we were pretty certain the school would close. Nobody in the district had retired. No other principals had retired and it is a small district, so there wasn't a school available for me and I didn't know what was going to happen to me. [The superintendent] had said to me, "You know we'll work something out. There may be something at the board office, helping out somehow." "Ok, but what is that? What will that look like?" (P1)

I remember walking away from the final meeting when it was announced the schools that would close, of the six that were on the list, and I suddenly thought, 'Oh, I don't have a school anymore. Now where will I be?' And I thoroughly enjoyed being an administrator and in the years I was a classroom teacher I enjoyed that too. But, I certainly had made the change in career into being an administrator. (P5)

I wasn't sure I would have a job at the end of it. I was brand new as a principal, so that was my first year and we were looking going from [X# to Y#] of schools. So, I thought, "Where am I going next year?" (P4)

I knew that I would be getting a position somewhere in the district, but at that point in time, I wasn't so sure with my wife, just because of her seniority, or lack thereof . . . and so I didn't know the extent of downsizing how it would impact on us as a family. I asked the

question on a regular basis, "Where I was going?" and on a regular basis I wasn't—no information was coming forward. (P6)

The principal's relationships between staff and parents were another frequent area that produced concern for school leaders. Five principals expressed the importance of focusing on working relationships during the closure process, highlighted by the following comments:

During the actual process, particularly for the staff, we were as tight as we had ever been and we were a very close knit school. As far as the staff went—we would share, we would talk, and we would align ourselves on how we were going to conduct ourselves. (P2)

So a lot of—what's the word?—as a French Immersion teacher might say, "assuaging." What does that mean? Comforting people and supporting them . . . It is all the emotion that comes with it. So, you really do get to know people on a whole different level and you realize that how important the relationship piece is of your job. (P4)

Treating staff with some respect, and treating them as humans, and trying to make the move for them as smooth as possible. . . . I think other than shutting the building, probably the biggest thing was the staff, making sure that they were going to be treated appropriately. (P6)

Sometimes an initial perception by a parent caused a relationship with a principal to be negatively altered:

PAC president was mad that I the principal did not tell them about the closure consideration. I was expressly told not to and that set the tone, caused some *bitterness*. There were some really hard feelings around that; an unfortunate start, anger needed a focus somewhere. (P1)

So, the level of trust in me wasn't high for the next 2 years. I just came in and you are on behalf of the Board looking at closure. "Did they bring you in to close the school? Is that your role as principal?"

So, they sort of looked with a hairy eyeball at me every time I showed up at the school site for the next year. (P3)

Within the realm of relationships, for two principals, the atmosphere surrounding the closure resulted in a feeling of isolation. Pathologies are possible when there are disturbances in one's lifeworld (Finlayson, 2005; Habermas, 1987). Weick (1995) also posits how "confusing situations" can generate alienation or despair. This isolation could be positioned on the anomic continuum where there exist feelings of alienation as a result of disturbances in the lifeworld's social or moral normality. The sense of alienation that was felt is conveyed through the statements below:

Sometimes it was very challenging and sometimes it was very isolating because obviously as the principal you are representing the Board, and being the only administrator, and being a teaching administrator when I was there, there were times that it was very challenging because people got to the point that the teachers and the parents began to bond together and so, there were times when I felt I was the *evil outsider*. (P5)

I was not seen as being on the right side of this issue, and because of the passion that they carried for the issue; some of the parents in the community took some of that out on me. (P3)

Within this subtheme, the principal had personal concerns regarding job security, relationships, and a sense of isolation in a tense work environment. The administrator isolation that surfaced during district restructuring had been identified as a concern by Goddard (1997). Also, the school closure decision generated an immediate personal concern for job security. Rational deliberation led the leaders to feel optimistic, but the uncertainty of not knowing about their administrative position was stressful. This primary concern for job security was previously identified in other school closures by Thomas (1980).

Emotion-laden Working Environment

Previous research that examined how educational leaders felt affected by critical events demonstrated (a) the understandably difficult working environs, and (b) also the thematic narrative types that evolve from experiencing these events (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, 2004; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998; Trider, 1999). The data in this study supports these past observations. The narratives, primarily ones of hopeful optimism, were a theme in past investigations. The “quest” narrative identified by Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (1998) was characterized by the leaders viewing the circumstances as an opportunity to grow and to learn.

The school atmospheres in this study were portrayed as having high levels of emotion and anger, generating uncertainty and discord that required deliberation and sensemaking on behalf of the principals. The particularly poignant natures of the circumstances were reflected in the metaphor type and the ominous stories that principals brought forth to create a working perspective for the school closure.

Feeling emotional and working within a workplace filled with strong emotions was marked in the closure experience. Weick (1995) stated that “negative emotions are likely to occur when an organized behavioral sequence is interrupted suddenly and the interruption is interpreted as harmful or detrimental” (p. 47). Principal comments were consistent regarding the presence of intense emotions. P6 indicated that “I didn’t know the extent of downsizing how it would impact on us as a family,” and P2 mentioned that, “I would say absolutely, every emotion; the sadness. I was incredibly sad when it did close.”

Incidents of anger and emotion represented the unease that was frequently evident in the narratives having the highest incidence of occurrence of all coded topics. Even though all principals were optimistic and proud professionals, anger and emotion was an attribute that permeated the school setting. P2 commented, “I think sometimes it felt like things were out of control. Although I was supposed to be the one running the school, I had no control of what was happening at the school. People were upset and emotional.” Further information about the anger and emotion that was present is found in the statements below:

And I really got to see anger, or solidarity, friendships, fear—fear, you know, that idea that it is a conspiracy; mistrust. Good people, good teachers, and these sides of them would come out because that challenge would be put in front of them. (P5)

So, they were quite angry, some of them. This is how they took their reaction to being on the closure list. And so, I had a few that let their stress come my direction . . . I think (principal involvement) was key for making it, trying to take some of the emotion out of it and to be able to give that result. (P4)

The pressure of having to be “calm in the midst of the storm” was characterized by a principal’s statement that “you are working very hard to be the cheerleader and to keep up morale” (P5).

To summarize, the concerns that surfaced in the closure experience indicated that principals (a) were apprehensive around securing a job for themselves, (b) maintained a sense of pride in their performance of responsibilities through a difficult event, (c) were concerned for how the experience was affecting relationships with parents and staff, and (d) were cognizant of working in an emotionally charged setting.

Concerns found in past research that became evident in this narrative investigation were: (a) most school closures occurred in lower SES catchments, (b) significant student migration did not occur, (c) feelings of isolation by the school leader during district reconfiguration occurs, (d) school closure was a critical event in a principal’s life and strong emotions are attached to that, (e) strategies for making sense of the change were analogous to those expressed by Karl Weick (1995), (f) behaviours and action from the principals aligned with the observation of Albert Bandura’s (1997) theory of *Self-Efficacy*, and (g) the language representative of system and lifeworld, and the feelings associated with disequilibrium, were present as explained by the *Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas, 1987).

System, Lifeworld, and Allegiance

Subthemes in this section were matters of communication and principal positioning. These areas were: (a) the questioning of contrived consultations, (b) the affective and instrumental language of the principals, (c) the tension in the atmosphere, and (d) the principal balancing service to two communities.

The narrative data brought out a tension and mistrust of the system world by the communities of the lifeworld. Four principals brought forward this mood with seven comments that demonstrated how the parents and teachers felt a lack of sincerity in the communicative or consultative processes leading up to the closure decision. This tension between the system and lifeworld was discussed by Finlayson (2005) when commenting on systems “manufacturing popular consent” (p. 120). Habermas (as cited in Calhoun, 1992) pointed out the conflicting pressures of managing the necessary public discourse to arrive at a decision that is legitimately accepted.

With reference to Manin (1987) concerning the need for legitimacy in arriving at decisions, Habermas (as cited in Calhoun, 1992) remarked about the difficulty in attaining the balance between legitimacy and input when “the power-infiltrated public sphere certainly prohibits the uncontrolled infusion of valuing points of view” (as cited in Calhoun, 1992, p. 437). Habermas recognized that the increasingly complex society require more controlled processes, but paradoxically the system’s intrusion into, and increasing control of communicative practice, reduces the opportunities for deliberation and input which are necessary for decisions to be legitimate and accepted. With the system in control of establishing the consultative process, for some participating in the closure consultations “there is a feeling of betrayal” (P1) and “some right away say, ‘It’s a done deal’ and they are very cynical” (P2). Other comments pointed out the difficulty of the system in developing trust and gaining a legitimate acceptance of the closure decision by the school community.

There needs to be more conversations, because those consultations are not conversations. Many of my parents felt that they were not heard. There was a definite feeling that even though we were going through the process, the decision had already been made. (P1)

There is always that element of those who thought there was some kind of conspiracy happening. There is going to be that feeling, as much as we are trying to be transparent. But, there was always that underlying belief for some, "Yes, there is conspiracy. Yes they are just going to do this." (P4)

A ubiquitous tension existed for principals as they managed their participation with the district and the school community. Strike (2007) discussed the dual obligation that principals managed. Building a strong learning community was a primary responsibility. Strike also pointed out the foremost requirement of the principal was to carry out the business of the school district. In an ethical dilemma, such as the closure of one's school, Strike emphasized that the legal obligation to the employer would take precedence. Principals were aware of this dual obligation and the realization of their primary responsibility to the school district. An understanding was displayed of the position they occupied in serving both worlds, the school district and the school community. Eleven comments from five principals reflected this dual allegiance:

It was "walking the tight rope." At times, I think in formal circumstances, my allegiance was 100% to the Board. At times, at PAC meetings, my allegiance of a different sort was to the PAC. . . . On one hand, it was right to keep the school open and the community together and people valued a small school. On the other hand, it was right to close the school. It was for the greater good of the district; kids' needs could be met in other places. (P2)

My role as a principal was to walk that line and it was more double-edged, because I was there to support the teachers and the parents and try to keep, and to be an agent of the Board. So, I couldn't be on anybody's [side], I couldn't appear to be on anybody's side. While I support the Board and the decisions they make, I was feeling the pain of the teachers and the anger of the parents. (P1)

I obviously knew that my allegiance was to the Board, not just my contractual, but it is part of what you do when you are a principal. They are your employer. That is who you work with, that is who you get direction from. So, I have to be seen as to support them even if I don't necessarily agree with them. (P1)

The above remarks illustrate that principals felt a close affiliation with the publics that they were serving as a result of holding the school leadership position. They also realized that these feelings for the lifeworld aspects of their responsibilities were in opposition to their legal obligation. Professionally and publicly, the principals knew they had to conduct the business of the Board. The language that principals used also demonstrated their positioning between the system and lifeworld. The principal narratives displayed the fluid nature of their cognitive shifting between the two worlds. Language analogous with the system world was present, with such phrasing as “it was a clear-cut process, guidelines, support, quick responsiveness. There were a lot of good structures in place and certainly as a principal that was helpful, advantageous,” and terms such as “mechanical process” (P2), “party line” (P4), “top tier,” “agent,” and “third-level” (P3).

The affective language of the lifeworld was also strongly represented, with “compassion” (P2) and numerous references to the terms of “caring,” “emotion,” and “relationships.” The following excerpt indicates the duality of the two worlds:

The role of the principal in the closure is an incredibly precarious one. You are on a tight-rope and it is a very fine line that you walk as a principal, because one side of the rope is the care, the concern, the compassion for the community in which you work; you know you want to help them because they're parents, they are lovely parents. They want to do the right thing for their school and keep it open. But on the other side of the tight-rope you're quite cognizant of the fact that you are an agent of Board and that you need to toe [the line] and represent the party line. (P2)

The summation from P3 also reveals the language and awareness of the principals' positioning in the two worlds, when stating, “I listened to the community to understand, to give support. I took direction from the district as my employer. One was from the heart. The other was from the head.”

Leadership Changes Related to the School Closure Experience

Data from the principal narratives exhibited consensus that both efficacy and leadership ability was affected by the school closure experience. Increases in self-confidence, role awareness, and resolution skills were apparent in the data.

