Nurturing Our Community of Practice: Collaborating to Strengthen Face-to-Face Communication Among the Staff of Hamilton District Christian High

by

CHERYL WEBB

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Royal Roads University
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Supervisor: DR. M. BETH PAGE
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COMMITTEE APPROVAL

The members of Cheryl Webb’s Thesis Committee certify that they have read the thesis titled Nurturing Our Community of Practice: Collaborating to Strengthen Face-to-Face Communication Among the Staff of Hamilton District Christian High and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements for the Degree of MASTER OF ARTS IN LEADERSHIP.

Dr. Niels Agger-Gupta [signature on file]

Final approval and acceptance of this thesis is contingent upon submission of the final copy of the thesis to Royal Roads University. The thesis supervisor confirms to have read this thesis and recommends that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements:

Dr. M. Beth Page [signature on file]
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Abstract

This project asked “By what means can the staff of Hamilton District Christian High nurture our Community of Practice?” Framed by action research engagement and insider action research, the inquiry allowed staff participants from this independent school to share stories of face-to-face interactions and team experiences, and to dialogue in a World Café. The study revealed that Hamilton District Christian High (HDCH) has many strengths that support a healthy community of practice, including conditions for effective, meaningful, face-to-face encounter practices that support those conditions and the values of shared purpose and community. Though staff practice servant leadership with each other, their understanding of leadership and followership and their discomfort with disagreement may be limiting them. If HDCH engages in the recommendations to celebrate its strengths and improve in its areas of growth, staff will grow in both mutual understanding and their capacity to provide exceptional Christian high school education. This project was conducted in compliance with the requirements of the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Policy.
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Saxton (2019) said that it takes a village to raise a leader. I have an amazing village.

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Table of Contents

Creative Commons Statement ........................................................................................................... 3

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ 4

Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................................... 5

List of Tables .................................................................................................................................. 9

List of Figures ................................................................................................................................. 10

Chapter 1: Focus and Framing ....................................................................................................... 11
  Inquiry Question and Sub-Questions .......................................................................................... 12
  Significance of the Inquiry .......................................................................................................... 13
    Benefits .................................................................................................................................. 14
    Stakeholders ........................................................................................................................... 15
  Organizational Context and Systems Analysis .......................................................................... 16
    Systems Analysis ..................................................................................................................... 16
  Personal Significance .................................................................................................................. 18
  Overview of Thesis ...................................................................................................................... 19

Chapter 2: Literature Review ......................................................................................................... 20
  Communities of Practice ............................................................................................................. 20
    What is a CoP? ......................................................................................................................... 20
    Structure ................................................................................................................................ 21
    Benefits ................................................................................................................................... 23
    Challenges ............................................................................................................................... 25
  Face-to-Face Communication .................................................................................................... 27
    Attributes ................................................................................................................................. 27
    Face-to-Face and Communities of Practice .......................................................................... 29
    Face-to-Face and Leadership ................................................................................................. 30
  Servant Leadership ..................................................................................................................... 32
    Servant Leaders and Followers .............................................................................................. 33
    Attributes of Servant Leaders ................................................................................................. 35
    Servant Leaders and Organizations ....................................................................................... 35
    Criticisms of Servant Leadership ........................................................................................... 36
    Responsibilities ....................................................................................................................... 37
  Chapter Summary ....................................................................................................................... 37

Chapter 3: Methodology .................................................................................................................. 39
  Methodology ............................................................................................................................... 39
  Data Collection Methods ........................................................................................................... 41
    Narrative Interviews ............................................................................................................... 42
Chapter 4: Inquiry Project Findings and Conclusions

Study Findings
Finding 1: Common Elements
Finding 3: The Necessity and Tension of Leadership and Collaboration
Finding 4: Ideal Future
Summary

Study Conclusions
Conclusion 1: Conditions
Conclusion 2: Practices and Opportunities
Conclusion 3: Leadership
Conclusion 4: Ideal Future

Scope and Limitations

Chapter Summary

Chapter 5: Inquiry Implications

Study Recommendations
Recommendation 1: Celebrate What is Good in HDCH’s Staff FtF and CoP by
Sharing the Findings and Conclusions of this Inquiry Project with Staff and with the Board of Directors.

Recommendation 2: Survey staff about their experiences of Collegial Conversations and Other Activities Which We Believe Are Growing a Culture of Dialogue.

Recommendation 3: Present to Staff about the Complexities of FtF Encounters and What is Involved in Speaking Up and Listening Up in Both Formal and Informal Encounters.

Recommendation 4: Engage All Staff in a Small Group Protocol to Refine a Shared Ideal Future of FtF Communication Culture

Recommendation 5: That Staff Learn More about Leadership-Followership and Collaborative Leadership and that They Engage in an Activity of Reflecting on Their Shifting Place in a Leadership-Followership or Collective Leadership Space.
Recommendation 6: Create Opportunities to Share Our Stories with Each Other by Soliciting Staff Stories, in Response to Specific Prompts, for the Weekly “Sunset” Memo .................................................................................................................................94

Recommendation 7: Continue to Ensure Each PD Day and the Majority of HDCH Other Formal FtF Settings Have at Least One Dialogic Element by Making Growth in Interaction One of the Learning Goals .................................................................95

Recommendation 8: Conduct a Restorative Practices Refresher That Reminds Staff of the Tools They Already Have for Navigating Conflict As Well As Ensuring They Are Aware of the Value of Multiple Perspectives and Disagreement ........................................96

Organizational Implications ............................................................................................97
Stakeholder Engagement ...............................................................................................97
Change and Threats .......................................................................................................98
Inquiry and Leadership .................................................................................................99
The System of Staff Communication .............................................................................100
Third Person Research ................................................................................................101
The Rest of the Story .....................................................................................................102
Implications for Future Inquiry .....................................................................................103
Thesis Summary ........................................................................................................105

References .....................................................................................................................109

Appendix A: Systems Diagrams ......................................................................................124
Appendix B: Narrative Interview Agenda ........................................................................126
Appendix C: Collegial Café Agenda ...............................................................................129
Appendix D: Inquiry Team Member Letter of Agreement .............................................133
Appendix E: Research Project Information Letter .........................................................135
Appendix F: Email Invitation to Participate in Narrative Interview ................................139
Appendix G: Consent Form for Narrative Interview ......................................................142
Appendix H: Invitation to Collegial Café .......................................................................143
Appendix I: Consent Form for Collegial Café ...............................................................146
Appendix J: Collegial Café Conversation Summary Sheet ............................................147
List of Tables

Table 1 Most Common Narrative Interview Data Codes by Occurrence ..............................................58

Table 2 Inquiry Recommendations and How They Support the Nurturing of the CoP at

HDCH ..................................................................................................................................................88
List of Figures

Figure 1. Rich Picture by Table 1. ................................................................. 68

Figure 2. Rich Picture by Table 2. ................................................................. 69
Chapter 1: Focus and Framing

The purpose of this project was to explore how the staff of Hamilton District Christian High could nurture our community of practice (CoP) through face-to-face (FtF) communication. Hamilton District Christian High is an independent, faith-based high school that has been providing Christian education in the Hamilton, Ontario region since 1956. I have been working at Hamilton District Christian High since 2006. My current role is Director of Operations; I lead a team of support staff and I am part of the Leadership Team (LT) along with the Principal, Vice-principals, and Director of Student Services.

In conversation with my partner, the Principal of Hamilton District Christian High, we hoped through this inquiry project to continue to lead Hamilton District Christian High’s staff, including administration, support staff, and teachers, in the development of collegiality: that is, a culture of sharing knowledge, observing each other, and encouraging each other toward growth (Barth, 2006). I believe the Hamilton District Christian High’s staff is a CoP: a “[group] of people who share a concern, a set of problems … and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4). While staff members may have different roles and areas of expertise in the school, the CoP is “organic, natural and informal” (Kerno & Mace, 2010, p. 84) in the way that the relationships that constitute it have developed. As school staff, they are connected in their school setting by “webs of relationships, . . . [which reinforce] leadership-followership” (Crippen, 2012, p. 197), or mutual servant leadership. The principal and I believe that staff members have the potential to become more effective as a CoP, because a CoP is not only about knowledge and expertise; it is a system of social relationships (Wenger, 2000). In fact, in such a relational web, leadership-as-practice
(Raelin, 2011) can emerge, reflecting “the negotiation of shared understanding among a group of interacting individuals as a source of leadership” (p. 203). This is leadership as emergent through social process rather than as a trait of individuals. My inquiry partner and I developed this project because we believed that FtF communication among staff was an area that would support the development of the CoP. In the context of this study, where staff members are normally co-located at one school site, this FtF communication has been in person. However, due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the FtF became virtual as of mid-March 2020. I entered this inquiry ready to explore how this project might benefit the organization’s staff relationships, mutual leadership, and capacity to work together towards the organization’s mission and vision.

Through this inquiry, my colleagues have led me, teaching me about their experience of communication and relationships in our work at Hamilton District Christian High (HDCH) and showing me how we lead each other.

**Inquiry Question and Sub-Questions**

My inquiry question was “By what means can the staff of HDCH nurture our CoP?” Sub-questions were:

1. What are the stories HDCH staff tell about memorable successes their team of colleagues has had at HDCH?
2. What communication skills, practices, and underlying values would contribute to more effective team communication?
3. What would ideal FtF communication among staff look like?
4. What effective FtF communication practices might staff co-create?
Significance of the Inquiry

In the report from an external audit held in 2018, feedback from some staff was noted in the area of communication: “Communication between the leadership team and staff is primarily one-on-one or in staff meetings, where it is one-directional” (Pries et al., 2018, p. 6). A desire was also expressed by some staff for more all-staff meetings with opportunities for dialogue (Pries et al., 2018). While in the same report there was positive feedback about care of staff for each other and trust for and with administration (Pries et al., 2018), the Principal believed it would be valuable for staff to be engaged in action research about the organization’s FtF communication.

Initially, the Principal and I discussed this project in terms of improving staff community. There were three reasons for this focus. First, healthy relationships are significant to HDCH as a faith-based organization; the Principal believes that community is “our core identity as a Christian school” (D. Todd, personal communication1, June 9, 2019). Second, two of our staff’s four values have to do with relationships: care for one another and withness2. Third, HDCH is committed to using restorative practices: “a social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision making” (Wachtel, 2016, p. 1). Staff members aim to be relational and want to continue to grow in relationality and community.