Efficacy

Principals made 11 comments stating that their sense of efficacy had increased as a result of living through a school closure. Self-confidence, belief in abilities, and resilience are foundations of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Evans, 1989). As emotional and as critical as the closure experience was for principals, these leadership attributes were still felt to have been strengthened as a result of the experience. P2 mentioned that “I became one of the experts in closing a school . . . my credibility went up because people saw that I was able to navigate the challenging circumstances.” The comments below further reveal the increased sense of strength and confidence that the principals felt:

People have really told me that I come across as confident, like I know what I'm doing, but, inside that was not the case. Now, I feel like I do have more of that. I think I am more ready to tackle things and as I mentioned before, my ability to step in to conflict, I feel much stronger about that, knowing that I make good decisions, that there is sound reasoning behind it, that I do know my beliefs a lot better than I did before. So, I think I am a lot stronger because of it. I approach things now with an inner confidence that I didn't have before. I might have projected it, but I didn't really feel it or I didn't believe it. Now, I think I definitely do have a greater sense of belief in myself and I do think that the closure had a lot to do with that. (P1)

You gave to become a good listener; your sense of empathy in a situation like that needs to be massive. Your self-control needs to be—I never had to be more of a professional than through that time. I never had to be more empathetic than through that time. So, you

become more able in both of those areas. . . . I am more able to adapt to other changes. (P3)

The judgment of personal capabilities and arriving at an increased self-efficacy was accompanied with moments of uncertainty and self-doubt. Principals discussed how they reflected on their abilities during difficult stages of the school closure. A sampling is presented below:

So, sometimes it felt out of control. You would go through phases of calmness, where, 'Ok, I can manage this. Everyone is ok. We are making signs; put them on the fence. I can be large and in charge.' I think there were ups and downs. (P2)

I was feeling really, really good professionally. When the closure came it threw me back into that, "Oh my God, am I really good enough?" kind of thing. And then through it, I felt like, "Yes, I did this and I did it well." (P1)

And so, I had a few that let their stress come my direction and I thought, "Wow, I don't know if I'll be able to manage this." People who were senior to me in their years and having been at that school, certainly for 15 or 20 years, and I was brand new coming in and it came flying at me, and I said, "I don't know if I can do this." Well, I don't know if I was that worried, but like, "This is tough. This is tough." (P4)

There was indication that the empathetic traits of effective leadership were also enriched as evidenced by six comments in three of the narratives, as P5 pointed out, "I think my sensitivity to so many things grew" and "it made me realize how important it is to build good relationships."

Professional Engagement

Bandura (1997) makes a connection between efficacy and engagement. As people lose efficacy their engagement drops; whereas when people gain efficacy their pursuit of activity increases. There were no indicators in the principals' narratives that

engagement in professional activities declined as a result of the closure event. The principal narratives indicated a similar or improved level of commitment to the district.

The data reflected that experiencing a school closure did not discourage principals from being actively engaged in educational initiatives beyond the school level. Three principals made this clear. P6 commented succinctly regarding this sentiment with, “there were no changes. . . . I didn't feel hurt, or feel that because of this I was going to change my ways.” P2 also pointed out that, “it didn't change me on any politically motivated engagement.” One principal felt more professionally engaged as a result of a gained confidence as hereby expressed:

I was totally focused on the school and very little outside activities at all. But, since then I am on a district committee and I think part of that is feeling that a little bit more confidence and belief in myself and my opinions, because through the closure, when I would talk about stuff, people would listen because it was my school I think that really helped to me to gain confidence that my views and my opinions have weight, and that they are worthy. (P1)

During the time of, and adjacent to a school closure, principals felt that the demands reduced their engagement in outside educational interests as, “any other things that you might be interested in tended to fall by the wayside because, it was all encompassing” (P5), and principals were “totally focused on the school and very little outside activities at all” (P1). Reengagement in district educational initiatives was later resumed, and for P1 fresh career territory was sensed, saying that “I am now on the [district] committee . . . I think really [I am] a part of that is because I feel I do have something to contribute.”

Role Awareness and Craft Knowledge

Leadership change also manifested itself in a greater “awareness and understanding of my role as an educational leader” (P2). P4 said that, “it made me broaden my horizons.” This growth in role awareness was also evident in the statement:

What that experience allowed me to focus on was that it is about people of all ages. It is the community; seniors that live around the area. It is the tax dollars. It is families that are invested; the adults, the children, the siblings, the staff that is invested. (P3)

P6 felt an increased awareness “from the money financial budget end of things,” Unique, context-specific meetings had to occur “when this building shut. I know that towards the end I had some rather significant discussions with the Director of Human Resources” (P6). The school closure experience positioned principals to be exposed to specific trade knowledge in the area of politics, process, and management details, which the excerpts below represent:

I think my awareness of how policies, practices and procedure go was heightened and I became more aware of that and a little bit more informed about the workings of a Board and of senior staff and the relationship between senior staff and the Board. . . . I learned about the cost of running a small school, all of those factors that really as a principal of a small school never really strongly weighed in. (P2)

Several instances we had to sort of show initiative in the area of human resources and staffing, in staff movement, and we had to show initiative in terms of the maintenance and just how we are going to close the building. (P6)

Conflict Resolution Skills

A further skill enhancement was conflict resolution. All narratives demonstrated some improved conflict management. Three principals indicated that their abilities improved in the area of dealing with emotionally tense situations, as P3 pointed out, “I never felt those emotions and in some ways that was really a good training for an administrator.” Further representing this skill growth are the following comments:

I think I got better at dealing with conflict, because that had always been an issue for me, I felt that I would avoid contact as opposed to, particularly if there were parents who were upset, I very much was in to placating. So, I think I got much better at dealing with those

really difficult emotions when it comes to facing conflict situations and I think that really strengthened me as a principal, because I think I can handle situations. (P1)

I learned a ton about how to navigate situations and how to conduct yourself in very public, emotional charged situations, or in the press. Some of those I had never experienced before, so I certainly learned a ton going through the process. (P2)

The principals explained how they felt their leadership capacity was enriched as a result of living through a school closure. They felt that (a) self-efficacy was increased, (b) professional motivation was the same or possibly increased, (c) awareness of the principal's mandate was broader, (d) craft knowledge in such areas as finances and policy had grown, and (e) conflict resolution skills were enhanced.

Sensemaking in the School Closure Event

When the "flow of events" is interrupted, or the "sense of self" is disrupted, sensemaking by the individual or organization is triggered (Weick, 1995).

This was an eye-opener that the paradigm that was, isn't, and never will be again. The reality is that once you recognize that the paradigm is changing in this way, you start to recognize that it could change in other ways. So, it certainly does have you come to a realization that nothing in the way that we do business is necessarily set in stone. (P3)

Sensemaking occurs to "render the subjective into something tangible" (Weick, 1995, p. 14). When a principal's school was closed, the narrative data illustrated that a variety of sensemaking frameworks were employed to come to terms with the event. All of the principals had definite examples of how they made sense of the situation. When making sense, principals predominantly used two vocabularies, the ideological, and the use of stories. They also used a combination of action-driven and belief-driven sensemaking.

Action-driven sensemaking applies a sense of responsible commitment to the disturbance. Commitment represents having people in place who are responsible for an action (Weick, 1995). In the principal narratives there were many expressions that showed the school leader referring to, accepting, and taking responsibility for carrying out the business of the Board, such as, “You work for the Ministry; you are a member of the management team” (P4), and “I am an agent of the Board” (P3).

Belief-driven sensemaking requires being an evaluative critic, one who makes a judgement coupled with a philosophical basis and with the supporting evidence (Weick, 1995). In conjunction with other sensemaking strategies, the principals used the rationality of demographic and financial data to come to terms with the school closure, as it materialized from “a logical thing to have happen. The enrolment was declining” (P3). Other participants expressed their evaluation in a similar way as noted below:

For [place name] has the largest declining enrolment for the three (place name) areas. So, one of the schools had to close. It, there were just too many schools. It was not feasible economically, to keep all of them open. So, when we looked at, “Why [my school]?” That data around people choosing not to come, the fact that our school was not being used to capacity, I had so much empty space in that building . . . almost half of the school that was not being [utilized]. (P1)

We were well aware of what the amount of money they needed to balance the budget . . . I clued in that the amount of money that they needed to do to balance the budget was fairly substantial, and I knew that they would start to look at school closures. (P6)

I felt great sympathy for the school community, but I could also see the realistic situation, looking at it from the Board’s point of view. That final year that I was at [school], we had 4 Kindergarten students. We had a K-1-2 split. And no matter how we tried to reach out into the community, the numbers weren’t there. (P5)

Ideological vocabulary in sensemaking uses the terms associated with norms, beliefs and values (Weick, 1995). In the narrative data, this is represented as an understanding of the common good. The comments below demonstrate that the belief

and values of the common good served as a foundation for accepting the closure circumstances.

We had to be fiscally responsible to the greater good of the community. So, I understood the ethical dilemma of the district position. And at the end of the day, ethical decisions are the difficult ones to reconcile you to. . . . So, I understood it from that lens. (P2)

I was ok with it as none of it went against my values to say what we were looking at ways to sustain and enhance quality education. . . . Ok, we can keep this school open but we won't have any technicians to repair the computers. We can keep this school open, but we won't have any new equipment, or there will be no, ah, TOCs for district workshops . . . sometimes you had to get that honest with people. So, as I say, I didn't have a hard time doing that. (P4)

Stories, the use of metaphors, and analogies to death were prominent in the sensemaking process. Relevant life stories such as balancing a household's finances and job security provided a perspective for both the principal and for the people they were supporting emotionally. Good illustrations of these perspective stories are as follows:

And he was like, "So, they still have a job?" "Yeah, but not at our school and then they might not even be able to teach the same grade!" And he sat there and looked at me and said, "Big deal! They still have a job. They still are doing the same job. Oh, it is at a different building and it might be at a different grade. And you are crying?" (P4)

I tried to talk to them about how you know, how people in their personal life suddenly your whole financial situation changed and you know went from making \$100,000 a year to making \$30,000 a year you probably couldn't still live in that beautiful, palatial house, on acreage that you had always been used to. (P5)

The Phoenix-rebirth analogy was present and used to make sense of the change that school closure was instigating. P1 pointed out that “so maybe the idea of the Phoenix, because while the school was dying we were also trying to make it positive that they were going somewhere else, that something new would come out of it.” P5 used the same analogy with “OK, we have gone through some very rough times, but we are starting to, sort of the Phoenix. We are rebuilding again, right?”

The realization that the closure event is a critical one in the life of school leaders is evident. The most common analogy to the situation is represented as an end or a death. There were nine analogies of death found in the narratives. Only one leader did not compare the incident using this type of language. Comparing school closure to such a strong emotional life experience allowed a working perspective to be generated. P4 said that “I had known there were a couple of people who had died, old age, cancer, and or there were kids who had something horrible happen to them and I said, ‘Nobody is dying’.” The samplings of comments that follow further elucidate the strong emotional situation that school closure presented for principals:

It was like a mourning process for them. It was very emotional . . . it is like a grief process. It is like having a, sounds dramatic, but it almost like when somebody is, has a terminal illness and you know for sure that they are not going to make it, right? (P4)

The closest I can get, and they are two different things, both difficult, we had the death of a student at this school. He didn't die at school, but at home. The two experiences both dealt with loss. In the sense that both were loss, both were also permanent . . . they are very comparable; the same sort of emotions, the same sort of stages; the tears, the frustrations, the anger at, “Why this would happen?” The only difference was that memories of a loss of a person would linger in a different way. (P3)

Obviously, it is a death. Well, maybe not obviously, but that is how it felt to us . . . There was a rebirth in trying to help these kids feel that where they were going was a good thing. . . being a little bit fanciful, almost being reborn in a new place. I can't think of anything else because for me it was a death. For me it was a death. For many of the staff it was a death. (P1)

The preceding three comments demonstrate how impacting the school closure event was to principals. Even though the emotions generated by a closure decision were powerful, it is important to mention at this stage of the revelation of results that the school leaders were all positive and dedicated professionals. The principals' narratives were optimistic in nature, as their stories displayed a consistent and persistent confidence in challenging conditions.

Superintendent Views on How School Closure Affects Principal Leadership

Once the principal interviews had taken place and initial findings were developed, two senior managers were interviewed. The interviews lasted from 35 to 60 minutes. The initial portion of the interview allowed the superintendents to bring forth their observations regarding the effects of school closure on principal leadership. Following this, the superintendents were asked for their reflections on the initial results.

The superintendent interviews confirmed almost all aspects of the findings found in the data of the principal narratives. From these superintendent interviews, five areas of agreement became obvious pertaining to how the school closures affected principals, these being: (a) the efficacy of the principal increased, (b) principals need to be aware of their allegiance, (c) the key role of the principal was seen to be a manager and facilitator of the closure process on behalf of the Board, (d) sensemaking on behalf of the principals occurred, and (e) the realization that principals were operating within an environment where anger and emotion were present.

Both superintendents recognized an increased efficacy in the principals who went through a closure experience. Superintendent S1 referring to leadership changes of the principals, explained that, "I think a heightened sense of political awareness. Probably a resiliency . . . it does have an effect of making them stronger." Superintendent S2 also commented that "I think if the principal successfully navigates the closure, I think it is a confidence builder." Superintendent S1 later went on to elaborate on efficacy and the growth in leadership with:

I think it is really interesting to watch the same principals in their work now. It is almost like the process of tempering steel; it really does—I do not see a lot of issues from the school that phases these people, because they have seen the good behaviour and they have seen the extreme bad behaviour in the community and they have figured out how to rise to the top through that, as emotionally challenging as that may be.

Nevertheless, one comment of a senior manager also pointed out that the experience has the potential to negatively impact a principal's confidence, as explained with:

If the principal gets derailed by the politics, and that can happen, there can be a lot of pushes and pulls . . . then I think it could have a negative effect on confidence. I have seen both. I have seen principals who I think have really grown, and have said to themselves afterwards, "That was tough. I handled that. It didn't kill me—it made me stronger." Then there are others who say, "Oh, my goodness, I am so glad that is over. That didn't make me feel better." You get both sides. (S2)

The importance of a principal recognizing their allegiance to the school district was brought forth by both senior managers, and superintendent S2 expanded that this realization would assist the principal in his or her management of the closure event, saying:

The principal needs to be clear about declaring himself or herself as an agent of the Board, but essentially neutral in the process . . . If a principal has been in a number of schools, has history in the district, has a history in the community, understands really clearly his or her role, the principal can go through this really—I think the principal can really have a positive affect whether or not there is closure, on the whole process. (S2)

While there was recognition of the principal's role as a caregiver, the superintendents were consistent that the primary role of the principal was that of a

manager and facilitator of the closure process. This was demonstrated through the comments of superintendent S2 stating that:

Making sure that the school community, the parents, the kids and the teachers and support staff, really understand what the process is. That is one side of it. On the other side is to, in a fairly transparent way, inform the Board of some of the issues around the closure, so that if the closure goes ahead, those issues are surfaced and can be dealt with. (S1)

The superintendents' comments pointed out some of the same sensemaking frameworks as that of the principals. There was recognition that a reliance on values and beliefs within an ethical framework and an understanding of the common good would assist the principals in navigating through, and coming to terms with the school closure experience. Superintendent S2 felt that "the only way you can only accept closure is to understand how school closures benefit the greater number of students." Similar sentiments were expressed by superintendent S1 with the assertion:

I think people, who manage to work through it positively, have a really strong sense of self. I think they have a strong ethical base from which they do their work; they approach most of their work from the perspective of the whole Kidder framework about understanding truth and loyalty, and the individual and the community, and can use those paradigms to their advantage. . . . I feel that the people that I have observed who are successful have a clear understanding of the greater good. (S1)

The superintendents both acknowledged their own awareness of, and confirmed the data from principal narratives, that the environment in which the principals had to operate during the closure consideration was tense and emotional. The following excerpts represent this:

I think what happened is, you are at the school level, you are at the vortex of all the emotion and you get it from all angles. You get it from your parents. You get the anxiety from your staff, whether it is teaching staff or nonteaching staff. Often times, that is just the

work of the principal, I mean it is part of what principals feel and live through on a daily basis, but it is far more intense than in what you would normally experience. (S1)

On a personal basis, some of them were conflicted and some of them were very attached to their schools, so personally felt the sadness and I think two or three that I know that went through the process, they were stressed. It did cause them the odd sleepless night, and it really depended on the pressure in the community. (S2)

Superintendent Opinions Regarding Initial Findings

After the unstructured interview, the superintendents were asked for their opinion regarding the initial findings from the principal narratives. Statements were presented one at a time, these being that principals demonstrated, as a result of a school closure (a) an increased awareness of their role and responsibilities, (b) greater efficacy and confidence in their abilities, (c) enhanced skills in conflict resolution, and (d) experienced the school closure as a critical event in their career.

Both senior managers agreed that all of the initial findings were an accurate representation of what they observed in the development of the principals who had lived through a school closure. There was consistent and unanimous agreement regarding role awareness, conflict resolution skills, and an increased efficacy. The school closure as a significant and critical event in the life of a principal received affirmation, but not with the same intensity, such as using the analogy of a death, as observed by the principal stories. The superintendents' reflections on closure as a critical event are as follows:

I would agree . . . how they come out of that challenge, really charts their future career success. It is hard to imagine that there is more pressure on a principal than working through the closure. (S1)

Really it is contextual. I feel that in our district there have been other events and issues that can define a principal. I would think opening a new school, being involved in reconfiguration, dealing with a

serious issue of staff misconduct, dealing with the death of a child, or a staff member—those can be significant event too. When you look at defining events, a school closure is certainly significant. (S2)

In relation to an increased awareness of the principal's role as a result of experiencing a school closure, superintendent, S1 agreed, saying "like we talked about earlier, it increases that heightened awareness." A concurring comment from superintendent, S2 was:

It is one of those things that really clarify the whole notion of being an agent of the Board. I agree with that. I think it was a real "Aha" in our district 5 or 6 years ago, when we finally started to articulate a process. Frankly, even for me as a new senior manager, I think the closure process was a real catalyst, a really good example of how a principal is very different than a teacher, and is an agent of the Board, and privately may hold some views contrary to those of the corporate Board, but still needs to execute the will of the Board. (S2)

Advanced conflict resolution skills were alluded to in the unstructured portion of the interview, as superintendent, S1 mentioned "I do not see a lot of issues from the school that fazes these people." Upon reflection on the presented finding that conflict resolution skills were enhanced, the data was affirmed as indicated below:

I would agree . . . it almost instilled a quiet confidence that they can work through anything. That was the resiliency piece that we talked about earlier . . . You can tell that they have worked through the problem from every angle, including the interesting politics that can develop in a school between partner groups, with unions, and these types of things. They are very much stronger problem solvers and much more independent in that regard. (S1)

Oh, yes! Even through the closure process, I saw principals really change from at the beginning. I saw principals who might have waffled at the beginning and got some support from colleagues, or checked in with senior management to get that support. I saw growth through the process. (S2)

Both senior managers in the unstructured portion of the interview brought forward information that the principals increased in efficacy and confidence. When reflecting on the findings that were presented, one comment affirmed without condition and another comment affirmed the enhancement again, but with reference to principals who had successfully managed the closure event.

That would be a clear observation based on two principals in particular that I have observed. It is really interesting, I think they both had tremendous potential to grow in to being very successful principal, they were both very early in their careers as principals, but if you were to document the issues that come out of their schools that are challenging issues, that someone would bring to the district, there are very few. (S1)

As I said, earlier, if a principal comes through this with, having dealt with some of the more complex personnel issues and relationship issues, I think it can be a real confidence builder . . . I do not disagree with the statement at all. (S2)

Further Findings from the Study

Given the small sample size generalizations are not possible, but the stories are significant as lessons themselves. Organizations, such as school communities consist of people. These stories from people allow for understanding of that organization.

The leadership capacity of school-based principals is enhanced as a result of living through the closure of their school. The narratives make visible the difficult circumstances within the school closure event; one that is characterized by anger, emotion, and uncertainty. Yet, at the conclusion, principals stand stronger and more able to lead in the educational community.

The paradox of the situation immediately materializes. Principals describe the closure as a critical and matchless event in their life, and the analogies used to gain perspective on the event are forceful, generating empathy and compassion for their plight. Yet, from this state of affairs evolves a more confident and capable educational

leader. To reiterate what has been brought forward in earlier sections: (a) principal self-efficacy increased, (b) their role awareness and craft knowledge grew, and (c) their conflict resolution skills were enhanced. P3 alluded to an old cliché that seems apt for this apparent illogicality, when stating, “I mean, everything that doesn’t kill you, it makes you better, makes you stronger.”

What factors perpetuated this successful outcome from such an arduous journey will be further determined with the assistance of future research. What was noticeable from the data was principals made use of their core values and beliefs—something that fortifies principals in their difficult dilemmas and decisions (Sergiovanni, 2009). Realizing that the common good of the district was greater than the good of one school was prominent in their perspective. Four of the principals felt that they were well supported by their senior managers, an effort that was commented on by the superintendents.

Educational outcomes were not directly a part of the research questions. Nevertheless, this area came forth as a concern. During the months in and surrounding the closure consideration, maintaining the educational focus at the school was said to be difficult, and activities, educational and extracurricular, were reduced. Creating and sustaining effective learning is at the core of what educators do, and what districts and parents expect, thus, this development is worthy of mention. There were three principals who were clear in this regard. P5 said, “any other things that you might be interested in tended to fall by the wayside because, it was all encompassing, especially during the core of that year.” Other comments related to the educational consequence of school closure are as follows:

During that time we did put things on hold. We were super-busy, making sure we covered all things to close. So, some things just didn’t happen, at the same level. A lot of things have to happen. They still just happen every year, but maybe with not the same sort of level. So, as we got busier around the closure things, we dropped the level of activity. (P4)

Depending on what went on around the closure, depending on what stage it was at, there was no doubt that less school work was being

done. More emotion was being shown or less emotion was being shown. I can't for the life of me accept that the level of education, the quality of education during that year, when closure was imminent, as effective as in a year when that wasn't being discussed. (P3)

Further information that surfaced from the narratives was in the degree of opposition to the closure being associated with two factors: (a) the SES of the catchment, and (b) the tenure of the teachers. In the two school communities characterized as having a middle SES, it was expressed that these communities mounted and sustained a stiff opposition to the school closure. Principals of the lower SES schools brought forward that their parents did not put up a significant struggle to save the school, as portrayed below:

So, I'd like to say I was paying attention to the public, but I just didn't feel that there was a strong, "Let's keep it open," and I don't know why. That is just the sense of that area at that time. They did not have their political act together. (P6)

As we had community town hall type meetings, not everybody would attend, in particular from the school that I was at. They weren't people who went out with the placards; you know, "Pride. This place is really important." So, we had a lot of, sort of investigative type, initial gathering, information, and opportunities for the communities to bring forward their concerns. But, I didn't always have a very large representation from my school; maybe my PAC president would come, or maybe two people might come. (P4)

The attachment level in relation to the tenure at the school was similar for staff as it was for the administration. Principals related the amount of anger and resistance from the staff to the years they had been at the school; the longer tenured the staff resulted in an amplified tension, as illustrated below:

And I had a couple of seasoned teachers at school who had quite a long history in poor areas, so teachers there felt that they were one of the strong, one of the safe things for some of these families. This was the safe place. They were the strongest in the community, the

teachers, and they knew those families over the years. So, they were quite angry, some of them. (P4)

A staff low in tenure had less attachment to the closure, as P6 explained, “I don't know that I could read in staff a lot of emotional attachment to the building. Even though this would have been, just about for every one of them, it would have been in Year 4.”

In conjunction with the pessimism of some actors in the closure debate, principals did notice some positive benefit for them. Public participation in the closure discourse and consultative process resulted in skill benefits for the parents operating in the political arena. Finlayson (2005) discussed how the lifeworld has the ability to modify its actions as it participates. This recursive attribute of the public involvement was manifested in a perceived increase in parent efficacy. Six comments from three principals remarked that the parent efficacy also grew as a result of living through a school closure and those parents “did fight and they got stronger through the process. Their fight got stronger” (P1). P6 shared that “the parents in the community became very political. They quickly got organized and they were a tough group to deal with.” And P6, who at the time of the interview was again witnessing a new closure consideration in the region, commented that:

It's a fascinating study watching the parents of [these schools] unite now, . . . so, kind of interesting compared to what I'm going through right now, with the potential closures [in this area]. This is certainly a far better organized situation than it was back then.

From the principal narratives there were indications that: (a) learning is affected by the closure environment, (b) the intensity of the community opposition is related to the socioeconomic status of the catchment, (c) more staff anger resulted from an increased tenure, and (d) parent efficacy increased from experiencing the school closure.

Summary

This chapter presented the results of the narrative analyses as described in the Method chapter. The intention of this investigation was to examine how a school closure affects the principal's perception of their leadership. The presentation of data from these narratives illustrates that (a) the closure is a critical event for the school leader, (b) the leadership capacity and efficacy of the principal are increased, (c) sensemaking strategies were active to understand the event, and (d) principals were aware of their delicate positioning between and within the system and lifeworld.

Most of the principals stated that the closure event was the most significant event of their career and was a highly emotional experience. The amount of emotional attachment seemed to increase with time at the school with only a very short tenure being necessary for an increased degree of attachment. Working through a school closure process was unsettling to administrators but the ultimate outcome was a feeling of increased self-efficacy and an improved leadership capacity in regards to conflict resolution skills and role awareness. Sensemaking strategies for the closure event were founded on ideological beliefs, perspectives from other grave life stories, and a sense of action-driven commitment. Data from the superintendent narratives confirmed the perceived leadership changes that the data analysis revealed.