1 All personal communications in this report are used with permission.
2 We define “withness” as having both high support for and high expectations of our students and each other. This is in the context of Wachtel’s (2016, p. 3) “Social Discipline Window.”
While a focus on healthy relationships is not officially part of either HDCH’s mission or vision as a school, such relationships are necessary to accomplishing the school’s purpose of providing impactful learning for students. The mission at HDCH is to “cultivate [students’] character through learning for a life of service to God” (HDCH, Mission & Vision section, n.d., para. 1). While, as Hanscamp (2018) put it, “a school gains its distinctive character from being focused on the teaching and learning dynamic” (p. 20), healthy relationships are necessary in order for that teaching and learning to happen well. In fact, Crippen (2012) went so far as to claim that “schools are all about relationships” (p. 197); the teaching and learning happen in those relationships. Given the importance of relationships and the focus of the school’s mission in mind, I began to think about FtF communication that supports the cultivation of the CoP rather than of simply community. HDCH staff are already a CoP, a “social system” (Wenger, 2010, p. 1) whose members take very seriously their role in students’ learning and who “on that basis interact regularly to learn together and from each other” (Pyrko et al., 2017, p. 390). While CoPs are not innately healthy or beneficial, they can be cultivated towards increased health and effectiveness (Wenger & Snyder, 2000) that lead to benefits for the school as a whole. The HDCH staff has not been formalized as a CoP, nor has this term been used by staff to describe themselves before this inquiry.

**Benefits**

The key potential benefit to HDCH of engaging staff in an action-oriented research project around nurturing their CoP through FtF communication was the potential growth of relationships. W. N. Isaacs (2002) found that FtF communication when practiced effectively transformed relationships for the better. HDCH’s Principal shares this view; as he put it, FtF
communication “fosters engagement and higher trust” (D. Todd, personal communication, June 9, 2019) among staff. According to Etmanski et al. (2014), engaged action research supports relationship development, as it “advances respectful, ethically sound working relationships” (p. 4); through such an inquiry project, participants “co-construct knowledge, learning and changing together” (Hersted et al., 2019, p. 3). As a CoP is itself a network of relationships, having an increasingly effective CoP—the desired outcome of this project—requires such advancement. To my mind, an increasingly effective CoP is one with increasingly healthy relationships through which members grow personally and professionally in knowledge, practices, and in movement towards our shared goals. Significantly, there may be an impact to the rest of the school community: Barth (2006) stated, “The relationships among the educators in a school define all relationships within that school’s culture” (p. 9). If it is true that the health of staff relationships directly impacts students, parents, and anyone associated with the school community—not to mention staff’s “professional practice” (p. 9)—then staff have a responsibility to grow in this area.

**Stakeholders**

The stakeholders in this project were the staff members of HDCH. From among the 37 teachers, 10 support staff, five learning support workers, and five Leadership Team members who comprise the staff, nine people chose to participate. The potential benefit of this inquiry project to HDCH staff would be improved FtF communication, resulting in better relationships, an increased capacity for effective meaning-making, and therefore a healthier CoP.
Organizational Context and Systems Analysis

HDCH staff work together on one site in Ancaster, Ontario. Historically, the staff, students, and families of this school have had strong relational ties. The school was founded in 1956 by Dutch Christian Reformed immigrants who shared both an ethnic identity and a faith identity. They believed that the responsibility to teach children from a Christian worldview was shared among home, school, and church (Christian Reformed Church, n.d.). Over the years, while the community has increased in ethnic and denominational diversity, a majority of staff and students still have a Dutch heritage of some kind. Key characteristics of the community have remained, even as diversity has increased, including (a) an understanding that community members are responsible together for the education of children; (b) a belief that a Christian worldview should be integrated into every school subject, every part of life, and should impact the character of students and staff alike; and (c) a strong sense of responsibility to work towards the flourishing of people and of the world. Two of these characteristics can be seen in the HDCH mission and vision statements, which indicate that the goal of learning at HDCH is the growth in character of its students so that they can be “a faithful presence” (HDCH, n.d., Vision & Mission section, para. 2), serving their communities wherever they are and in whatever they do. It is this shared focus that forms the basis of the HDCH staff’s CoP.

Systems Analysis

It is useful to consider a systems analysis in the context of this inquiry because, as Wenger (2010) posited, “a community of practice itself can be viewed as a simple social system” (p. 1). The HDCH CoP, as a set of social learning relationships, is in fact a system or, depending how boundaries are drawn, a set of systems. For the purpose of this project, the boundary of the
system under analysis was the staff of HDCH, a group of 57 administrators, support staff, and teachers.

Like the HDCH CoP itself, the communication among staff can be considered as a system. As I developed this project, I considered the potential elements of a system of staff communications and created a preliminary systems map from my insider knowledge of the organization (see Appendix A). Based on my initial understanding, I believed that the desire for certain kinds of FtF communication was likely a symptom of deeper issues or needs, rather than a “fundamental condition” (Beckhard & Harris, 2009, p. 690) of the HDCH organization. There had been feedback from some staff that, at times, communication and decisions were perceived as being done to them rather than with them (Pries et al., 2018). In my preliminary analysis, I understood the key elements in the system of HDCH staff communication to be trust, relationships, different perspectives on the role of leadership, and beliefs about decision-making. I hypothesized that Leadership Team members and some staff had different perspectives on the role of leadership. I believed that leaders set direction and communicated the direction and that the way staff received that communication depended on their understanding of leadership, their trust in and relationship with organizational leaders, and their alignment with the school’s direction. I now realize that this preliminary analysis of the system of staff communication missed some very important elements that became clear through the inquiry process. It was important throughout this inquiry for me to stay open to what fundamental conditions might be underlying the feedback from staff about communication. I will discuss this learning in Chapter 5.
While schools do have entrenched power structures (Yoon, 2018), as a small, independent, faith-based school, HDCH has a nimbleness that allows the organization to shift its structures in ways that might be more challenging in a larger setting. One example of this agility is the new Principal’s recent institution of a monthly, all-staff meeting in order for staff to engage in FtF dialogue. Once per month, the weekly Collegial Connections professional development time is now an all-staff dialogue experience. The organization had moved away from such meetings in the past several years. This is an example of a change in first-chair leader being a point of leverage (Stroh, 2015) for organizational change. So far, staff members have expressed appreciation for these opportunities to convene and converse.

**Personal Significance**

In my own leadership and learning, I have discovered the importance of mutual inquiry to personal growth and effective relationships (Short, 1998). For me, this capstone project focused on an area with great potential to make the school community (and so our ability to carry out our mission and vision) even better. My intention for this project was to contribute to positive change by using methods that involved FtF communication for information gathering, so we could practice what we hoped to improve. Ultimately, I aimed to provide leadership that would support positive change in the school’s CoP and that would address conditions underlying the current state of HDCH’s FtF communications.

In terms of goals for my own growth, I hoped to learn how to effectively practice action research and lead people through structures that promote engagement and collaboration (Kaner et al., 2014; Lipmanowicz & McCandless, 2013). I hoped to grow in my understanding and application of systems thinking (Senge, 2006). I wanted to develop in first-, second-, and third-
NURTURING OUR COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

person inquiry (Reason et al., 2014). I hoped to contribute to academic conversations about leadership, organizations, and communication through what I learned during this inquiry project. Also, I wanted to be part of an increasingly meaningful, dynamic community of staff dedicated to the mission and vision of HDCH (n.d.): cultivating character through learning for lives of service to God, so that all HDCH students and graduates would live as a faithful presence in the communities where they serve.

Overview of Thesis

In order to address how this project answers the inquiry question, “By what means can the staff of HDCH nurture our CoP,” I began by engaging in a theoretical grounding for the inquiry; in Chapter 2’s Literature Review, I write about the themes of communities of practice, face-to-face communication, and servant leadership. In Chapter 3, I describe the details of the study itself, which include (a) the methodologies of action research engagement and insider action research; (b) the planning and use of narrative interviews and a World Café for data collection methods; (c) a description of project participants and study conduct; and finally, (d) the processes for data collection and validation of findings, the ethical implications of the study, and proposed study outputs. The study findings and conclusions are laid out in Chapter 4. Finally, in Chapter 5, I share the specific recommendations that I believe can help HDCH nurture its CoP, followed by the implications of this inquiry for the organization, and in closing, a summary of the thesis.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review for this study will focus on three topics: (a) communities of practice, (b) face-to-face communication, and (c) servant leadership.

Communities of Practice

As mentioned previously, my Partner and I initially talked about supporting the growth of FtF communication among staff as a way of building community. However, because our hope was for increasingly healthy relationships among staff as well as excellent, collegial work, communities of practice (CoPs) were a fitting focus for this inquiry. The CoP theme aligned with the Principal’s desire for an increasingly collegial community.

What is a CoP?

A CoP is a “social learning system” (Wenger, 2010, p. 1) or a network of relationships through which members make meaning, know, and develop their identities. Wenger (1998) developed the concept of CoP in relation to a “social theory of learning” (p. 4) to describe the social rather than organizational structures in which learning happens. Lave and Wenger (1991) went so far as to claim that learning does not happen outside of a CoP. Kerno and Mace (2010) noted other common CoP characteristics, which include (a) continuous, mutual relationships; (b) common consensus of membership; (c) shared domain of interest; (d) common practices; and (e) shared language shortcuts. Kerno and Mace argued that CoPs are “inherently organic, natural, and informal” (p. 84) and that organizational hierarchies can work against them. While CoPs exist in and sometimes across organizations, they are “not intrinsically beneficial or harmful” (Wenger, 1998, p. 85); their impact on an organization depends on the health of the CoP.
When Cox (2005) reviewed four key works about CoPs—J. A. Brown and Duguid (1991), Lave and Wenger (1991), Wenger (1998), and Wenger et al. (2002)—he found they were similar in how they emphasized “situated negotiation of meaning and the importance of identity in learning” (p. 536). However, there are different perspectives on the way CoPs are understood. Cox demonstrated that these four works diverged in significant ways, including in their definitions of the key terms community and practice. As noted in Chapter 1, for the purposes of this inquiry, a CoP is defined as “[a group] of people who share a concern, a set of problems … and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4).

**Structure**

A CoP has three elements to its basic structure: “a *domain* of knowledge … a *community* of people who care about this domain … and the shared *practice* they are developing to be effective in their domain” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 27). First, the domain element is “not abstract … but consists of key issues or problems that members commonly experience” (p. 32). For example, in the case of HDCH, the domain is high school education; it is around this shared area of interest that staff gather. When the goals and needs of an organization intersect with what members are passionate about, that creates a domain that is “a potent source of energy and value” (p. 32) for a CoP.

The second element is community. In this context, community is “a group of people who interact, learn together, build relationships, and in the process develop a sense of belonging and mutual commitment” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 34). In fact, community is all about belonging: Block (2008) described two meanings for belonging in the context of community. He stated that
first, belonging is about being part of something, and second, that belonging is about ownership. As he put it, “to belong to a community is to act as a creator and co-owner of that community” (p. xii). Of course, belonging in community is not disconnected from broader social systems, many of which perpetuate inequality, that exist in the contexts outside of CoPs. While Wenger (2002) did not specifically address issues of power, hooks (2003) declared, “To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination” (p. 36). Community is not uncomplicated, and CoPs do not exist outside of such unequal socialization.