In summary, the data analysis indicated that principals felt school closure affected their leadership. As difficult as it was, the school closure presented benefits for the principals in regards to their leadership capacity, and in turn, that of the district leadership strength. Efficacy and role awareness improved. The degree of personal impact from the closure appeared to be related to tenure and attachment to the school; with longer tenure increasing the degree of attachment. These primary and related results will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5.

Summary and Conclusions

This final chapter begins with a review of the purpose, theoretical frameworks, and methodology. After this, discussion of the findings is presented. Lastly, implications for theory, practice, and future research are offered.

Summary of Study

The sections below review the purpose, theoretical frameworks, and the methodology of the study. Following this review, findings and discussion follow.

Purpose of the Study

The overarching question of this research was:

“How is principal leadership affected by the closure of his/her school?”

In order to address the purpose of the study, four sub-questions were posed, as stated below:

1. How was the school leader involved with the closure process?
2. In what ways is the school leader’s professional outlook altered due to living the experience of a school closure?
3. Were any practices or stages of a school closure process more significant to the school leader?
4. What evidence may inform future professional development of school leaders?

Past research on school closure examined effects of school closure on aspects pertaining to the community, students, and parents (Egelund & Laustsen, 2006; Hargreaves, 1997; Valencia, 1984; Witten et al., 2001). Very little information emerged from the literature concerning how the school leader, the principal, was affected by school closure.

Few researchers have looked at how critical events and district decisions impact on educational leaders and on employees in general (Ackerman & Maslin Ostrowski, 2002, 2004; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998; Trider, 1999). From the literature on school closure it was evident that the closure consideration perpetuated tense, traumatic, and untrusting circumstances for the educational community (Egelund & Laustsen 2006; Moray, 1985; Witten et al., 2001).

Society values education. Boards and parents need to feel that the best possible leaders are in position at their schools. Principal leadership is imperative for schools to operate effectively (Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Leithwood, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2007; Phillips et al. 2003; Sergiovanni, 2006, 2009; Strike, 2007). The increasing turnover of school and educational leadership is proving to be more problematic (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Lashway, 2002), and the factors justifying closure considerations will continue (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008). These issues made it noticeable and necessary to examine the impact that school closure had on principal leadership.

Theoretical Framework

Three theories were used to assist with data insights and analysis. To be aware of communication practices, dialectic impasse, and positioning of the school leader in the public sphere, *The Theory of Communicative Action* of Jurgen Habermas (1987) was examined. Also stemming from this theory was an attention to the use of phrasing and terms associated with the system and lifeworld. *Sensemaking* from Karl Weick (1995) provided structure for examining the narratives. Using sensemaking allowed for observing the vocabularies and frameworks for making sense of the event. Albert

Bandura's (1997) *Self-efficacy* provided a conceptual background for probing the attitudes, beliefs, and engagement of the principals related to the school closure event.

Methodology

To examine these research questions a qualitative approach using a semi-structured interview protocol was established. The question format and protocol was developed with the help of three active educational researchers, school-based administrators who had experienced a school closure, two district-based administrators, and a pilot interview process. Six practicing principals from four middle-sized school districts throughout British Columbia, who had lived through a school closure were interviewed to investigate the research questions. The transcription of the recorded interviews occurred immediately after the discussions. The principal investigator carried out iterative coding and concept development from the transcribed interviews. Two independent readers assessed the transcriptions. Initial findings were compared to the independent reader assessments.

With initial findings in place, two interviews occurred with superintendents. The same opinions that were found amongst the principals were evident from the interviews with the senior managers. At the conclusion of their interview, the superintendents were asked for their opinion regarding the initial findings. There was a high degree of agreement from the superintendents for all findings.

Discussion

In this section the central question of the study will be addressed. Following this each of the four guiding questions will be discussed.

How is principal leadership affected by the closure of his/her school?

Principals perceived that their leadership was affected as a result of the closure experience. The data from the narratives indicated that principals felt their leadership was changed in relation to (a) improved self-efficacy, (b) increased role awareness and craft knowledge, and (c) enhanced conflict resolution skills.

By successfully managing a school closure process the practicing principals felt a higher level of self-efficacy. Four of the principals expressed that they had developed an increased level of confidence and self-belief as a result of working through the school closure. This finding received the third highest occurrence of comments, 17 in total. These data were also confirmed when superintendents expressed the same observation of the principals they supervised.

This finding of improved self-efficacy was surprising and reassuring to the investigator. The most commented area from principal interviews was concerning the anger and emotion that developed in the closure setting; eliciting 31 comments from five of the six principals. It was the principal with the greatest elapsed time since closure that did not comment on the emotion-laden atmosphere. With the preponderant focus on the difficult situations of anger and high emotion that were present, it might be expected to generate a reduced self-belief in one's capabilities. There were stories of self-doubt occurred during the experience. Yet, through that very heated environment, the principals materialized as stronger leaders, with a heightened sense of capability and confidence. This benefit for principal leadership was different from what the investigator had expected and this finding was comforting.

As the leadership change centered on increased ability and confidence in those abilities, Albert Bandura's *Theory of Self-efficacy* provided insight for this finding. Bandura (1997) connects a higher level of efficacy to increased degrees of engagement, pursuits of activities, and "successful adaptation" (p. 32). A higher level of efficacy results in proactive engagement choices. A strong sense of self-efficacy may have been in place, prior to closure, which assisted the principals in their resiliency to endure the closure process as "people need firm confidence in their efficacy to mount and sustain

the effort to succeed” (p. 11). Nonetheless, principals reported having an increased level of self-confidence as a result of having experienced the school closure.

A few factors may have contributed to this increased belief in personal capabilities. Of the principals reporting the higher self-efficacy, all but one also reported the presence of affirming comments in regards to their management of the closure circumstances. This relationship would be consistent with Bandura’s (1997) position that “evaluative feedback highlighting personal capabilities raises efficacy” (p. 102). These same individuals also mentioned that they felt supported by their district-level administration. Low tenure (1 to 4 years) for some principals may have assisted with the development of efficacy. In the closure process by two of the principals who were in their first year at the school, allowing them to feel less connection to the anger and emotions of the situation. This relationship of tenure to emotional attachment would be consistent with what Goddard (1997) identified with principals in Nova Scotia, where more experienced principals felt more stress during closures and district reconfigurations.

The principals’ level of professional engagement also supports the theory of self-efficacy in that a positive self-efficacy promotes engagement in activities (Bandura, 1997). Three principals stated that their interest and engagement in educational initiatives within the district was not affected by the school closure experience, expressing that they felt equally or more engaged after the experience. If efficacy was negatively affected it would be expected to perpetuate avoidance behaviour, which was not evident.

Less powerful, but still noticeable parallels regarding the increased leadership capacity come from Habermas’ (1987) idea of the system, lifeworld, and communicative action. The community that the principals operated in served as the medium for them to acquire the increased self-efficacy. Principals have significant freedom to manage and facilitate in their lifeworld and Habermas would attest that this creative professionalism and autonomy makes self-realization possible. Coupled with this, the following statement by Habermas(1987) reveals (a) reflection assists self-realization, and (b) that this reflection is an association to the ideas in Weick’s (1995) *Sensemaking*:

The ego-identity of the adult proves its worth in the ability to . . . integrate them with old identities in such a way that the fabric of one's interactions is organized into the unity of a life history that is both unmistakable and accountable. An ego-identity of this kind simultaneously makes possible self-determination and self-realization. . . . Responsibility to take over one's own biography means . . . to view the traces of one's own interactions as if they were deposited by the actions of a responsible author, of a subject that acted on the basis of a reflective relation to self. (pp. 98-99)

A person's sense of efficacy develops from reflecting on one's actions and how successful these were. This self-reflection is a personal microcosm of sensemaking. Efficacy is a personal judgment and requires the retrospective sensemaking of the individual by analyzing the past and picking up on significant cues. This active sensemaking is necessary for principals to arrive at their new representation of their self.

Increased awareness of the principal's role and attaining more knowledge of their craft was another leadership change that was manifested. Encountering a school closure in their career generated closer and unique working relationships with senior management and trustees during that period of time. The circumstances exposed the principals to details, policies, and processes regarding education that would not normally have been accessible. Specifics on financing, human resources, legalities, and communication protocol were areas articulated as having resulted in improved knowledge.

An improved ability to resolve conflict was another professed change in principal leadership. Both superintendents and three of the principals stated that conflict resolution skills and confidence were improved. Interacting with staff, social agencies and resolving disputes are major areas where principals spend most of their time (Sergiovanni, 2009). Feeling more confident with and having higher levels of resolution skills is a desired benefit for one's leadership capacity.

How was the school leader involved in the closure process?

Principals were involved with the closure process at the procedural level to a limited extent. Procedurally, the principals attended the public meetings associated with the closure but the organization of these meetings and conducting the business of the public meetings was managed by district personnel.

Principals were engaged in the closure process for the purposes of communication, providing support, and transition. Principals served as a communication conduit for district information getting to the school community and also as a conduit for communication from the school community to the Board through the district managers. Principals provided to the district nuances about the school community that the district was not cognizant of, such as school culture, and how people were feeling and reacting.

Principals viewed their primary role as a caregiver to the children and the staff. All principals commented on the importance of this role in closure; it being the concept receiving the second highest accumulation of narrative comments. Keeping education a focus with a sense of normality and trying to keep the emotions of students, staff, and parents balanced was felt to be a primary and perpetual role for principals throughout the closure.

Transitions were another critical area of principal involvement. The successful transition of the students to the receiving school was foremost in this regard, being commented on extensively by five of the principals. Transitioning the physical closure of the building and the management of learning resources were also cited as major responsibilities in the principal's involvement in school closure.

The thoughts and actions displayed by the principals around their caring for, and managing of people, and the many transitional activities throughout the closure process indicated a strong ability to communicate with their publics. The principals may have been able to achieve this professional success as a result of their intuitive understanding of the environment, values, and needs in their communities, and then being able to transform this into appropriate action that all could understand and accept. This

communication took in the intersubjective generation of ideas to arrive at mutual understandings for moving through difficult circumstances.

This ability displayed a communicative rationality on behalf of the principals. In order to be successful with their communication, the school leaders needed to meet the validity claims of Habermas (1987) as a minimum. Their language and actions needed to be descriptively correct (truth), aligned with the community's values and norms (rightness), and have sincerity (truthfulness). The school leaders' communicative rationality met these validity claims and their personal relationships with the school community assisted with the transformation of the information, ideas, and activities, involved in a school closure.

In what ways is the school leader's professional outlook altered due to living the experience of a school closure?

There is no indication that professional outlook was negatively affected by the closure of their school. Sadness was evident in five principal narratives, emphatically during three interviews. Nevertheless, as emotionally difficult as the situations were, the principals' professional outlook continued to be as positive as it was previous to the closure.

Consistent with the literature, the optimistic outlook that the principals portrayed was analogous to two of the narrative types that Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, 2004; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998) chronicled in their studies regarding critical incidents in the lives of educational leaders. The researchers found that "restitution" and "quest" were two of three repeating narrative themes. Restitution narratives reflected a belief acknowledging difficult circumstances that life would return to normal. The "quest" narrative was representative of hope and optimism. Within this study, all principal narratives conveyed a sense of optimism and growth and four principals specifically commented regarding this. The six principals' displayed a resilient and positive outlook by their continued desire to be professionally engaged in educational initiatives beyond the school level, as mentioned in relation to efficacy above.

Were any practices or stages of a school closure process more significant to the school leader?

While numerous incidents were recalled throughout the narratives, when asked explicitly about significant moments, the following were most prevalent: (a) the moment of the decision by the Board, (b) successful student transitions, and (c) incidents of anger from parents.

The exploration of this question and the associated results are somewhat unique to closure research making any direct comparisons to the literature tenuous at best. The replies identify two situations that were difficult emotionally for the principals. Hearing the legal finality of the closure motion was felt dramatically by three principals, and three principals, including one outside of the previously mentioned, recalled the actual date of the motion being passed. Five principals recalled incidents of angry parents, two specifically towards them as principals. Another foremost point of significance in the closure process was the transitioning of students to their new schools. Five principals expressed gratification regarding how well the students adapted and accepted their new schools, which was assisted by their planning of the transition activities. This last piece of data is consistent with closure literature that demonstrates that students handle the closure transition sooner and more agreeably than others (Ebmeier, 1986). The principal narratives in this study identified student transitions as being rewarding and satisfying work. These results allow for preparedness in relation to the significant stages in school closures. Knowing in advance the impact of the decision lets oneself or others make ready for that moment. Recognizing and expecting incidents with ill-tempered parents allows one to anticipate and prepare strategies for establishing calm. Weick (1995) reminds us:

A good story holds disparate elements together long enough to energize and guide actions . . . and a good story, like a workable cause map, shows patterns . . . that could be created anew in the interest of more order and sense in the future. (p. 61)

The stories of the principals have helped to generate and recognize patterns within the school closure experience and these patterns assisted in the disclosure and description of findings.

What evidence may inform future professional development of school leaders?

When asked for their advice concerning managing school closure, the principals offered many comments, predominantly on communication practices, but also some queries about parental involvement. The overall analysis of narratives also provided insight for parent participation which will be shared later in the chapter.

Twenty comments of advice came from the principals, 13 of which were in the area of communication practices, four regarding transitions, two regarding parents and one on leadership. The one comment pertaining to leadership was to have principals consider the closure as an opportunity for professional growth. Two principals felt investigating parental action and efficacy would be of interest.

Concerning the suggestions on transitions in closure, these were in addition to the information and the high priority that principals provided to student transitions within their narrative stories. Specific learning activities relevant to changing schools, and being aware of student groupings when composing classes, were brought out. Hiring extra staff, such as additional teachers and clerical staff, during the demanding transitional times was felt to have been necessary and very beneficial. Despite the fact of a demanding and increased workload by doing so, transferring the administrator to the receiving school was considered to be advantageous to smooth transitions and a lessening of anxieties for those affected by closure.

Advice for communication was provided. In relation to district communications, the following thoughts were presented: (a) maintain ongoing dialogue with the closure principals, (b) consideration of school viability need not be associated with a specific school, but developed as a routine, ongoing dialogue within the district, (c) provide clear criteria for when closure would be considered, and (d) district administrators, particularly superintendents, having more of a presence at school sites during closure considerations. There was a sense that these district approaches would help to reduce school-level tensions.

The most articulated advice for personal communication to assist principals was a request for printed literature being made available about what issues a principal could expect in a closure scenario. This *how to* type of manual would highlight common incidents and dilemmas that develop during school closures, the additional administrative tasks that are involved, and suggestions for approaches and actions. The importance of continually being aware of what was developing and what needed to be done was emphasized. It was felt that being well organized and proactive with matters that arise was essential for the principal to maintaining a calm school environment. Communicating with, and mentoring by another principal, who had successfully managed a school closure, would have been considered an advantage. It was also recommended that principals need to expect anger and tensions to rise, and that maintaining a politically neutral stance was fundamental to navigating the pressures. From a retroactive perspective, the above summarized the specific advice from principals with regard to transitions, and district and personal communications.

When examining the central question as to whether the leadership of a principal was affected by school closure, the conclusion is affirmative. Even amongst the tense circumstances which surrounded the school leaders for months, self-efficacy of the principals increased, awareness of their role and craft knowledge expanded, and their ability to resolve conflict was enhanced.

The principal and superintendent narratives expressed sensemaking strategies that aligned with the *Sensemaking Theory* of Karl Weick (1995). Information from the narrative analyses illustrated that the participants used ideological and story vocabularies to explain the interruption of a school closure. Stories from real-life situations were used to develop frames for predicting and understanding the situation. Personal and professional values and beliefs were brought forward in their deliberation to gather perspective and acceptance. Within the narratives there was also representation of action-driven sensemaking whereby the school leaders realized they had a commitment and responsibility to act on behalf of the Board of Education (BC School Act Regulations, Section 5, 6[a], 2009); this belief overrode the emotional connection for wanting the school to remain open.

Bandura's (1997) theory of *Self-Efficacy* and the associated behaviours and motivations were also observable in this investigation. A significant finding was the personal belief that one's capabilities increased as a result of the principal experiencing the closure of his/her school and this was expressed directly by both the principals and superintendents. The principals felt and explained this change in efficacy and the superintendents discussed the witnessing of it. Bandura relates behaviour and choices to levels of personal efficacy. A strong self-efficacy assists one to be more adaptable to changes and motivates a person to be more engaged in activities. The principal narratives exemplified resilience in managing through complexities. A continued interest in engaging in professional pursuits was demonstrated as well. Both of these attributes supported the stronger efficacy that was felt and vocalized by the school leaders.

Precepts of the *Theory of Communicative Action* of Habermas (1987) were present in the narratives. The principals used the affective language of the lifeworld when relating to their activities associated with the school and community and also utilized the instrumental language when referencing the activities of the system world. In addition to the correlated language usage of the two worlds, some of the reactions and feelings associated with disequilibrium in the lifeworld, such as anxiety and a sense of isolation, were also apparent in the stories.

Implications for Theory, Practice, and Further Research

The following sections discuss how the results from this study are connected to theory, practice, and future research. These thoughts result from the assessment of the investigator and the ideas of the participants in this study.

Implications for Theory

It was felt that a theoretical framework based on one perspective would have neither been sufficient nor adequate for conducting this investigation concerning school

closure affect on principal leadership. The three selected assisted in understanding and displaying the contextual setting and the personal cognitive processing that materialized.

The Theory of Communicative Action by Habermas (1987) provided a way of understanding the two worlds that the principal works within on a daily basis, but especially so during the demanding event of the closure of his/her school. Weick's (1995) ideas relating to sensemaking and his view of school organizations as "tension" organizations helped with the comprehension of a system that was dealing with transition. This tension was striking in the stories of school closure. The event for the principal was filled with relationships and obligations, personal communication and formal proceedings, rationality, and emotion. Principals often used the terms of "walking the line" and "balancing act" as they worked to satisfy the expectations that the two worlds, system and lifeworld, had of them.

Principals, as they worked within and between the two worlds, used sensemaking strategies that paralleled those suggested by Weick (1995). Their stories produced a visualization of internal sensemaking as they consciously articulated the opposing tensions felt from the district and community. The stories demonstrated a fluid movement within the complex environment and made available a dramatic, real-life demonstration of the theories in action.

In daily demands, principals are continually using communicative action to build understanding, solutions, and consensus. Yet, when needed, the leaders managed to adjust to the demands of the legislated authority. Their narratives illustrated an ability to shift between, and understand both worlds, something the system and lifeworld debate the importance of each other being able to do.

This study helps to illustrate the application, integration, and extension of the theoretical framework. Sensemaking, as described by Weick (1995), finds its strength from both theory and individual studies, as was done here. The assessment of contextual experiences helps to illustrate the application of sensemaking in a natural and original place and indeed contributes to the ideas of sensemaking. Weick attests to the importance of such applications to sensemaking when stating, "what is unusual about the topic of sensemaking is that it is grounded as much in deductions from well-

articulated theories as it is in inductions from specific cases of struggles to reduce ambiguity” (p. 13). The ongoing hermeneutic nature of sensemaking, which Weick discusses within its “ongoing” property, is evident when principals utilize a variety of past experiences and analogies to reflect on and use to develop a working perspective for school closure.

An area where the implicit becomes the explicit in this study is Habermas’ (1987) concept of two worlds. Through the narratives, principals exhibit both feeling and comprehension, when they communicate their obligations to two worlds, district and school community. The intuitive understanding of this positioning, and action in the system and lifeworld, helped to explain their reasoning.

The integration of theory was noticeable when principals used sensemaking strategies in the contextual milieu of system and lifeworld. A matching of self-efficacy and sensemaking became apparent when the principals reflected on their experiences to determine their heightened level of capacity. The retroactive property of sensemaking needed to precede and allow for the judgment on efficacy to occur.

There were a few prominent terrains where the attributes of sensemaking and communicative action were noticeably mixed through this narrative study. Weick’s (1995) reference to organizations, such as education, as tension organizations was analogous to the tensions that exist between Habermas’ two worlds. The confusion of self that occurs in sensemaking situations, resulting in possible hesitation or alienation, was synonymous with the isolation and alienation within the anomic continuum that is related to communicative action.

Perhaps most perceptible to practitioners of educational leadership was the communication styles that oppose each other within the educational network. Corresponding to sensemaking is the generic subjectivity of an organization’s management with the intersubjective nature of individuals or groups when sensemaking. These features were comparable to the attributes of instrumental and communicative languages in the ideas of communicative action.

Extensions of theory also came to light. It was observed how principals used sensemaking to come to terms with the closure of the school and then to use this sensemaking logic as stories to provide others with perspective on the situation as well. This secondary application of sensemaking was direct and useful to the school leader; serving to keep communication open, and to reinforce values and purpose.

Another observable extension was related to Habermas' (1987) validity claims. Principals were able to work through difficult circumstances and exit the other side with staff and community relationships intact. How they managed and communicated had validity. The principals met the validity claims regarding communicative action, but so could the system have descriptive correctness, values, and sincerity. The attribute extensions that the principals displayed were (a) interpersonal relationships and (b) actions appropriate to the circumstances they worked in. These two additional claims to validity were not attainable for the districts as their intentions did not generate validity and were met with a lack of trust.

The theoretical frameworks selected to be the lens for observation in this investigation did prove useful, specifically: (a) strategies for making sense of the change were analogous to those expressed by Karl Weick (1995), (b) behaviours and action from the principals aligned with the observation of Albert Bandura's (1997) theory of *Self-Efficacy*, and (c) the language representative of system and lifeworld, and the feelings associated with disequilibrium, were present as explained by the *Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas, 1987).

At a time when legislative demands and fiscal pressure are increasing for the system, there is an equally opposing momentum in the lifeworld. School communities have more direct access and an enhanced ability to mobilize and communicate their wishes. A complex task lies ahead for school districts as they try to manage the communicative action to seek understanding on legislative demands. The combining and balancing of these two seemingly incompatible momentums arises like an ironic paradox, but this is what districts will have to progressively be more able to do as school closures and district reconfigurations materialize. How districts employ strategies to engage their publics will either assist or impede in establishing a positive tone for their

beliefs, the type of response from the public, and the nature of the platform for democratic consensus. The school principal may play an increasingly important role in this discourse objective as they are the ones most familiar with the territory. It is likely that conflicts will arise between the system and lifeworld and principals will need to understand how to cope and work in both contexts, and the pivotal influence their position holds.

Implications for Practice

The dissemination of this study will assist all stakeholders in forming a richer description and understanding of the school closure tensions, with particular attention to how the closure impacts principals. Certainly, there will be a sense of reassurance that principal leadership can grow as a result of the experience. Nevertheless, the tension and strong emotions, with the corresponding impact on school leaders, will be surprising and perhaps a little unsettling to realize. It is suggested that the following organizations would benefit from exposure to this study: (a) British Columbia Principals and Vice-Principals Association (b) British Columbia School Trustees Association, (c) BC School Superintendents Association, (d) BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, and (e) BC Teachers Federation.

Boards of Education

The following considerations are restricted to what has been generated from this narrative look into school closure and from the perspectives of the school principal: (a) length of closure consideration, (b) policy considerations, (c) financial costs, (d) engaging lower socioeconomic catchments differently, and (e) public engagement in closure policy development.

The range of time in which the official consideration of school closure took place varied. In this study the range of consideration was from 2 to 6 months. These timeframes refer to the formal process of closure consideration and consultation, from the announcement of consideration to the decision meeting. Nevertheless, the principal

lives with the school closure for a much longer period, dealing with both the periods of anticipation and aftermath.

Principals discussed how they encountered informal, rumour-mill comments and inquiries leading up to an official initiation. Even as principals started the school year, parents and staff would probe the principal for indications if the school was going to close. The time in advance of the announcement of consideration included undertones of emotion and stress, but at a lesser intensity. After the closure decision, and the corresponding heightened emotions that followed in the days afterwards, there begins a large increase in workload. Principals try to maintain a focus on learning, but also need to manage a major restructuring in the months subsequent to the decision.

The consensus from the comments in this area was that longer consultations were more difficult from the principal's perspective. The school leaders' concern for the educational impact of closure, would support an analysis on behalf of Boards regarding the length and timing of the closure consideration in respect to the disruption at the school level. Of course, the consideration of the consult duration needs to be contemplated along with the Board's need to plan a consultation process that is meaningful to the public, and allows for the opportunity of input and reflection on alternatives, in an effort to have any decision be met with acceptance and seen as being legitimate.

Suggestions concerning policy were (a) normalizing the discussion of school closure within the context of the whole district, and (b) implementing data points that trigger assessment of a school's viability in a neutral manner. Boards of Education deal with a few items on an annualized basis, and senior management prepares the information to conduct the dealing with these business items. An inclusion of a yearly report on the capacity and cost of all schools in the district may serve to reduce the sense of maltreatment that an apparently sudden or random motion generates for a school community.