The final element is practice. It is important to distinguish the practice of a CoP from practices (e.g., the “communication practices” that are part of the inquiry sub-questions laid out in Chapter 1), which are specific series of activities that may be performed repeatedly (Pickering, 1995). In contrast, the practice of a CoP is more about process and is emergent from its community (Raelin, 2016). While Wenger et al. (2002) defined a CoP’s practice as “a set of common approaches and shared standards that create a basis for action, communication, problem-solving, performance, and accountability” (p. 38), Raelin (2016) described it as “a coordinative effort among participants who choose through their own rules to achieve a distinctive outcome” (p. 3). What these definitions have in common is that practice is shared, belongs to a community, and is oriented towards achieving a purpose together. While this description may be true in the context of CoPs, there are many different uses for and understandings of this practice in everyday language (Kemmis et al., 2014). I believe it is useful to consider practice in even broader terms, such as described by Kemmis et al. (2014):
A practice is a socially established cooperative human activity in which characteristic arrangements of actions and activities (doings) are comprehensible in terms of arrangements of relevant ideas in characteristic discourses (sayings), and when the people and objects involved are situated in characteristic arrangements of relationships (relatings), and when this complex of sayings, doings and relatings “hangs together” in a distinctive human social project. (p. 52)

A practice is complex in its relationships to the community from which it emerges, and it exists in relationship more broadly to the conditions around it. Kemmis et al. (2014) argued that practice is held in place by practice architectures: (a) material-economic arrangements that support doings, (b) cultural-discursive arrangements that support sayings, and (c) social-political arrangements that support relatings. While Wenger et al. (2002) considered practice more locally in terms of a CoP, Kemmis et al. used a critical theory lens and considered practice as it relates to the broader society. The practice of HDCH’s CoP—which is focused on Christian high school education—is shared, belongs to the community, and is oriented to achieving a purpose; at the same time, it is not disconnected from material-economic arrangements (e.g., philanthropy of our support community), cultural-discursive arrangements (e.g., Western, North American culture), and social-political arrangements (e.g., relationship to government bodies).

Benefits

Healthy, effective CoPs provide many potential benefits to organizations. Kerno and Mace (2010) described several, including increased “ownership over outcomes… [and] sense control over direction” (p. 86) among members, as well as a strengthened sense of belonging through “the cultivation of unity” (p. 89). In fact, they argued that a healthy CoP can be a
“mechanism to optimize success” for an organization (p. 89). Participation in a CoP can lead to a strong “horizontal accountability … through mutual commitment to a learning partnership” (Wenger, 2010, p. 13) among its members, which may be more powerful than vertical or hierarchical accountability. These benefits are largely from the perspective of the organization rather than that of its members.

How can you tell if a CoP is healthy? Wenger et al. (2002) shared two indicators: first, member engagement is voluntary; and second, leadership emerges from within the CoP. A healthy CoP has trusting relationships so it is able to manage dissension; members can use disagreement and conflict to “deepen their relationships and their learning” (p. 37). According to this perspective, CoPs without any conflict might be in danger of becoming unhealthy. Wenger et al. also suggested that organizations can encourage health of CoPs by ensuring there is an environment of valuing the learning in CoPs, making resources available, and “encouraging participation, and removing barriers” (p. 13). Without such an environment, CoPs will still exist, but may not be aligned with organizational goals, and thus, advantages to the organizations may be lost. A Community Assessment Toolkit or CAT was developed by Verburg and Andriessen (2006) as a method of CoP assessment. This tool, based on CoP and group dynamic theories, measures such aspects as “formalisation and support by management … knowledge processes, social identity, cohesion and willingness to share” (pp. 16–17). These measurables are also indicators of CoP health.

While Wenger et al. (2002) largely considered the benefits of a healthy CoP from what Cox (2005) described as a “managerialist stance” (p. 527), the benefits to its members should be considered as well. In a review of workplace communication literature, Sias (2014) summarized
that workplace relationships “characterized by emotional and affective bonds” (p. 383) were connected with positive outcomes, such as enhanced commitment by employees, reduced turnover, increased organizational learning and creation of knowledge, and improved performance. These kinds of personal benefits may be more meaningful for CoP members than organizational benefits. CoPs that are recognized as “successful” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 17) provide value to not only the organization, but also its members.

Healthy relationships benefit both employees and the organization. These horizontal relationships create the kind of accountability that DuFour et al. (2008) extended more prescriptively with the principle of collective commitments: a key element of professional learning communities. Collective commitments are shared values of a professional learning community, clarified and committed to by members; they are meant to mobilize the mission and vision towards shared action for change, to focus on how each member can contribute: “When people have made promises to each other, they are more likely to honor those promises and hold each other accountable” (p. 155). In a similar vein, Kegan and Lahey (2001a) described “public agreements” (p. 103), or collectively determined commitments to organizational integrity; these are meant to support fairness, attentiveness, and competence. Making such commitments or agreements together supports the kind of horizontal accountability that exists in a CoP.

**Challenges**

A key challenge found in CoP literature is the diversity of understandings about important terms. Another challenge has to do with perspective and ownership: Is it organizations or CoP members who get to determine whether a CoP is healthy and effective? From a managerial perspective, Kerno (2008) offered three potential challenges to successful
implementation of CoPs. First, he posited that “increased work demands” (p. 74) in North American work culture may limit the time necessary for “informal and natural” (p. 74) activities of a CoP. He suggested that less time for connections with others would impact effectiveness; I would add that reduced time would impact the quality of connections between people, which is a factor that will be addressed further in Chapter 4. Second, Kerno, and later Kerno and Mace (2010), argued that the success of CoPs depends on the “socio-cultural environment” (p. 86) of the organization; CoPs are less likely to be effective in individualistic cultures. In the context of HDCH, with its history of shared responsibility for the education of children and its common Christian worldview, I believe that there is a less individualistic bent than might be typical in North American organizational culture. HDCH was begun through the collaboration of a group of people and is still governed by a Board of Directors elected by its society’s members. HDCH has always been a group project.

Third, from a managerial perspective, Kerno (2008) suggested that organizational hierarchies may work “at cross-purposes” (p. 75) to CoPs and inhibit their success. Kerno and Mace (2010) and Pyrko et al. (2017) would similarly note that a challenge of CoPs is that they cannot be created or implemented from the top-down. In contrast, Wenger et al. (2002) suggested that CoPs can be implemented or that at the very least, leaders can work to support CoPs that already exist. According to Page et al. (2016), it may be possible for leaders to support belonging through the development of a network of relationships by implementing formal structures for learning. A CoP may be such a structure. Verburg and Andriessen (2006) addressed the challenge of management-member ownership when they asked, “To what extent should management be managing a CoP?” (p. 16). They answered that the extent of management
is determined by the type of CoP, but that generally, some management facilitation is necessary for continuity, while too much oversight could quash the potential for innovation. This seems to be a difficult balance to strike in organizations and in the study of CoPs. A final challenge of CoPs is related to ownership and management involvement. If the vision of a CoP is presented as being without conflict, this vision could become “a new norm to impose on participants” (Cox, 2005, p. 536) rather than an opportunity for learning and growth.

**Face-to-Face Communication**

Face-to-face (FtF) communication is any verbal and/or non-verbal interaction that happens between or among individuals. The inclusion of the theme of face-to-face communication reflects the desires staff expressed in the audit report for HDCH (Pries et al., 2018) and the focus on growth in relationships.

**Attributes**

FtF communication has a number of attributes. First, it is “the richest medium” (Men, 2014, p. 269), fulfilling Daft and Lengel’s media richness characteristics: “immediacy … the use of verbal and nonverbal cues, natural language … and personal focus” (as cited in Men, 2014, p. 269). As these characteristics demonstrate, FtF communication is much more than a verbal exchange. Hearing others’ voices helps people to perceive them as fully human and fully capable; in particular, when people disagree, “paralinguistic cues” (Schroeder et al., 2017, p. 1746) in the voice allow interactants to hear emotion, infer intention, and recognize others’ “humanlike capacities” (p. 1746) and intelligence in a way that one does not through written text.

FtF communication is also the site where language and social norms are maintained (Locher, 2004a) through the “day-to-day activity” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 53) of
interpersonal interaction. While FtF interactions shape relationships to others, they also impact the individual. The process of FtF communication is a process of identity creation and negotiation, a process which is also part of CoP participation. This identity creation is referred to as face; rather than the physical faces participating in the conversation, face in this context is “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself” (Goffman, as cited in Locher, 2004a, p. 59). Face may also be described as “a self-image or mask” (Locher, 2004b, p. 322) that individuals construct for themselves and for each other as they communicate. Face is by necessity social; it depends on others’ recognition for its existence. In fact, Locher (2004a) claimed that “the negotiation of face” (p. 11) is part of any interpersonal interaction, and Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) stated that “identity work is done primarily [emphasis added] in face-to-face interactions” (p. 59). FtF communication exists within the context of relationships and as a social process where people make meaning and create identity. Communication scholars have conceptualized relationships as “communicatively constituted” (Sias, 2014, p. 378); in other words, interpersonal communication is the site where a relationship is created. Relational work is the term for this negotiation of social relationships through FtF interaction; it is “the process of shaping relationships in interaction by taking [self-image, or self-created identity] into consideration” (Locher, 2004b, p. 322). Negotiating social relationships does not necessarily maintain harmony because it includes any behaviour from polite to neutral to impolite (Locher, 2004a).

Much relational work goes unnoticed because it is unmarked (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003): that is, it is made up of communication habits that people perform automatically and that are often guided by the social and linguistic norms of their communities (Locher,
2004a). One set of norms that vary from community to community are those around conflict. Reitz (2015, p. 174) wrote that norms of interaction that “privilege empathizing, being polite and finding common ground together” could result in important issues remaining unaddressed, individuals choosing not to speak openly, and the possibilities for meaningful connection being reduced. As Parker (2019) asserted, “Human connection is as threatened by unhealthy peace as by unhealthy conflict” (5:20). When it comes to dialogue, exploring difference can be an important part of relationship building.

Reitz (2015) proposed a theory of leader-follower encounter in order to direct “attention towards … the complexity and richness of being in relation” (p. 224). An FtF interaction holds meaning for us as human beings, meaning and emotion that are part of the whole experience beyond the words people say, the paralinguistic cues people share, the face people present to each other, and the norms people hold to or challenge. Reitz argued that the difference between having meaningful, dynamic interactions and transactional ones, in particular between leaders and followers, may be in part both the way leadership is understood and social constructions of busyness and worthwhileness: “An addiction to heroic leadership constructions coupled with a frenzied pace of life can lure us into transactional encounters whereby possibilities of dialogue and creative thinking together are extinguished” (p. 2). Unfortunately, at present, little research has focused outside the leaders’ experience or beyond the leader-follower dyad (Reitz, 2015).