Another policy consideration that may be coupled with, or independent of a yearly reflection, could be the inclusion of a threshold capacity that initiates a formal assessment of the school. This would allow the public to see that the Board routinely

and neutrally assesses the district schools as a matter of business, and also allow the public to witness the demographic changes each year as the data trends over time.

Districts realize, and utilize for justification of decisions, the cost savings from closing a school. The savings are generally expressed in the range of \$300,000 to \$400,000 per year depending on the size of the school and the ease of student assimilation into other facilities. The anticipated savings are arrived at from the reduced costs of administration, clerical, custodial, utilities, and having fewer teachers by combining student populations. Boards would also need to build into the projected cost savings over time, the significant costs that result in closing down a school.

While varying amongst districts, increased closure costs result from additional staff being hired to assist teachers, clerical, and maintenance, when carrying out the needed transitions. These additional costs are for transition meetings, moving, preparation, materials, and renovations. In addition to the staff and materials support, transportation can be a significant factor for closing distended school sites, offsetting a portion of any intended savings. For urban settings increased transportation costs may not be necessary as links could already be in place to accommodate to the increased flow of students. In rural areas, often altered transportation costs result and staff and busses have a considerable cost attached to them. These new ongoing yearly expenses would need to be taken in to account regarding the benefits of closing a distant rural school.

This study informs Boards about the degree of passion that a closure may be met with. In higher SES settings and/or where staff tenure is higher at the school, stiffer degrees of opposition may result. Knowing this allows Boards to be especially cognizant of how they communicate and consult with the school community. What process seems most suitable for one community may need to be adjusted for another. Lower SES communities do not have the same personal, cultural, or political capital to be as well heard as higher SES populations. These low SES catchments may need more outreaching, or a different type of engagement, on behalf of the district to ensure an equitable allotment of input and information sharing takes place.

Coming to terms with the right amount of input into the closure consultation, and by what means, is a delicate management task. Too much input and openness can result in increased tension and impede a Board's ability to arrive at a timely decision. Too little democratic discourse may also result in anger and alienation of the school community.

Perhaps having diverse input into closure policy initially may serve to bolster positive relationships and trust prior to the actual closure considerations. Communicative action could effectively be utilized, with parent and staff representatives proactively. In generating the values and principles that underpin the criteria for analyzing facility and programming viability, much of the rancour and cynicism of closure considerations may be reduced. "Paying it forward" in this manner may be more fruitful longitudinally than trying to manage an instrumental process towards an inclusive and legitimate consensus.

Regardless of the timing, during policy development, or in the closure process, communication and interaction with the school community is an area where the situational advice from the imbedded school principal will prove valuable, and contribute to success.

District Managers

Recognition of the potential shock that a school closure has on a principal is worthy to have by itself. To be understanding and empathetic with the building principal throughout the closure year will offer substantial personal support. Nevertheless, there are a few specific times when the support for principals would be most appropriate.

The day of the actual decision, and that following, is most difficult for principals. At these moments it would serve to support the principal with conversations prior to the meeting, immediately following the business, and during the next day. With critical incident debriefing it has been found that intervention with the affected person is best to occur within the first 24 hours (Campfield & Hills, 2004). The degree of discussion and support necessary could be assessed based on previous conversations, the degree of emotional attachment to the school community, and the nature of the closure activities

building up to the moment. The support would need to come from a senior manager, or another administrator, who had the best personal connection with the administrator.

Job security and professional placement is the primary concern for the building principal of the closed school. There is a duality of cognition that exists for the principal. Rationally, they feel they will be employed, somewhere. Emotionally, they do not know if they will have a job, and worry about this until it is determined. Principals of closed schools have a great deal to manage at this time and their own job security needs to be proactively taken care of.

The uncertainty of not knowing their future career position adds more tension for the principal than what has already been built up by the closure environment. Merely insinuating that there will be a job did not noticeably reduce this tension. Recognizing that it is the finality of the Board business that determines any necessities, it is still prudent for senior management to establish a process for how administrative positions will be managed following closures. Discussing possible scenarios, or confidentially making *potential* assignments known, may assist. This positive intervention would serve to alleviate the job security concern that is very real for principals in the closed schools.

The increased operational tempo that results from the closure decision is challenging for principals. There is an added workload at a significantly elevated intensity for the closing principal and to some extent for the receiving school as well. Coupled with the increased duties is the emotional transition of leaving one administrative placement and at the same time preparing for another. There are expectations from parents and staff. Routine district commitments, deadlines, and meetings impose a significant management squeeze on principals. Senior managers need to be attentive to these demands on their behalf, allowing flexibility and omissions whenever possible. School principals display pride in their work ethic, do not want to disappoint anyone, and would not want to appear unwilling to manage all of the expectations.

Communicating the dilemmas that coincide with having an administrative position needs to occur yearly, and for all. For some of the principals in this study, five being in their first position, the closure event was the first instance when their holding of an

excluded position placed them between their two masters, the Board and the school community. Sharing experiences at administrative meetings, discussing ethical dilemmas, and developing and articulating personal beliefs and values would provide the needed professional foundation for principals when they are faced with difficult circumstances. British Columbia is a province that does not have administrative credentialing. To fill in this gap, most districts operate their own leadership development program for aspiring, and established administrators. Scenarios of professional dilemmas, political situations, and managing closures and reconfigurations, need to be discussed and worked through.

Principals

Suggestions from those who have travelled the journey, the principals, are as follows: (a) reflect and write, (b) explain your position to the school community, (c) be aware of the critical moments through the process, (d) be mindful of the increased workload, and (e) find a colleague to connect with regarding the closure experience.

Principals can find support in the closure by reflecting on their educational philosophy. It is recommended that all educators reflect, discuss, and write about core beliefs, values and principles. These personal declarations are the underpinnings from which a school is operated, and are used in deliberation to arrive at decisions. Revisiting core beliefs about education and life in general would assist school principals when they were faced with difficult situations, such as pressure from parents or staff, or coming to terms with the closure. Taking time to reflect, write and share thoughts with someone, and keeping a journal of the closure experience would prove helpful.

Some people in the school community may not be aware of the legal responsibility principals have to the Board. It would be recommended that the public be informed about the principal's professional position. If relationships have been established, and the explanation is thoughtfully managed, principals found that parents and staff respected the different obligation, and understood the parameters of information and assistance that could be provided. Declaring oneself, explaining that the principal is an agent of the Board needs to be delicately done. Emotions are high in closure circumstances and trust can quickly be damaged from a misunderstanding, or an

unusual incident. Thus, the declaration of principalship responsibility needs to be done tactfully and not too often, to maintain the trusting working relationships.

There exist moments in the closure encounter that surprise principals with their intensity. Prior to these moments one may not feel they will be moved by the event, but the emotional impact is unexpectedly strong. Anticipating, reflecting, and writing about these potential critical moments ahead of time would help prepare oneself. Being cognizant of the actual time of the decision, the day after the decision, the last day at school, and the potential instances of anger may reduce personal anxiety. Preparing options for handling these delicate times will assist in accepting these events, and not being taken aback.

Principals want to be able to manage it all. Principals experiencing closure found the workload increased dramatically due to the many additional issues they had to attend to. Personal conversations, upset individuals, staffing processes, additional meetings, inventory, management of resources, student transition activities, and additional school events represent a sampling of the increased responsibilities thrust upon the already demanding principal role. Principals need to be aware of how much one individual can manage to stay away from the breaking point; seek assistance, access what tasks are essential, accept offers of help, and delegate where and if possible.

Wanting to talk to a colleague who had gone through a school closure was expressed by a number of the principals. Talking to another professional is valuable, but principals really would have appreciated being in contact with a principal who went through a closure. There may be colleagues within the district, a nearby district, or from the professional association, who can offer a listening ear and perspectives.

Implications for Future Research

This research contributes to a small body of knowledge in the area of critical events and school leaders. The study takes an original look at the issue of school closure and changes in principal leadership. This initial investigation is promising from a leadership capacity perspective, individually, and as a school district. Nevertheless,

even though covering four school districts, the sample size is small and the findings warrant deeper examination.

Expansion of sample size would allow for increased validity and examination of effects on principal leadership along the lines of gender, experience, career stage and the tenure-attachment relationship. A larger sample would also allow for more limning out of such variables as socioeconomic catchments, staff tenure and process differences. An increased sample may generate a more definitive understanding of what variables support the positive changes in principal leadership that are presented in this study.

This study involved survivors, principals who made it through the journey and continue to participate as educational leaders. There are other principals who went through a closure experience, but who then took leave, retired early, or went back to teaching. What was the experience like for those leaders? What factors were evident in their situation? A separate study restricted to the non-survivors would be intriguing and also allow for some cross comparisons.

In relation to support of principals during closure, two anomalies surfaced. Of the six principals, two did not feel supported by senior management. These principals were male. The other four principals, all female, felt supported by senior management. In addition to this variance of support along gender lines, there was also a difference of perceived support by two principals within the same district. Further exploration along gender leadership styles, expectations for, and styles of support, and relationships prior to closure may develop further insight on, or confirm useful support archetypes.

This examination of school closure exposed a relationship between principal tenure at the school to his/her attachment with, and the emotional impact of, the school closing. When principals were in their first year at the school, they perceived the closure more as one of taking care of business. This focus was clear in the narratives and the principals stated that this positioning assisted with their handling of the closure event. Interestingly as well from the other principals, is that after as little as 1 (full) year at the school, principals had already forged a strong bond with the school and community.

This short tenure generated a gravity of emotional attachment, and produced a higher level of sadness, during recall of the events, and through his/her story details.

This small study opened up a number of stimulating opportunities for research concerning school closures. Student achievement after closure, in the short and long term, would be a valuable question to examine. Parent efficacy is an area that would be of interest, as would teacher participation and adjustment. Does a certain leadership style permit a principal to handle the closure environment more easily, or with more difficulty? What are the differences found between urban and rural closures?

Two suggestions for methodology arise. To increase the number of participants and alternative method should be considered. Initiating contact with all superintendents in the province by electronic or written correspondence has potential for producing a larger sample. Working initially through the BC Principals and Vice-Principals Association would be another option for contacting and increasing sample size. These two approaches for initial contacts would also have the potential of generating a sample of non-survivors.

The limited studies found which have some alignment with the intentions of this investigation are qualitative in nature. Most employ interview and narrative analysis, and some utilize survey data. With adequate time and resource a mixed-method design would have the potential to generate larger quantities of data and increase validation. A possible proposal would be to conduct an initial design employing administrator surveys in the 60 provincial districts and then follow this quantitative process with a purposeful sampling of the respondents to obtain sample size for an interview-based method.

Caveats

The purpose of this research was to add rich description to the frequently emotional and highly contextual experiences of principals charged with closing their schools. This study was bounded by a small sample size of eight, purposely selected participants and cannot claim causal relationships or generalizations to other contexts.

The content validity converged coherently with the triangulation of superintendent narratives and with member checks and independent readers. Nonetheless, causal relationships are not possible or intended.

This study was delimited to the personal, retrospective understandings concerning the perceived effects of school closure. Errors and omissions may occur. It was not the intention of the study to assess whether school closures are beneficial or detrimental, or to critique the beliefs, actions or abilities of school personnel.

The theoretical frameworks of *communication theory*, *sensemaking*, and *self-efficacy* were beneficial to assist in analyzing the data. The use of other frameworks would have the potential to develop other interpretations than what is evident in this study.

The scope of this study is restricted to in-depth narrative analysis of the perceptions of only principals and superintendents concerning school closure. Many other perspectives from teachers or parents would have added greater texture to the understandings and increased validity further.

Final Reflection

This researcher underwent change as well. Having experienced a sudden and unsupported school closure, it was heartening to witness such optimism and growth from school administrators. The interviews proved to be a cathartic experience for both the participants and the investigator. The affirmation that deeply felt personal emotions was commonly felt by others assisted with the grieving process and the acceptance of a difficult school closure. This experience was a strong step along the journey of attaining closure regarding this critical event.

The results from this study are encouraging for educational leaders. These understandings provide confidence for myself and others, and further nurture my strong pride in the vocation of school principal and public education.

References

- Ackerman, R., & Maslin-Ostrowski, P. (2002). *The wounded leader: How real leadership emerges in times of crisis*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ackerman, R., & Maslin-Ostrowski, P. (2004). The wounded leader and emotional learning in the schoolhouse. *School Leadership & Management*, 24(3), 311-328.
- Anderson, J. B. (2008). Principals' role and public primary schools' effectiveness in four Latin American cities. *The Elementary School Journal*, 109(1), 36-60.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY: Freeman.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2008, February). *2007-2008 Summary of key information*. Retrieved from http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reporting/levels/prov_key.php
- British Columbia School Act. (1996). Retrieved from <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/revisedstatutescontents.pdf>
- British Columbia School Act, Disposal of Land or Improvements, Policy 20, Ministerial Order M16/03. (2008a, September). Retrieved from http://www.mpsd.ca/districtinformation/pdf/policy_20.pdf
- British Columbia School Act Regulations. (2009). Retrieved from http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/d/bcreg_265-89.pdf
- British Columbia School Act, School Building Closure and Disposal Policy. (2008b, September 3). Retrieved from http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/school_closure.htm
- British Columbia School Act, School Opening and Closure Order, Section 73 and 168 (2)(p), Ministerial Order (M194/08 Repeals 320/02). (2008c, September 3). Retrieved from <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/e/m194-08.pdf>
- Bushrod, G. M. (1999). *School closure and its impact on community*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan.
- Calhoun, C. (Ed.). (1992). *Habermas and the public sphere*. Cambridge, UK: MIT Press.

- Campfield, K. M., & Hills, A. M. (2001). Effect of timing of critical incident stress debriefing (CSID) on posttraumatic symptoms. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 14*(2), 327-340.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Civitarese v. Kootenay-Columbia School District, No. 20, BCSC 1275 (2003).
- Comox Valley Citizens v. Comox Valley School District, No. 71, BCSC 1071 (2008).
- Comox Valley School District No. 71, Permanent School Closure, Policy 3050. (2007). Retrieved from http://sd71.bc.ca/sd71/policy_manual/manual/3050.pdf
- Cooper, A., Janzen, H., Lewis, J., McKay, M., Rooney, S., Allen, R., et al. (2006). *Leading the way*. British Columbia School Superintendents Association. Vancouver, BC: Karyo Communications.
- Dingman v. Upper Grand District School Board, O.J. No. 156 (2000).
- Easton, D. (1965). *A systems analysis of political life*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Ebmeier, H. (1986). *The effect of closing a high school on parent attitudes, student attitudes and student achievement*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED278107)
- Eckel, P., & Kezar, A. (2003). Key strategies for making new institutional sense: Ingredients to higher education transformation. *Higher Education Policy, 16*(1), 39-55.
- Egelund, N., & Laustsen, H. (2006). School closure: What are the consequences for the local society? *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 50*, 429-439.
- Eriksen, E., & Weigard, J. (2004). *Understanding Habermas: Communicative action and deliberative democracy*. London, England: Continuum.
- Evans, R. (1989). *Albert Bandura: The man and his ideas—A dialogue*. New York, NY: Praeger.
- Fine, M. (1993). [Ap]parent involvement: Reflections on parents, power, and urban public schools. In A.H. Halsey, H. Lauder, P. Brown & A. Stuart Wells (Eds.), *Education: Culture, economy, society* (pp. 460-475). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Finlayson, J. G. (2005) *Habermas: A very short introduction*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Frank, A. (1995). *The wounded storyteller: Body, illness, and ethics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- Fredrickson, J. (1981, May). *Long-range planning and the enrolment decline* (ED203463). Paper presented at the Annual Educational Conference of the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators, Oconomowoc, WI.
- Fullan, M. (2005). *Leadership and sustainability: System thinkers in action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Gioia, D., & Thomas, J. (1996). Identity, image, and issue interpretation: Sensemaking during strategic change in academia. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 41, 370-403.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Goddard, T. (1997). *Voices from the swamp: Identifying the professional development needs for principals*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.
- Habermas, J. (1987). *The theory of communicative action: Volume 2: Lifeworld and system: A critique of functionalist reason* (T. McCarthy, Trans.). Boston, MA: Beacon Press. (Original work published in 1981)
- Habermas, J. (1996). *Between facts and norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy* (W. Rehg, Trans.). Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. (Original work published in 1992)
- Halsey, A. H., Lauder, H., Brown, P., & Wells, A. S. (Eds.). (1997). *Education: Culture, economy, society*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Hargreaves, A., & Fink, D. (2006). *Sustainable leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Hargreaves, L. (1997, March). *Issues in rural primary education in Europe: A summary of a symposium on Issues in rural education*. Paper presented at the European Conference of Educational Research, Seville, Spain.
- Jakes, H. E. (1984). School closure policy in Ontario. *Ontario Education*. Mar-Apr, 18-22.
- Kearns, R., Lewis, N., McCreanor, T., & Witten, K. (2009). The status of quo is not an option: Community impacts of school closure in South Taranki, New Zealand. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 25(1), 131-140.
- Kleinman, A. (1988). *The illness narratives: Suffering, healing, and the human condition*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Kootenay-Columbia School District No. 20, School Closure, Policy 5.7. (2008). Retrieved from <http://www.sd20.bc.ca/section-5-school-board.html>
- Lapan, S. D., & Quartaroli, M. T. (Eds.). (2009). *Research essentials: An introduction to design and practices*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Lashway, L. (1996). *Ethical leadership* (ED397463). ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, Eugene, OR.
- Lashway, L. (2002). *Trends in school leadership* (ED470967). ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, Eugene, OR.
- Leech, N. L., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2008). Qualitative data analysis: A compendium of techniques and a framework for selection for school psychology research and beyond. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 23, 587-604.
- Leithwood, K. (2006). The 2005 Willower family lecture: Leadership according to the evidence. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 5(3), 177-202.
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2008). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. *School Leadership and Management*, 28(1), 27-42.
- Leithwood, K., & Montgomery, D. J. (1984, April). *Patterns of growth in principal effectiveness*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Lutz, F. (1990). *Trends and options in the reorganization or closure of small or rural schools and districts* (ED321964). ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, Charleston, VA.
- Manen, M. (1990). *Researching the lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. London, Ontario: The Althouse Press.
- Manen, M. (1994). Pedagogy, virtue, and narrative identity in teaching. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 4(2), 135-170. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from www.phenomenologyonline.com
- Manen, M. (1995). On the epistemology of reflective practice. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 1(1), 33-50.
- Manin, B. (1987). On legitimacy and political deliberation. *Political Theory*, 15(3), 338-368.
- Maslin-Ostrowski, P., & Ackerman, R. (1998, April). *The wounded leader: Looking for the good story*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, San Diego, CA.
- Mercer v. Greater Victoria School District, No. 61, BCSC 1998 (2003).
- Mission School District No. 75, Mission Public Schools District Board Policies, School Closure, Policy #15 (2008). Retrieved from http://www.mpsd.ca/districtinformation/policy_manual.aspx

- Mitchell, M., & Egudo, M. (2003). *A review of narrative methodology* (DSTO-GD-0385). Edinburgh, Australia: Defence Science and Technology Organisation.
- Moray, M. (1985). *School consolidation: Easing the transition*. Redwood City, CA: San Mateo County Office of Education.
- Olson, L. (2008). Cultivating a taste for leadership. *Education Week*, 27(33), 20-23.
- Ostro, G. (1978, June). *Major school change policy: A model for community involvement in declining enrolment*. Paper presented at the Canadian School Trustees' Association Congress on Education, Toronto, Ontario.
- Pfeffer, J. (1982). *Organizations and organizational theory*. Boston, MA: Pitman.
- Phillips, S., Raham, H., & Renihan, P. (2003, March). *The role of the school principal: Present challenges and future in managing effective schools*. Reported submitted to the Ontario Ministry of Education.
- Potter v. Halifax Regional School Board, N.S.C.A. 88 (2002).
- Prince Edward Island School Act, School Closure Regulations, R.S.P.E.I. Cap. S-2.1. (1988). Retrieved from <http://www.gov.pe.ca/law/regulations>
- Prince George School District No. 57, Opening and Closing of Schools, Policy 7550. (2003). Retrieved from <http://www.sd57.bc.ca/index.php?id=1103>
- Province of Alberta School Act, Closure of Schools Regulation, Alberta Regulation 238/1997. (1997). Retrieved from <http://education.alberta.ca/departement/policy/legislation/regulations.aspx>
- Radintsky, G. (1969). *Contemporary schools of metascience*. Gothenburg, Sweden: Akademiforlaget.
- Reeves, D. (2009, July). *Leadership performance matrix*. Presented at the online Leadership Seminar, July 17, 2009.
- Renihan, F. (2008, Fall). *Understanding school leadership*. Paper presented at the Seminar for Educational Leadership course, Simon Fraser University, Surrey, BC.
- Richards, L. (2005). *Handling qualitative data: A practical guide*. London, England: Sage.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. Newberry Park, CA: Sage.
- Robson, C. (2002). *Real world research*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Rural School and Community Trust, The. (2003). *The fiscal impacts of school consolidation: Research based conclusions*. Retrieved February 23, 2009, from <http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2042>

- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Sergiovanni, T. (2006). *Rethinking leadership: A collection of articles*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Sergiovanni, T. (2009). *The principalship: A reflective practice perspective*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Sherwood, B. (2009). *The survivors' club: The secrets and science that could save your life*. New York, NY: Grand Central.
- Smith, W. (April, 1984). *A study of administrator communication networks in a public school under conditions of contraction*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Stelck, S. (2008). *Walking the tightrope: How superintendents respond to challenging "rights" issues and the role of law* (Doctoral dissertation, Simon Fraser University). Retrieved from <http://ir.lib.sfu.ca/bitstream/1892/10254/1/etd3371.pdf>
- Strike, K. (2007). *Ethical leadership in schools: Creating community in an environment of accountability*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Thomas, D. (1980). Administrative leadership in school closures. *NASSP Bulletin*, 64, 21-28.
- Trider, D. (1999, April). *Leadership in a turbulent policy environment: Implications for school leaders: Evidence from the field*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Research Association, Montreal, Quebec.
- Tyler, C. (2005). Metaphor and management: Making sense of change. *Management in Education*, 19(3), 28-32.
- Valencia, R. (1984, October). *School closures and policy issues* (ED323040; Policy Paper No. 84-C3). Policy paper developed for Institute for Research and Educational Governance, School of Education, Stanford University.
- Van Maanen, J., & Barley, S. R. (1984). Occupational communities: Culture and control in organizations. In B. M. Staw & L. L. Cummings (Eds.), *Research in organizational behaviour* (Vol. 11, pp. 43-103). Greenwich, CT: JAI.
- Waslander, S., & Thrupp, M. (1995). Choice, competition, and segregation: An empirical analysis of a New Zealand secondary school market, 1990-93. In A. H. Halsey, H. Lauder, P. Brown, & A. S. Wells (Eds.), *Education: Culture, economy, society* (pp. 439-459). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Weick, K. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Weldy, G. (1981). Declining enrolment and school closing: A principal concern (ED201070). *The Practitioner*, 7(3), National Association of Secondary School Principals.
- Wells, A. S., & Serna, I (1996). The politics of culture: Understanding local political resistance to detracking in racially mixed schools. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66, 93-118.
- Witham, M. (2000). *A fair go: Cutting the cake and closing schools* (Doctoral dissertation, James Cook University). Retrieved from ERIC. (ED450987)
- Witten, K., McCreanor, T., Kearns, R., & Ramasubramanian, L. (2001). The impacts of a school closure on neighbourhood social cohesion: Narratives from Invercargill, New Zealand. *Health & Place*, 7, 307-317.
- WorksafeBC. (2002). *Coping with critical incident stress at work* (10M R1/02, PH44. [Brochure]). Retrieved May 27, 2010, from http://www.worksafebc.com/publications/health_safety/by_topic/assets/pdf/critical_incident_stress.pdf
- Wright, N. (2002). *Stories from the inside: A narrative analysis investigating the professional lives of three New Zealand secondary school heads of English departments* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Waikato) [Abstract]. Retrieved from ERIC. (ED479125)
- Ylimaki, R.M., Jacobson, S. L., & Drysdale, L. (2007). Making a difference in challenging, high-poverty schools: Successful principals in the USA, England, and Australia. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 18(4), 361-181.
- Zame, M., Hope, W. C., & Respress, T. (2008). Educational reform in Ghana. The leadership challenge. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 22(2), 115-128.
- Zwijze-Koning, K., & de Jong, M. (2009). Auditing management practices in schools: recurring communication problems and solutions. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 23(3), 227-236.

Appendices

Appendix A.

Recruitment Email and Consent Form

2010s0169 Lenarduzzi – The Effect of School Closure on Principal Leadership
Script for E-mail Participation/Recruitment

Dear (Dr., Ms., Mr.)