**Face-to-Face and Communities of Practice**

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) claimed that “an important link between each individual’s experience and the larger social order is the structure of participation in communities of practice” (p. 57). They went so far as to state that personal identity is
“inseparable” (p. 58) from participation in a CoP. Because CoPs function as “speech communities” (p. 56), they are where people learn how to engage in FtF communication and therefore linguistic and social practice. They are where people experience relationships and “jointly make sense of … social order” (p. 58). It is in CoPs that people develop culture or “shared, tacit assumptions” (Schein, 1996, p. 19), which can have either positive or negative impacts on a CoP, and it is in CoPs where the “social appropriateness” of communication is driven by culture (Bakar & McCann, 2016, p. 36). One simple example of this is that the understanding of politeness varies among communities (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). It is clear that language and communication are critical elements of any CoP and thus any organization. As Kegan and Lahey (2001a) noted, “Work settings are language communities” (p. 8), and as such, FtF communication is an important focus for leaders.

**Face-to-Face and Leadership**

Organizational leaders “[lead] language communities” (Kegan & Lahey, 2001, p. 8); in fact, leaders can play a “galvanizing role” (Men, 2014, p. 271) in the way members of an organization communicate. Not all leadership styles have the same impact however. Transactional leadership and transformational leadership are two very different styles, which were initially described by J. M. G. Burns (1978) and then further explored by B. M. Bass and R. Bass (2008), among others. Transactional leadership is an exchange where a leader “offers rewards [to followers] in return for compliance and performance” (Jackson & Parry, 2011, p. 31). In contrast, transformational leadership is where a leader connects with followers around a shared moral purpose and is focused on longer-term aims (BusinessBalls.com, n.d.). Men (2014, p. 264) found that transformational leaders often use “information-rich face-to-face
channels” to communicate with followers. Men confirmed that FtF communication had a “small positive effect” (p. 278) on employee satisfaction—employees felt listened to, cared for, and empowered. Servant leadership, a variety of transformational leadership, was originated by Greenleaf (1977), which is discussed in more detail in the next section.

Bakar and McCann (2016) found that that work group managers who demonstrated servant leadership enhanced the organizational citizenship behaviours3 of their followers and that this enhancement was mediated by alignment between the managers’ and members’ relational and communication norms in dyadic, or one-on-one, communications. Through their study, they determined that there was empirical support for “the central roles of communication exchange processes in work groups” (p. 33). In contrast, Giri and Santra (2012) found that while FtF was positively correlated with transformational leadership, FtF did not necessarily predict organizational effectiveness. Most studies seemed to be about the leader or leader-follower dyad. In her overview of organizational communication research about workplace relationships, Sias (2014) found that such studies had a “substantial focus on supervisor-subordinate relationships … [compared to a] relative lack of research attention to peer relationships” (p. 381). However, it has been found that the quality of supervisor-subordinate relationships in an organization can impact the relationships peers have with each other: “Coworker communication [is] a key site of sensemaking and the social construction of fairness perceptions and peer relationships” (p. 383). Clearly, FtF communication in an organization matters, and how it functions among

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3 Organizational citizenship behaviours are behaviours (including, for example, altruism, courtesy, and conscientiousness) that are engaged in voluntarily, that cannot be mandated, and that contribute to the health of an organization (Kaya, 2015).
organizational members (as opposed to between a leader and a member) merits further exploration.

Servant Leadership

It was Greenleaf (1977) who first suggested that servant leaders could be powerful sources of transformation for hope in organizations. He described servant leaders as those who put others’ “highest priority needs” (p. 13) above their own, whose followers grow personally, and who understand that change begins within themselves, among other attributes. Laub (2010) put it more succinctly: Servant leadership is “an understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader” (p. 108). Based on a comprehensive review of 20 years of servant leadership scholarship, Eva et al. (2019) crafted this definition:

Servant leadership is an (1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community. (p. 114)

Eva et al. suggested that this definition reflects the distinctive “motive, mode, and mindset” (p. 114) held by servant leaders: (a) the motive is a desire to help others that comes from an altruistic character; (b) the mode is a focus on follower well-being and growth in various areas, including psychological, emotional, and ethical; and (c) the mindset is that of “a trustee” (p. 114), one who is committed to the members of their organization, making a meaningful difference for not only the organization, but also the individuals, communities, and social structures with whom the organization’s members engage. This framing of servant leadership
aligns with HDCH’s (n.d.) mission: Cultivating character (i.e., other-oriented approach) through learning (i.e., prioritizing of follower needs and interests) for lives of service to God (i.e., outward reorienting towards concern for others).

This focus on follower needs makes servant leadership unique among other values-based leadership approaches such as transformative leadership and Level 5 leadership (Collins, 2001; Greenleaf, 1977; Laub, 2010; Mayer, 2016; Sendjaya et al., 2008). Servant leadership is significant for this project because attributes of servant leadership such as “covenantal relationship” (Sendjaya et al., 2008, p. 406) align with HDCH’s identity as a Christian community (Sendjaya et al., 2008). As well, schools are places where authentic servant leadership and followership can result in a culture “where all voices are valued and supported by the web of relationships” (Crippen, 2012, p. 197), leading to a shared purpose and mutual influence.

What needs do servant leaders address? Mayer (2016) connected servant leadership to follower needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In contrast, Daft (as cited in in Patterson, 2010) noted several unspoken follower needs, including being heard and understood, having their inner greatness acknowledged, and being told the truth with compassion. No matter how needs are framed, servant leaders are described as being committed to followers’ best interests.

**Servant Leaders and Followers**

Servant leaders support follower well-being in many different ways. They relate with followers in a way that allows for “safe and strong relationships” (van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2010, p. 8), and for the development of “webs of relationships” (Crippen, 2012, p. 197) among
servant and leaders throughout the organization. As well, servant leaders demonstrate the virtue of love (Caldwell & Dixon, 2010; Patterson, 2010): for example, by listening and leaving room for silence (Greenleaf, 1977) and by acting according to moral and ethical principles (Sendjaya et al., 2008; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). van Dierendonck and Patterson (2015) have argued that compassionate (or unselfish, moral) love is in fact an antecedent of servant leadership; that such love provides an “underlying motivation” (p. 121) to serve. Additionally, Greenleaf (1977) argued that followers “grow taller” (p. 21) when their leaders empathize with and accept them, while encouraging them to perform to their full capability. In fact, a sense of personal mastery comes when followers are supported to “grow, develop, and succeed” (Mayer, 2016, p. 150) by servant leaders who value and develop people. So, the love and care from servant leaders is not strictly sentimental; it shows itself through leadership actions that support followers’ opportunities for personal growth. Part of this growth is the development of followers’ capacity for servant leadership. As Laub (2010) wrote, “Servant leadership assumes a shared leadership where everyone in the organization is responsible for exhibiting the key qualities of servanthood” (p. 107).

Responding to follower needs can be difficult when what followers need, what they think they need, and what leaders think they need diverge (Smylie & Murphy, 2016, p. 20). When followers have their needs met with love, the results include cultures of care (Smylie & Murphy, 2016); follower growth (Caldwell & Dixon, 2010; Greenleaf, 1977); and benefits such as job satisfaction, team effectiveness, trust, and safety (Laub, 2010). In a study of how people in a servant leadership organization experienced the practice of servant leadership, Ragnarsson et al. (2018, p. 5) found that followers described leaders who were accountable (i.e., willing to make
tough decisions, do the right thing, and slow the pace of work when facing “significant issues”) and an environment where people “care and help each other out” through openness, autonomy, and space to learn and develop.

Attributes of Servant Leaders

Servant leaders are responsible for their own development as well. They are reflective about their own place in history (Greenleaf, 1977) as well as about their role in the larger system of their organization and society: “The servant views any problem in the world as in here, inside oneself, not out there” (p. 44). As a result of such self-awareness, servant leaders can practice authenticity (Laub, 2010). They cultivate humility (Eva et al., 2019; Greenleaf, 1977; Sendjaya et al., 2008; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011), which might include considering themselves as followers. In the context of a school, Sergiovanni (2000) commented, “The purpose of leadership is to create a shared followership. … Leaders in covenantal communities function as head followers” (p. 167). Servant leaders are also attentive to themselves as leaders (Smylie & Murphy, 2016); they demonstrate gratitude, forgiveness, and altruism (Eva et al., 2019); and they have a responsibility to act in moral and ethical ways (Sendjaya et al., 2008; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Servant leaders not only do servant leadership in action, but their capacity for effectiveness relies on who they are—on their characters as servant leaders (Sendjaya et al., 2008).

Servant Leaders and Organizations

Servant leaders attend to the growth and well-being of their organizations. As Smylie and Murphy (2016) argued, “Organizational culture … can set expectations for caring action and interaction” (p. 14): Interpersonal and organizational caring are both responsibilities of servant
leadership. Servant leaders are stewards of their organizations, holding these institutions “in trust” (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011, p. 250). Servant leaders need to keep and share their dreams for the organization (Greenleaf, 1977), be committed to excellence (Caldwell & Dixon, 2010), and share their servant leadership in such a manner that its characteristics are both valued and evident throughout the organization (Laub, 2010). Servant leaders are responsible to build community “by emphasizing strong interpersonal relationships … within the organization” (van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2010, p.8); their modelling and teaching of how to relate with others can be a powerful force for change in their organization. This is particularly true because the formal and informal structural elements of an organization can help or hinder the development of servant leadership culture throughout it (Smylie & Murphy, 2016). Finally, servant leaders have “an overarching concern towards the well-being of the wider organizational stakeholders and the larger community” (Eva et al., 2019, p. 114); they take a perspective that is longer and broader than just their own organization and its members.

**Criticisms of Servant Leadership**

Greenleaf (1977) seemed to have made assumptions about how servant leaders develop; he wrote about “natural servants” (pp. 9, 17) whom he described as challenging inequity and practicing active listening. This idea that leaders are born has largely been discredited (Jackson & Parry, 2011) in favour of an understanding that leaders develop through practice (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). What leaders can become depends on their learning and experiences, not just on innate qualities. As well, van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) cautioned that if servant leaders focus too much on servant and not enough on leader, they risk overemphasizing the people aspect of this approach and underemphasizing the leadership aspect; they may neglect their
Responsibilities to the development of their organizations. Another criticism comes from an intersectional perspective: in one study, Liu (2019) found that some followers interpreted the servant leadership behaviours of a minority leader as servanthood, but not as leadership. She suggested that servant leadership may be co-constructed among leaders and followers and that socially constructed dynamics such as race, gender, age, sexuality, and more may impact how such leadership is interpreted. Finally, servant leadership literature tended to focus largely on people in leadership positions in organizations: Servant leadership measures focused on the leader-follower dyad (Eva et al., 2019), and studies tended to focus on leaders as well, rather than the experience of followers (Ragnarsson et al., 2018).

Responsibilities

In Greenleaf’s (1977) view, institutions led by servant leaders could become communities that challenge injustice, innovate for positive change, and extend care throughout society. He described that this shift to servant organizations is not entirely the responsibility of leaders: “The real enemy [to positive social change] is fuzzy thinking on the part of good, intelligent people, and their failure to lead, and to follow servants as leaders” (p. 45). While servant leadership is a follower-centred approach focused on follower needs, it does not absolve followers from participating in the work of positive change. If leadership is understood as “emerging from social practices” (Raelin, 2011, p. 196) as proponents of leadership-as-practice describe it, then responsibility belongs to everyone involved in work together.

Chapter Summary

As I explored the academic literature related to CoPs, FtF, and servant leadership, I discovered how interconnected these themes are in the complex conditions and actions that exist
in the spaces between people. A CoP is a network of relationships through which members make meaning, know, and develop their identities; it is where people share relationships, informal membership and belonging, a domain of interest, common language, and practices. For HDCH, the domain is faith-based high school education. The school’s practice is shared, belongs to all staff, and focuses on achieving collective goals. When CoPs are healthy, they are a powerful source for effective learning and good work, unity, horizontal accountability, and satisfaction for team members. Language and communication are a necessary part of CoPs; in the case of the HDCH staff, having some of that communication be FtF and in person has been very important. As staff members connect in this way, they create and maintain their language and social norms, they negotiate their identities, create relationships, and make sense of the social world of which they are part. These FtF spaces are complex and rich, and they are a place where leadership happens as well. Servant leadership, which is distinguished by its focus on followers’ needs, is important at HDCH because its characteristics align with the school’s Christian worldview: other-focus, compassionate love, ethical and moral principles, and desire to create positive change inside and outside an organization. While I found that by and large servant leadership literature has focused on the leader to the neglect of the follower and has not attended specifically to the potential impacts of intersectionality on leadership, I still believe servant leadership is the model that aligns most closely with leadership at HDCH.

In Chapter 1, I described the focus of this inquiry project and the context of HDCH. In Chapter 2, I provided an overview of the literature about communities of practice, face-to-face communication, and servant leadership. In Chapter 3, I provide detail about the inquiry process itself.
Chapter 3: Methodology

I designed this project as an engaged action-oriented research inquiry. In this chapter, I describe my methodology, and why I chose to combine Action Research Engagement with Insider Action Research; I specify the planning and use of Narrative Interviews and a World Café as my data collection methods; I give context about project participants and detail my Study Conduct; finally, I describe my processes for data collection and validity, the ethical implications of the study, and proposed study outputs.

Methodology

Action Research (AR) is “a process of collaborative enquiry carried out by people affected by a problem or concern, often using a cyclical process to increase their understanding of the real problem before moving towards a solution” (Sankaran et al., 2009, p. 181). In other words, AR methodologies involve four common threads: collaboration, or working together to co-create knowledge; location, that is, a specific community of people; iteration, or cycles of action and reflection; and transformation, or goal of positive change. For this inquiry project, I elected to use the “Action Research Engagement (ARE) model” described by Rowe et al. (2013, p. 8). This is a framework of cycles of engaged, action-oriented inquiry that connects to all four of the common threads, engaging participants through each stage from “Focus and Framing ... [through] Engaged Inquiry Methods, ... Reflection on Action, ... Evaluation of Action and Engage Forward, ... and Recontextualize and Reconstruct for Organizational Change” (Rowe et al., 2013, p. 21). Like other AR methodologies, ARE takes into account that relationships are the origin of one’s knowledge about one’s world and oneself (Gergen & Gergen, 2015). The relational, engaged nature of this approach connects with HDCH’s focus on healthy relationships
and culture of restorative practices (HDCH, 2008). Unlike other AR methods, however, ARE accounted for the time-limited scope of this inquiry project, which did not permit complete cycles of AR (Royal Roads University, 2019b).

While using the ARE model for this project, I also held an insider action research awareness throughout. Insider action research, while it aligns with other methodologies in its inclusion of the four threads noted above, is primarily distinguished from other methodologies by the positionality of the researcher. During insider action research, the researcher is a “complete member” (Coghlan & Shani, 2015, p. 47) of the organization: that is, they hold the dual role of researcher and organizational member. As a complete member of HDCH, insider action research awareness helped me to see the challenges and benefits of this kind of inquiry. Coghlan (2013) described three challenges faced by insider researchers: (a) preunderstanding, or continuing to develop proximity to one’s setting while maintaining enough distance or perspective to take a critical view as well; (b) role duality, or inhabiting the role of researcher as well as the role of organizational member; and (c) organizational politics, or managing relationships in the organization ethically and with purpose. Being mindful of these specific challenges helped me engage in reflexivity throughout the process.

There are not only challenges, but also many benefits to insider action research. There is a richness of understanding that I bring as a member of my organization; I have existing organizational knowledge and relationships (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007) that an external researcher would not. I also have “understanding in process” (p. 66) or knowledge about my organization that has been developed collaboratively with my colleagues as we carry out our
work. I also hoped to see some of the potential impacts of “insider in collaboration with other insiders” action research that Herr and Anderson (2005, p. 36) articulated:

These … efforts have several aspects in common: they engage in inquiry in ways that help the group move from working as isolated individuals toward a collaborative community; they seek to engage their members in learning and change; they work toward influencing organizational change; and they offer opportunities for personal, professional and institutional transformation. (pp. 36–37)

Collaborative community; learning; and personal, professional, and organizational change: I came into this inquiry with a certain nervous hope that this methodology could help support all these.

Finally, I also tried to attend to power in relationships as much as possible. Since reality is co-created and shared in relationship (Savin-Badin & Major, 2013), research can be viewed as collaborative “world making” (Gergen & Gergen, 2015, p. 401). This collaboration is not neutral, as relationships are impacted by economic, cultural, ethnic, gender, and other socially constructed realities (Lincoln et al., 2011). Relationships are also impacted by hierarchy and power imbalances, two factors that have a long history in schools as institutions (Yoon, 2018). I believed that any inquiry in my school would touch, in some way, on power.

Data Collection Methods

The two data collection methods used in this inquiry project reflect the relational nature both of the topic and of AR: (a) narrative interviews and (b) World Café. The methods were carried out in person, face-to-face (J. Brown & Isaacs, 2005b; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Both methods, which are defined and described in the following sections, help to fulfill the
“Stakeholder Engaged Inquiry Methods” stage of ARE, with a goal of engaging stakeholders in “actions of inquiry, data gathering and dialogue” (Rowe et al., 2013, p. 21). In addition to these two methods, I gleaned data from my own field journal and reflections.

**Narrative Interviews**

A narrative is “a story one tells of one’s lived experience” (Stauffer, 2014, p. 165); narrative interviews are interactions during which the researcher aims to “create relational and conversational conditions that invite the participants’ stories” (p. 179). These interviews were also a way of practicing FtF communication, thus supporting the purpose of this research project. As an insider, I was fortunate to have pre-existing relationships with all of the participants I interviewed. In fact, it was noted by the external Inquiry Team member who conducted two of the interviews that establishing rapport with participants took some time over the course of the interviews they conducted. As I was new to such methods, I leaned heavily on Wengraf (2001) for practical considerations about how to plan for and carry out an interview as well as Carlson (2010) regarding member checking. Five semi-structured (Savin-Badin & Major, 2013) narrative interviews (Kartch, 2017; Mazur, 2018) were conducted. Each interviewee was asked three main questions, and then some follow-up questions, which, while suggestions were provided, were at the discretion of the interviewer (see Appendix B: Narrative Interview Agenda).

While the narrative interviews involved a small number of people (five), they allowed for “developing understanding through an exploration of story, interpretation and discourse” (Savin-Badin & Major, 2013, p. 229) and made space for stories to be “co-constructed between researcher and participants” (p. 231). It is through narratives that personal and organizational identities are constructed (Kartch, 2017), which made this method ripe for discovering more
about communication and CoP. These narrative interviews provided opportunities for participants, including me as the researcher, to grow in mutual inquiry (Short, 1998). As well, narrative inquiry is highly relational (Barrett & Stauffer, 2012). Narrative interviews allowed for in-depth dialogue that surfaced stories related to the current state of FtF communication. Following the interviews, I analyzed the transcribed data for common plotlines (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). More information about narrative analysis and plotlines can be found in the Data Analysis and Validity section of this chapter. These plotlines became the basis for forming questions for the second method, a World Café.

**World Café**

A World Café (J. Brown & Isaacs, 2005b) is a “conversational process that helps groups of all sizes to engage in constructive dialogue, to build personal relationships, and to foster collaborative learning” (Tan & J. Brown, 2005, p. 83). Cafés incorporate FtF interaction and relationship development and allow for learning together. This World Café (which I called the “Collegial Café”) was designed as the key element of the “Evaluation of Action and Engage Forward” stage of ARE, inviting all interested staff to participate in dialogue about “best strategies and actions for moving forward” (Rowe et al., 2013, p. 21). Such dialogic interactions are a site for “relational work” (Angouri & Locher, 2017, p. 219): that is, staff collaboration through FtF communication was an opportunity for the creation and negotiation of both relationships (Angouri & Locher, 2017) and personal and organizational identity (Kartch, 2017). This method was a chance to do research as an “insider in collaboration with other insiders” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 36). Working towards stronger relationships fit with the ultimate goal of this project: nurturing our CoP. The Café brought together “diverse voices” (D. Burns,
2017, p. 435), supported “collaborative conversations” (The World Café Community Foundation Creative Commons Attribution, 2015, p. 1), and engaged participant attitudes and actions towards change (Rowe et al., 2013). The Café was designed to address two sub-inquiry questions: “What would ideal FtF communication among staff look like” and “What effective FtF communication practices might staff co-create?” These inquiry sub-questions were addressed through three rounds of small-group conversation, based on pre-crafted discussion questions, and a full-group share-out. The discussion questions, which were created from the narrative interview plotlines, can be found in Appendix C: Collegial Café Agenda.

**Journaling**

Throughout the project, I maintained a research journal in order to support my own learning and reflexivity. This journal included field notes and my own reflections. Reflexivity is crucial for “first-person practice” (Coghlan, 2019, p. 30), or attending to my own beliefs, values, assumptions, actions and interpretations. As well, journaling helped me attend to my role duality as an insider researcher (Coghlan, 2019). Finally, it helped me to make “self-referential observations” (Mazur, 2018, p. 1129) about my own participation and reactions as I led engaged research methods.

**Project Participants**

All HDCH staff, other than the Principal (who acted as my organizational partner and who was excluded for power-over reasons), and my husband (who works in the same organization) were invited to participate in the narrative interviews and Collegial Café project. This reflected a potential total of 55 people.
Narrative Interviewees

For the narrative interviews, I engaged staff members with a variety of roles at HDCH. I used purposive sampling or “the deliberate seeking out of participants with particular characteristics, according to the needs of the developing analysis and emerging theory” (Morse, 2004, p. 885). In this case, the characteristics in question had to do with role at the school. Invitations to participate were extended to all staff by the internal Inquiry Team member. I asked him to book up to five interviews on a first-come, first-served basis, with the following role make up: up to five teachers, up to two support staff, and up to one Leadership Team member. In the end, three teachers and two support staff participated in this method.

World Café

All staff, other than the Principal and my husband, were invited to participate in the World Café by the same internal Inquiry Team member. We had a limit of up to 25 participants, with no participation parameters based on their role at the school. Twenty-five would have been close to half the staff. In the end, we had six participants, two of whom had also participated in the narrative interviews. Café participation was lower than I hoped, in part, because of the time of year; the Café was held on January 20, which is at the end of our first semester at a time when teaching staff are completing assessments from the first semester and preparing for the second.

Inquiry Team

The Inquiry Team for this project consisted of four people: (a) a fellow student from my MA program, (b) an external interviewer, (c) an external facilitator, and (d) an internal member who is my colleague. I asked my fellow student to support me as an Inquiry Team member because she was also going through the process of an inquiry project and thesis writing, and we
have a long-time, congenial relationship. She supported the project by providing feedback to my research planning (e.g., participating in a practice interview, reviewing method questions) as well as to my data analysis and knowledge products. The external interviewer conducted narrative interviews with two participants to help with the mitigation of power-over concerns, which is addressed in more detail in the Ethical Implications section. I asked her to participate because she has a PhD in Education, experience with AR, familiarity with Christian education, and an arms-length relationship with my organization. The external facilitator who led the World Café is a friend, has a great deal of experience with facilitation, and has some knowledge of the HDCH organization, but no official relationship with it. Finally, the colleague who acted as the internal Inquiry Team member is a long-time teacher at the school who has a reputation for integrity and who has no power-over relationships with fellow staff. He participated by extending invitations to participants and tracking RSVPs. All members of the inquiry team signed an Inquiry Team Member Letter of Agreement (see Appendix D).

**Implementors**

My partner in this inquiry project, the Principal, has both the interest in and authority to support the implementation of recommendations towards change. While he is new to his role this school year, the Principal has been a Vice-principal at HDCH for the past nine years. He has provided feedback and insight through project planning and development by approving and giving feedback to project deliverables. He, together with the Leadership Team, is supporting implementation of the recommendations for change. The Principal is enthusiastic about increasing staff engagement. He “views the project as a priority” (Royal Roads University, 2019a, p. 1) and is in a position to support both the inquiry project and the implementation of its
findings. I continue to be grateful to have an organizational partner who is enthusiastic and who is invested in growing a culture of staff engagement. As well, some members of the HDCH Leadership Team were participants in the World Café and have shown investment in the findings and the work of nurturing the school’s CoP. My hope is to engage more staff members in moving forward to implement the recommendations.

**Study Conduct**

In November 2019, my request for ethical approval for this inquiry was approved. Shortly thereafter, I held a pilot interview with one of my Inquiry Team members. With feedback from that interview, as well as from my project Partner and my supervisor, I finalized the narrative interview questions (see Appendix B). The internal Inquiry Team member sent out email invitations to participate to the HDCH staff (see Appendix E: Research Project Information Letter and Appendix F: Email Invitation to Participate in Narrative Interview). The internal Inquiry Team member tracked RSVPs; we had five participants. He arranged for two participants to have their interview with the external Inquiry Team member and managed their consent forms (see Appendix G: Consent Form for Narrative Interview) in order to maintain confidentiality. I managed the consent forms for the people I interviewed.

The semi-structured narrative interviews were held in December 2019. The same agenda and initial questions were used for all the interviews (see Appendix B: Narrative Interview Agenda). While follow-up questions were suggested, there was room left for the co-creation of conversation between interviewer and interviewee in the moment. The interviews were audio-recorded, and then transcribed and sent to participants for a member check. I then analyzed the transcribed data for plotlines; these plotlines were used, together with suggestions from J. Brown
and Isaacs (2005a, 2005b), to shape the questions for the next data collection method, the Collegial Café.

Ahead of the Café, I shared my draft Café discussion questions and agenda with my thesis supervisor, my organizational partner, and the external facilitator for feedback (see Appendix C: Collegial Café Agenda). The internal Inquiry Team member emailed the invitation to participate to the HDCH staff (see Appendix E: Research Project Information Letter and Appendix H: Invitation to Collegial Café). When the RSVPs initially came in slowly, the internal Inquiry Team member sent a follow-up email, and I also placed a paper invitation in staff mailboxes as well (see Appendix H: Invitation to Collegial Café). We had six participants: one teacher, two Leadership Team members, and three support staff. Two Café participants had also been interviewees, so there were nine participants total in the inquiry project as a whole. With six at the Café, we were able to have two different groups of three for each of the three conversation rounds. I collected the consent forms from participants the morning of the Café (see Appendix I: Consent Form for Collegial Café).

Data from the Café were collected via Conversation Summary Sheets (see Appendix J), table notes, my own observations, and the rich pictures (Armson, 2017) created by participants in the Share Out round of the Café. For data analysis, I summarized the Conversation Summary Sheets and my notes and interpreted the rich pictures. I emailed the full summary to all Café participants for a member check (Carlson, 2010) before I began analyzing the data. In response to the member check, one participant provided some clarification to my interpretation of one of the rich pictures. In addition to a member check, this connection served as a reminder of what
they described as meaningful conversations together with colleagues, and I wrote to them that I hoped it would encourage them and remind them of what they had experienced at the Café.

At different points in the process, I shared what I was finding with my organizational partner and also on one occasion with the school Leadership Team. What I shared included an overview of my narrative interview data analysis with the whole Leadership Team and then analysis of the Café data with my organizational partner. Some members of the Leadership Team were also inquiry participants; at the time, I found it tricky to determine what to share, as they were, in a sense, in two roles at once. I had an additional meeting with the Leadership Team to share initial findings and conclusions as well as to collaborate about inquiry recommendations. They are participating in the plan for implementation.

**Data Analysis and Validity**

Qualitative data analysis is an ongoing inquiry process “by which you: decide what data means; decide what story the data tells you, and decide what other stories in the data you’ll pay attention to” (Nelems, 2018, Slide 7). Throughout the inquiry process, I looked for stories of the HDCH staff, the school’s CoP, and current FtF communication as I analyzed narrative interviews, Collegial Café participant notes and summary conversation sheets, and field journals. Because engaging deeply and frequently with the data is critical (Nowell et al., 2017; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018), I transcribed the three interviews that I conducted, while the other transcriptions were managed by the external Inquiry Team member in order to protect the confidentiality of those participants. Because this inquiry process is emergent and ongoing, the methods I used for ongoing data analysis (Saldaña, 2009) were modified during the process in order to suit the data (Stauffer, 2014) and ensure the inquiry questions were addressed.
The choice of analytical approach depends on the context of the inquiry and is “invented within the context of each study” (Barrett & Stauffer, 2012, p. 179) based on factors such as the type of data and the researcher’s expertise (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) and the research methods and inquiry questions (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). As this inquiry project has included more than one methodology, what Hollingsworth and Dybdahl (2007) described as a “bricolage of … stances” (p. 153), I used various methods of analysis.

For the narrative interviews, I entered the transcripts into ATLAS.ti and performed manual holistic-content analysis as per Lieblich (1998): I read the interview transcripts over five or more times, being attentive for macro patterns; I made note of “global impressions” (p. 62); I coded the text and developed the codes into themes. I then recoded to reduce the codes to a manageable number. After that, I chose foci of content or themes that could constitute plotlines, and finally, I considered how the themes related to one another throughout the texts. Coding is “an interpretive act” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 4), a process that allows for movement from the reality of data to the abstraction of key themes or concepts (Chenail, 2012a). Coding involves dividing data into “units of analysis” (Chenail, 2012b, p. 266) whose qualities are then described with a word or phrase that captures their essence in some way. These units may be as small as single words and as large as whole sections of a text. My units tended to be the length of sentences or paragraphs.

For the Café data, I transcribed the summary sheets and uploaded them to ATLAS.ti along with my notes and rich picture descriptions. I coded them manually; coding is well-suited to researchers who, like me, are new to such inquiry (Nowell et al., 2017). There are many kinds of coding to choose from. Initially, I thought I would focus on coding “units of social
organization” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 14) because this inquiry was focused on relationships, both CoPs as a network of relationships and FtF communication. However, I found that descriptive coding “which summarizes the primary topic of the excerpt” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 3) was more useful. I found that the codes trended by Café conversation question, so I grouped them into themes, which are “abstract constructs that link … expressions found in text” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 87). I generated these themes inductively from the data and used the themes, along with quotes from participants, to create a summary of the Café conversations. As part of this summary, I also wrote a text interpretation of the rich pictures from the harvest round of the Collegial Café and coded that text. In order to validate the summary, I sent the document to all participants for their feedback. During this member check, I did receive some feedback about interpretation of one of the rich pictures, and I adjusted the text according to the request from the member who noted it.

Throughout my analysis, I worked to pay close attention to my role as researcher because, as Chenail (2012a) affirmed, “you as the researcher must manage yourself throughout the entire enterprise as you perform as the primary analytical instrument (Patton, 2002)” (p. 248): I attended to and recorded my own thinking and interpretations and considered how my perspectives impacted what I saw. For this reason, I kept field notes throughout the iterative (Saldaña, 2009) and recursive (Barrett & Stauffer, 2012) process of coding and theming in order to track my thinking, articulate my assumptions (Nowell et al., 2017), and make my thinking accessible to others. This was particularly important because qualitative data analysis is not only the analysis of data, but also “the analysis of the analysis of the data” (Chenail, 2012a, p. 248). I hope that my reflexivity and recursivity show that any conclusions or recommendations are
defensible, that they are “fair and plausible interpretations … well-grounded in the evidence” (Mazur, 2018, p. 1129). Schwandt et al. (2007) described this validity of interpretation as “authenticity” (p. 20). To be authentic, my methods of analysis and the analyses themselves must honour the inquiry questions, the data, and the participants who have so generously shared their data with me.

**Ethical Implications of the Study**

Ethics review of this project affirmed that participating in the interviews and the Collegial Café posed minimal risk to the staff of the school. The potential benefits of strengthening communication, relationships and community among staff outweighed any risk they may have experienced. I worked to minimize risk in the following ways. First, I ensured respect for persons by having an internal Inquiry Team member, a colleague outside of the Leadership Team, invite participants to the interviews and Café. Consent forms were signed to ensure clarity, and participants were reminded of ongoing consent throughout the process (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, 2014). Second, I guarded the welfare of participants by mitigating power-over. I did not interview two staff who report to me directly; instead, the internal Inquiry Team member who extended invitations and tracked RSVPs connected them directly with the external interviewer. This external Inquiry Team member conducted the interviews, sent the data to a third-party transcription service, ensured identifying information was removed, and performed the member check. As well, in the World Café setting, the Principal did not participate; hosting at tables was done by participants; and an external facilitator led the event, so my role was strictly that of resource and observer.
In order to ensure the just treatment of staff, all were invited to participate in the World Café, other than the Principal and my husband. In terms of justice, I noted in the invitations that my husband works for the same organization (of which all staff were aware). While we have no organizational power-over or power-under relationship, it was important for me to ensure confidentiality of participant identities, their data, the storage of that data, and to assure participants of that confidentiality. Finally, I identified reporting relationships and the mitigating actions I took to diminish the existence of any potential conflicts of interest. While this inquiry has allowed me to complete my master’s degree, there was no motive for personal advancement in my organization because this degree does not open any such avenues for me at HDCH at this time.

Proposed Outputs

The Principal is enthusiastic about the prospect of staff co-creating change in the school’s FtF communications; he and the Leadership Team will support the implementation phase of this project. In a “What’s Next” meeting held with the Leadership Team in April 2020, they approved the direction of the recommendations and worked together to adjust some specifics, in particular, the timeline. It became clear during this meeting that the Leadership Team is excited about the prospect of growth for staff in this area, and a portion of the school’s August professional development days will include carrying out recommendations from this project. I will also present findings, conclusions, and recommendations to staff and to HDCH’s Board of Directors. Outputs for this project include documents and a presentation for HDCH’s school leadership and staff, a thesis paper, and possibly journal articles or presentations for additional
audiences. While the presentations will be the outputs for HDCH’s stakeholders, I have written this thesis in order to share my third-person learning (Coghlan, 2019).

**Contribution and Application**

The benefits to participants in this research project included increased voice, collaboration, and engagement (Rowe et al., 2013). The potential benefits to my partner, as Principal, included a better understanding of how staff members view collegial communication as well as improved relationships and community among staff as colleagues. A healthier staff CoP can likewise benefit students and their learning as well as parents. One participant in the Collegial Café made this connection, wondering aloud how an effective staff culture of FtF communication might flow out or “embody in my work and other spheres.” Further, as the goal of learning at HDCH is for students to live lives of service by working for good in their communities, increased health of community among our staff has the potential to ripple out to positively benefit the communities where our students, alumni, and their families live, work, and serve. Finally, I hope that what we have learned through this process will inform making changes that increase understanding of FtF communications among school staff and, as a result, healthier school CoPs.

**Chapter Summary**

I designed this project as an engaged action-oriented research inquiry. I chose to use action research engagement, a framework of cycles of engaged, action-oriented inquiry which is collaborative, cyclical, iterative, and supports growth towards positive solutions. As I am part of the HDCH staff, I likewise attended to insider action research methodology. These relational methodologies aligned with the relational nature of my inquiry project, as did the in-person, FtF
data collection methods of narrative interview and World Café. Data gathered from the interviews was analyzed for plotlines and used in the development of the World Café questions. I analyzed the World Café data for themes and summarized it. For both methods, participants had an opportunity for a member check. Together with my field notes and journal, the interview and café data informed my findings. The project participants totalled nine people from among the HDCH staff, and I attended to ethical considerations throughout the process in order to honour the humanity of all involved. An inquiry team of four people provided key support for the conduct of the study. The HCDCH Leadership Team, including the project partner, engaged in critical feedback and input to study findings and conclusions, which are detailed in Chapter 4, as well as to the recommendations and next steps, which are presented in Chapter 5.
Chapter 4: Inquiry Project Findings and Conclusions

The methodology, methods, participants, data analysis and validity, and proposed outputs described in Chapter 3 provide the context for what is presented in this chapter. Here, I lay out the study findings and study conclusions from this project as well as its scope and limitations.

Through this project, I sought to understand how HDCH staff could work together to improve their relationships, and so their CoP, as we encounter each other FtF. To answer the inquiry question, “By what means can the staff of HDCH nurture our CoP,” I engaged in data collection methods that I hoped would help answer the following inquiry sub-questions:

1. What are the stories HDCH staff tell about memorable successes their team of colleagues has had at HDCH?
2. What communication skills, practices, and underlying values would contribute to more effective team communication?
3. What would ideal FtF communication among staff look like?
4. What effective FtF communication practices might staff co-create?

Study Findings

After hearing beautiful stories of my participant colleagues’ meaningful team experiences and one-to-one encounters, and after hearing their dialogue around communication with each other, and considering their reflections on that experience, I distilled four findings:

1. Staff narratives shared common elements, demonstrating conditions that support meaningful interactions and the beneficial outcomes of interactions.
2. Staff members believe that practices and structures make a difference in the quality of their FtF interactions by impacting the supporting conditions.
3. Staff members believe that leadership and collaboration are necessary and often in tension with each other.

4. Staff described an ideal future culture of face-to-face communication that includes meaningful shared purpose, unity in diversity, and collaboration towards collective wins; the participants did not represent conflict or disagreement.

Finding 1: Common Elements

Staff narratives shared common elements, demonstrating conditions that support meaningful interactions and the beneficial outcomes of interactions. In December 2019, five narrative interviews were conducted as part of this project. Participants were asked to tell stories of memorable, fulfilling work initiatives with a team, of times when they experienced meaningful FtF interaction, and of times when they experienced such an interaction with an HDCH colleague (for full detail, see Appendix B: Narrative Interview Agenda). In response to these questions, my colleagues shared diverse stories of team engagement and FtF encounters.

Through holistic-content analysis as described in Chapter 3, I found ten codes that occurred most. See Table 1 for the codes, noting occurrences for each.
Table 1

*Most Common Narrative Interview Data Codes by Occurrence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerability</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared purpose</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance of the Whole Person</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invitational Culture</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Heard</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further, I found that these codes related to each other and formed common plotline elements of the narratives. (Codes are italicized below for ease of identification.) By and large, narratives of meaningful FtF interactions and team experiences, as expressed by participants:

- began with a *challenge* or opportunity of a personal or professional nature (or both),
- described an *invitational culture* that allowed for *vulnerability* (often mutual vulnerability),
- included acceptance of the *whole person*, a feeling of *being heard*, and effective *collaboration*,
- were threaded with *shared purpose*,
- involved *time*, whether regular meetings, serendipitous encounters, or unconstrained connections, and
• resulted in growth and/or personal connection that extended beyond the encounter described.

I found that, while most stories shared these plotline elements, the way they were constituted differed between team encounters and the FtF experiences described, which tended to be one-on-one. The best way to illustrate how these elements functioned in the narrative was by engaging with my colleagues’ stories. In this section, I have described, compared and contrasted the team narrative elements with the one-on-one, FtF narrative elements with examples from the data.

Team Narratives. Meaningful team experiences began with challenges or opportunities. Two examples of challenges shared with me were the need to respond to a student in crisis and the resignation of a staff team member at a busy time of year. Opportunities could likewise spark a meaningful experience: for example, the chance to reimagine an old, ineffective program or the occasion to share an exciting new initiative with a potential supporter.

These team narratives involved the themes of shared purpose and collaboration. Shared purpose made the work to support a student in crisis “a more fulfilling experience” (Participant 2). As described in this example: “I like the fact that we’re on a team … people who really want to see good things happen for kids…. It’s about making sure the whole person becomes who they can be” (Participant 2). In fact, shared purpose was connected by participants to collaboration. Participant 5 said that a shared work ethic “motivated me personally to help fill the gap of a vacant position, to take on things that weren’t related to my specific role for the benefit of our team.” So shared purpose impacted both the meaningfulness of teamwork for participants as well as their willingness to engage in it.
Team members were vulnerable and brought their whole selves to the task. One example from a previous school was shared by Participant 3, a more recent addition to the HDCH staff, who described taking a risk to share an idea they were passionate about with school leadership. This willingness to be vulnerable led to a successful initiative that a team of people supported into being. Participant 1 gave an example from HDCH. They experienced a “warmth and real sense of human connection” from their job interview at the school. This welcome allowed them to show up more fully in their connections with colleagues. In an encounter that involved disagreement, which was atypical for this inquiry project, Participant 4 had an experience of speaking up with a conflicting opinion in a room with several other staff. This participant felt that being honest in this way “probably made it a little uncomfortable at the time,” but was thanked later for their honesty and was encouraged by other staff that their voice improved the outcome of the matter at hand. There was room to share an honest opinion and have that received with grace.

Team narratives involved time working FtF. This could be the total amount of time as in the case of Participant 1 who was part of a new school start up. It could also be regularly scheduled time; three participants spoke to the positive impact of weekly team meetings on quality of work. These regular meetings allow for members “to actually be proactive rather than reactive” (Participant 2) as well as to practice collaboration.

Finally, meaningful team initiatives resulted in a growth of collaboration and connection among team members. “I’m proud of the work that we do together.... It’s not just that we have this great connection, but we’re performing as a result of that,” shared Participant 5. Participant 4 expressed that a meaningful team experience increased their own “expectations about what’s
possible” with other teams and other staff and, as well, created hope for more collaboration and engagement in those spaces. So as teams collaborated and connected, that collaboration and connection was seen to grow—even beyond the team in question.

One-On-One Face-to-Face Interactions. Unlike the team narratives, shared purpose and collaboration were not elements that participants described in their stories of meaningful, memorable FtF encounters. Like the team experiences, however, these interactions began with a personal or professional challenge, such as a health concern, a parent worried about their child, or a difficult interchange with a colleague. Alternately, they began with an opportunity, such as a mentoring relationship. As well, time showed up again as an important part of these interactions. In some cases, these encounters happened in regular meetings; more often, however, they occurred when someone was available: for example, someone who was in the same place at the same time so they could be found (as Participant 2) or in a moment when “our time [wasn’t] under pressure” (Participant 3).

As in the stories of team, these interactions included several of the same elements that created conditions for good: an invitational culture that allowed for vulnerability (often mutual vulnerability), acceptance of the whole person, and a feeling of being heard. Many participants spoke to these elements as being part of or conditions for their meaningful encounters. This was well illustrated in a story from Participant 5, who shared a health struggle with a colleague. The colleague then “not only said, ‘Wow, I understand,’ but went further to say, ‘This is how I’ve also experienced that,’ and built that trust by sharing and being vulnerable with me with [their] own experience.” Participant 5’s initial vulnerability seems to have provided an opportunity for their colleague to hear them, to accept them, and to be vulnerable in return, leading to a mutual
sense of being heard and acceptance of their whole selves. This interaction was particularly powerful, according to Participant 5, because it happened early in the working relationship.

As with the team stories, the result of these one-to-one encounters was growth. It may have been personal growth and understanding, as for Participant 5, who found that a meaningful engagement with a health professional at a critical time impacted the way they now support someone in their life who experiences anxiety. The growth may also have been in connection between people. Participant 3 reflected that a meaningful conversation with a former student “added another element to our relationship … [took] away the barrier of teacher-student.” Participant 1, who shared with new colleagues their story of navigating a child coming out as transgender, put it this way: “Anytime you have genuine acceptance in a place where you’re already feeling afraid, that … kind of makes me go, ‘I wonder if this level of acceptance is possible in more of my life?’” So not only was this growth in connection between a participant and others; there was a growth in their hope for greater connection in other parts of life as well.

**Finding 2: Practices and Structures that Impact Conditions.**

Staff members believe that practices and structures make a difference in the quality of their FtF interactions by impacting the supporting conditions. There were two phrases from the narrative interviews that I could not get out of my head as I considered what questions to create for the Collegial Café. Both phrases have to do in some way with practices. The first phrase was from Participant 1, who saw interactions in various FtF staff settings, such as weekly Thursday morning Professional Development time, PD days, even short lunch hour conversations, as “little building blocks that are just kind of helping me feel quite stabilized in my work … [that] could actually really build into something quite meaningful.” The second phrase was from Participant
2, who declared that “if we believe that … we all are gifted to have something to contribute, then there has to be an opportunity for us to let our voices be heard with each other.” So, the practices of “Little Building Blocks” and of “Being Heard” became Collegial Café conversation rounds (see Appendix C: Collegial Café Agenda). Please note that direct quotations in the Café data are unattributed; the anonymous conversation summary sheets included participants’ key learnings from each round of dialogue, as well as their notes on what other people had said, so I have not distinguished among participants.

**Little Building Blocks.** To spark conversation—and to provide a chance for participants to be “captivated by each other’s stories” (B. Page, personal communication, January 8, 2020)—the first question for discussion was: “One participant talked about interactions with colleagues as ‘little building blocks’ that could become ‘something quite meaningful’ over time. Describe a time when a small action or interaction was meaningful for you.” Café participants noted that though little-building-block-style interactions are often small, impromptu, and can “go unnoticed,” their absence is noticeable. In fact, without such encounters, interactions become “commodified” or about “task” rather than relationship. Participants described little building blocks as “vitally necessary” for the development of healthy, trusting relationships over time. While such encounters deepen relationships, they likewise may occur more readily where there is already trust. Participants recognized that little building blocks can be either positive or negative, and that in either case, they make an impact and “lay a foundation” for future relationship. Though most responses to this conversation had to do with relationships, participants also discussed that FtF conversations, even small ones, also “spark ideas” and can “cumulate to develop bigger ideas and better practice.” In other words, these encounters can also impact
staffs’ work. Participants saw value in reflecting on little building blocks. One participant noted that they planned in future to keep track of such encounters and revisit them, so the results of these interactions can “percolate and grow.”

Let Our Voices be Heard with Each Other. It is clear from the narrative interview data that being heard was a key element in meaningful FtF interactions. For this reason, the second World Café question was: “One participant said, ‘There has to be an opportunity for us to let our voices be heard with each other.’ What’s important to you about such opportunities to hear and be heard at HDCH?” Café participants observed that there are many benefits to being heard: it “helps individuals feel supported, affirmed and appreciated,” “is fundamental for building trust,” and “creates job satisfaction.” When people are engaged in this way, it shows them that they “and their gifts are not commodities;” it humanizes them. Participants discussed that having structures that support sharing voice in place, such as “big group, small group and one-on-one conversations,” could help facilitate being heard. Later in the Café, they came back to this idea, suggesting that new ways of relating could be supported by putting new structures in place, such as conversational structures and “guiding documents/principles for open sharing and discussions.” Participants felt that “structured conversations are important” to create a “safe space of respect,” a space where “no one dominates… and every voice is heard… before we respond with our own opinion.” They also asserted that it needs to be “ok to call someone out” if they break such structures.

On the table notes, one participant asked how they could “positively contribute without forcing my perspective, without resentment, creating opportunities, when the process doesn’t invite it [emphasis added]—to effectively make change?” Process can support or inhibit being
heard. Participants also observed that there is a “difference between hearing and being heard.” They discussed how hearing others is important because it creates “higher [personal] investment” and allows for a “range of ideas, reference points.” They voiced that this diversity is “good business” and “makes us better.” As one participant jotted on the table notes, “Why not learn from all the wisdom in the building?” They agreed that making space for multiple voices would support better organizational outcomes. As well, they stated that hearing and being heard help to build “consensus” when it comes to decision making.

The condition of shared purpose was another significant part of this Café conversation. Participants wrote that “real commitment and collaboration come … from the pursuit of a common purpose” and that hearing and being heard is fundamental to the pursuit of “a common vision.” They felt that “sharing thoughts, feelings, opinions, ideas regularly leads to deeper, more meaningful collaboration.” At the same time, they noted the challenges of building “a culture of a ‘collaborative win’” when people hold different perspectives. They voiced that even when all perspectives are heard, making decisions and keeping moving as an organization can still be complicated.

Participants agreed that from daily, informal “Little Building Blocks” to structured conversations that allow staff to hear each other and be heard by each other, both their relationships and their work improve. As participants noted, they get better at both the community and the practice elements of a CoP.

**Finding 3: The Necessity and Tension of Leadership and Collaboration**

Staff members believe that leadership and collaboration are necessary and often in tension with each other. Participants stated that leadership is a critical element in the area of
hearing and being heard, in particular in terms of decision making. Participants commented that it is important that there be clarity about “the steps of a decision and the process” in order to have “buy-in and peace” in the staff community, that “ambiguity [leads to] negativity.” If a decision “is already made,” then it is important that leaders “be careful not to suggest people’s voice can change it.” The job of a leader is to “bring everyone to the end point with grace.” On the table notes, one participant wrote that “process vs. people → disempowers.” I understood this to mean that any process that does not honour the humanity of people reduces their personal agency. Participants also discussed that leadership style is important; they talked about the difference between commanding (i.e., “one-way,” “Do this”), selling (i.e., “one-way,” “This is amazing and here’s why!”), and leading (i.e., collaborative, “Let’s do this together”). They observed that over time, there has been an increase in opportunities for conversation among staff. Participants felt that HDCH has had “a shift in narrative” and has “begun to align practice with this [dialogic] conversation model.” The example given to support this observation was a “culture of listening and common purpose” in weekly Collegial Conversations, in Professional Learning Teams, and in Department Heads meetings, which often include structured interactions.

Even with this shift in narrative, power emerged as an important consideration. One participant wrote, “God speaks through all of us—not just the experts,” and another noted the “power of experience, credentials.” In addition to spiritual authority, the weight of experience, and the gravitas that comes with education, participants recognized that positional power exists. They asserted that positional leaders have the responsibility to intentionally “create the vision and then share the vision” through various means. At the same time, they agreed that “leaders must be part of the team.” Participants also recognized that all staff hold responsibility; they
shared that there is an individual responsibility for staff members to “create opportunities to share their voice,” not leaving that only to leaders. In addition, they felt that on some occasions, staff members may need to let go of their “own agenda” and “not harbour resentment” if “sharing [their] opinion” doesn’t “change the outcome.”

Finding 4: Ideal Future

Staff described an ideal future culture of face-to-face communication that included meaningful shared purpose, unity in diversity, and collaboration towards collective wins; they did not represent conflict or disagreement. In the final round of the Collegial Café, participants co-created rich pictures (Armson, 2017) to represent the elements they envision in an ideal culture of FtF communication at HDCH. This activity was meant to answer the inquiry sub-question, “What would ideal FtF communication among staff look like?” There were two pictures created (see Figures 1 and 2).
Both rich pictures showed that in an ideal culture of FtF communication, HDCH staff members have a shared purpose, a shared why. One picture expressed that “why” coming from leadership (see Figure 1). Both pictures showed HDCH staff heading in a common direction together, while working in complementary roles: one picture shows leaders and followers; one picture shows different roles in its metaphors such as a soccer team with goalie, other players, sideline cheerers, implied coach (see Figure 2). Both pictures included reference to meaningful conversation. One picture focused more on the faith-based reason for staff’s shared purpose; it was titled “God-Centred Conversations” (see Figure 1). The other focused more on different
people coming together into a diverse but unified whole, through a variety of metaphors, including a puzzle, a piece of knitting, a rowing team (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Rich picture by Table 2.

Neither rich picture expressed conflict or disagreement as part of HDCH’s ideal FtF communication culture. In fact, conflict or disagreement was much less likely to be shared as part of meaningful FtF interactions in either the World Café or the narrative interviews. Of the more than 15 FtF stories shared in interviews, just two involved disagreement. One was where
Participant 4 asked a challenging question in a group setting, which was described as leading to a better outcome, and one where Participant 3 spoke about a successful follow-up with a colleague after a “passionate” (implied: difficult) exchange. Disagreement or tension, when discussed during the Café, was largely in connection with multiple perspectives and leadership direction or organizational execution. FtF experiences have “the potential to become divisive if not rooted in vision or contextualized in relationship,” cautioned one participant. Also, the organization’s ongoing conversation around how best to support students marginalized due to sexual orientation and gender identity was described as challenging due to “polarized opinions.” A few weeks after the Café, HDCH did in fact have staff Professional Development days, during which staff engaged in structured conversation on this topic.

During the Café conversations, participants noted that, in dialogue, everyone holds responsibility for how they choose to receive others: for example, by “not label[ling] people” in order to discount other perspectives; by listening for “the story behind the song” from others; and by allowing people to hold to opinions “without labelling them as ‘difficult.’” This responsibility applies likewise to how people choose to present themselves: for example, “figur[ing] out a way to be steadfast without being difficult.” These examples seemed to indicate that disagreement can be marked in the CoP as being in opposition to community or as connected to an identity of “being difficult.” One person reflected that this conversation reminded them of the “value to discuss, share, and then move to disagree and commit.” So, while conflict or differing perspectives did not appear in the ideal picture, their reality was reflected in the Café dialogue and, very briefly, in the narrative interviews. Participant 3 shared a uniquely hopeful perspective on conflict regarding their follow-up conversation to an earlier disagreement with a colleague:
“If we can actually meet each other in those hard places, then … that makes meeting each other in the joyful places better, I think.”

Summary

Through the data collection, I found that staff narratives shared common elements, demonstrating conditions that supported meaningful interactions and beneficial outcomes; that staff believed practices and structures like little building blocks and conversations that support being heard made a difference to the conditions for meaningful communication; that staff believed leadership and collaboration were necessary and could be in tension with each other; and that staff described an ideal future of FtF communication that included meaningful shared purpose, unity in diversity, and collaboration towards collective wins, but did not address conflict or disagreement as part of that.

Study Conclusions

In this section, I connect the four findings to my inquiry sub-questions and related literature about CoPs, FtF communication, and servant leadership. The conclusions for this inquiry project are:

1. **Conditions** for effective, healthy FtF encounters and CoP exist at HDCH.
2. HDCH has **practices and opportunities** that support the good conditions for effective FtF encounters, both strengthening staff relationships and growing their capacity to do good work in the HDCH domain.
3. Understanding of **leadership** and