My name is Grant Lenarduzzi. I have taken an educational leave from my position as Assistant Superintendent, to complete a doctoral program at SFU, and I am doing some work concerning school closures.

Your name was suggested to me by your (Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent) as someone who may have some valuable insights to share.

My investigation involves interviewing a sample of principals who have lived through the closure of their school. After the interviews, I will look at the interview material, individually and collectively, to ascertain any common concepts or theories as to how a principal's approach to leadership may have been influenced by the closure experience.

I, as well, as a past principal, have experienced school closures. I feel our discussion would result in benefits for other administrators who may go through a similar event in the future.

Your participation is certainly voluntary and you would have the right to discontinue participation in the study at any time. We would meet at a time and place of your convenience (school, other site, home). I anticipate the single interview could take between 60-90 minutes in duration.

The data would be confidential (which I would further detail at our meeting) and any reporting out would involve the use of pseudonyms. The school and district name would not be identified.

If you are comfortable with the idea of sharing your experience, please let me know by (insert date), if you are willing to participate in this research project, in order to set up a convenient date and time?

Yours truly,
Grant Lenarduzzi

██████████
██████████

2010s0169

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent by Participant in a Research Study

The University and those conducting this research study subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of your interests, comfort, and safety. This research is being conducted under permission of the Simon Fraser Research Ethics Board. Your school district has approved the investigation as well.

Should you wish to obtain information about your (a) rights as a participant in research, (b) the responsibilities of researchers, or (c) if you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the manner in which you were treated in this study, please contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics, Dr. Hal Weinberg, by email at hweinber@sfu.ca or phone at 778-782-6593.

Your signature on this form will signify that you have received, read and understand this consent form which describes the procedures, risks, and benefits of this research study, and that you have received an adequate opportunity to consider the information describing the study, in which you voluntarily agree to participate in, and have the right to discontinue your participation in the study at any time.

Title: The Effect of School Closure on Principal Leadership
Principal Investigator: Grant Lenarduzzi; [REDACTED]
Department: Ed. D. Leadership

Risks to the you, third parties, or society: None

Procedures: (a) Interview questioning and related discussion, (b) transcription, interpretation, and concept/theory development from the transcribed discussion, (c) participant check regarding the transcription and associated understandings, and (d) a copy of the finished study is available to you, upon request through the principal investigator, Grant Lenarduzzi, via gpl2@sfu.ca. For confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used and any identifying details will be masked. Hard copy and electronic data will be kept in a secure locked room at a private location. Computer access is password protected.

The Study Requirements: You will need to (a) respond verbally to questions pertaining to the experience of a school closure, (b) realize that the discussion will be recorded, and (c) be willing to offer clarifications following the interpretation.

Benefits of study to the development of new knowledge: The study aims to determine how the leadership of school leaders is affected by experiencing a school closure and to use this insight for enhanced understanding and professional development of school and district-based educational leadership.

I have been informed that the research will be confidential and I agree to participate.

Your Name: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____ Principal Investigator Signature: _____

Appendix B.

Interview Protocol

2010s0169

Interview Protocol Form

Principal Interview Protocol

Institution: _____

Interviewee (Title and Name): _____

Interviewer: _____

Survey Sections Used:

- ___ A. Interview Background
- ___ B. Closure Process and Principal Involvement
- ___ C. Implications for the Principal
- ___ D. Reflections/Suggestions for the Future

Other Topics Discussed: _____

Documents Obtained: _____

Post Interview Comments or Leads: _____

The Effects of School Closure on Principal Leadership Interviews

Introductory Protocol

To facilitate note-taking, I would like to audio record our conversation today. For your information, only I, the Principal Investigator, will be privy to the recordings which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. You, the participant, are asked to sign a consent form devised to meet Ethic requirements for participants. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, and (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable. If you could please read over and sign the consent form at this time, prior to our discussion. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

This interview is planned to last one hour. During this time, there are several questions that I would like to cover.

Introduction

You have been selected to share you insights today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about the school closure experience. Our research project as a whole focuses on how the leadership of a principal is affected by a school closure experience, with particular interest in gaining insight for enhanced understanding of, and professional development for, school and district-based educational leadership. The study does not aim to evaluate your techniques or experiences. Rather, I am seeking to learn more about how principal leadership is important to Education.

A. Interviewee Background

How long have you been: _____ in your present position? _____ in the district?

How would you describe the level of parent advocacy at the closed school?

How did the consideration for the closure of the school become known?

B. Closure Process and Principal Involvement

1. As a Principal, what was your role in the closure?
 1. Follow up: How were you included in the process?
2. Could you describe the processes and activities around closure that were managed by the district?
3. As the building principal how were you supported through the process?
 1. Prompt for by whom? When? What forms of support?
 2. Follow up: What support helped? What did not?
4. How did you approach, or balance, your obligation to the district, versus your allegiance with the school community?

C. Implications for the Principal

5. In relation to the closure what were the implications for you professionally?
 1. Prompt for positives and negatives.
 2. Follow up: What were the implications for you personally?
6. As the principal, how did you come to terms with your school being closed?
 1. Follow up: How did you make sense of it?
 2. Follow up: When did you accept it?

7. Did your interactions with the broader school community change as a result of the closure experience?
 1. Prompt: How is it different?
8. In relation to your participation in district business, in such areas as initiatives and committees, how might you describe your level of engagement prior to the announcement of a closure consideration, during the closure consideration, and afterwards?
9. As a result of experiencing a school closure, would you be able to describe any change in approach or a change in a specific practice regarding your educational leadership?

D. Reflections/Suggestions for the Future

10. Hypothetically, if you were asked to speak at an administrators' conference, what would be one significant event or incident from the school closure that you might share with other administrators?
11. What advice might you suggest for other principals, or other districts, that may have to go through a closure process? What are the lessons learned?
12. What would you see as a good result of this investigation? Is there anything else you feel I need to understand?

Post Interview Comments and/or Observations:

Appendix C.

Interview Question Matrix

Question	Area of Inquiry	Studies & Resource	Theory
Introductory Context: Investigator background. Study intent. Consent form.			
Introductory Context: No. of years in school; Public /parent advocacy; event initiation	Nesting of community and experience of principal	Egelund & Laustsen	
1. In relation to the process around closure, where did you as a principal fit in? How were you included in the process?	Involvement	Witten et al.	Communicative Action; Sensemaking
2. In relation to the closure what were the implications for you professionally? Personally? (positives, negatives, family, friends)	Effect of incident on professional and personal life.	Ackerman & Maslin- Ostrowski	Communicative Action; Sensemaking
3. Could you describe the processes and activities around closure that were managed by the district?	Process and what stands out		Communicative Action; Sensemaking
4. As the principal, how do you come to terms with your school being closed? How do you make sense of it? When do you accept it?	Effect; What frameworks are used by the principal	Ackerman & Maslin- Ostrowski	Sensemaking; Efficacy
5. In relation to your participation in district business, initiatives (committees, etc), how might you describe your level of engagement prior to the announcement of a closure consideration, during the closure consideration, and afterwards?	Professional Vigor; Motivation & confidence		Efficacy; Communicative Action
6. As the building principal how were you supported through the process? (By whom? When? What forms of support?) What helped? What did not?	Professional and personal support	Trider; Thomas	Communicative Action; Sensemaking

Question	Area of Inquiry	Studies & Resource	Theory
7. In what ways may your leadership be different as a result of the closure experience?	Effect		Efficacy; Communicative Action
8. How did you approach, or balance, your obligation to the district, versus your allegiance with the school community?	Professional Dilemma	Strike	Communicative Action; Efficacy
9. Hypothetically, if you were asked to speak at an administrators' conference, what critical incident from the school closure might you share with other administrators?	Critical incidents within the incident	Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski	Communicative Action; Efficacy
10. As a result of experiencing a school closure, would you be able to describe any change in approach or practice regarding your leadership of the school community?	Effect		Efficacy; Sensemaking
11. What advice might you suggest for other principals, or other districts, that may have to go through a closure process? What are the lessons learned?	Advice for process		Communicative Action
12. What would you see as a good result of this investigation? Is there anything else you feel I need to understand?	Long term impact; what is significant to the principal?		

Appendix D.

Concept Occurrence

Concept	Principal Incidence	Occurrence of Confirming Statements													
		Total	P11	P21	P22	P31	P32	P41	S1	S1F ^a	S2	S2F			
Anger & Emotion	5	31	1	3	7	4	9	4	4	1	1	1			
Role Caregiver	6	18	5	2	1	1	3	5			1				
Efficacy & Confidence	4	17	4	3	2	2		2	2	2	1	1			
Dilemma & Allegiance	5	14	2	3	3	1		2	1		2				
Role Awareness	4	14	1	4	3		2	1	2		1				
Role Manager	4	14		3	3	1	2	4	2		1	1			
Self-Doubt	4	13	5	3		2	1		2						
Critical Event	4	12	3	1	3		2		1	1	1	1			
Significant Stages	6	12	3	1	1	1	4	1			1				
Death & Grief	5	11	2		3	1	3	1			1				
School Attachment	5	11	1	1		2	2	5			1	1			
Support	6	10	1	2	<2>	1	3	<1>	1	1					
Sensemaking	6	9	1	1	1	1	1	1	2		1				
Conflict Resolution	3	8	1	1	1			1	2	1	1	1			
System & Lifeworld Lang	5	8	1	3	2	1		1							
Conspiracy & Mistrust	4	7	3	1		2	1								
Suppressed Feelings	3	7	5	1	1										
Empathy	3	6		1	3		2								
Health/Illness	5	6	1	1	1	2	1								
Job Security	4	6	1		2	1	2								
Affirming Comments	3	5	3	1		1									
Educ. Impact	3	5		1	2	2									
Optimistic	4	5	1	1		1	2								
Parent Efficacy	3	5	1	1		3									
Prof. Vigor	3	4	1	2		1									
Prof. Pride	2	2			1	1									

^a S1F: S refers to the subject being a Superintendent and 1 denotes being the first that was interviewed.
 F relates to opinion on findings and the superintendent's opinion thereof.

Appendix E.

Organization of Categories into Themes

Themes	Category Association	Themes	Category Association
Leadership Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficacy • Empathy • Engagement • Resolution Skills • Role Awareness 	Sensemaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data • Death • Greater Good • Grief • Phoenix
Principal Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allegiance • Caregiver—Students • Caregiver—Staff • Communicator • Manager • Pride—Work • Professional Implication • Transitions—Students • Workload 	System & Lifeworld	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal & Formal Notice • Isolation • Roles • Process • Self-doubt
Emotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger • Attachment—Parents • Attachment—School • Attachment—Teachers • Cynicism—Trust • Health • Loss of Control • Support • Suppressed Feelings 	Outliers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice • All consuming • Educational cost • Financial Costs • Parent Efficacy • Parent Attachment
Critical Event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death • Knowledge of Closure Date • Narrative type/theme • Rebirth • Significant Stages 		

Appendix F.

Superintendent Interview Protocol

Institution: _____

Interviewee (Title and Name): _____

Interviewer: _____

Survey Sections Used:

- ___ A. Interview Background
- ___ B. Closure Process and Principal Involvement
- ___ C. Implications for the Principal
- ___ D. Reflections/Suggestions for the Future

Other Topics Discussed: _____

Documents Obtained: _____

Post Interview Comments or Leads: _____

The Effects of School Closure on Principal Leadership Interviews

Introductory Protocol

To facilitate our note-taking, I would like to audio record our conversations today. Please sign the release form. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. In addition, you must sign a form devised to meet our Ethic requirements for participants. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

This interview is planned to last one hour. During this time, there are three topic areas that we would like to cover.

Introduction

You have been selected to share you insights today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about the school closure experience. Our research

project as a whole focuses on how the leadership of a principal is affected by a school closure experience, with particular interest in gaining insight for enhanced understanding of, and professional development for, school and district-based educational leadership. The study does not aim to evaluate your techniques or experiences. Rather, we are trying to learn more about how principal leadership is important to Education.

A. Interviewee Background

How long have you been: _____ in your present position? _____ in the district?

How would you describe the level of parent advocacy at the closed school(s)?

How was the consideration for the closure(s) of the school initiated?

B. Could you describe the Closure Process and how the Principal was involved?

Prompt for support for Principal(s) and the Principal's professional dilemma of serving community and Board.

C. What do you feel were the implications for the Principal, professionally and personally?

Prompt for statements from Principals, community interactions, and acceptance of closure.

D. Can you offer any reflections/suggestions for the future regarding principals and the school closure experience?

Post Interview Comments and/or Observations: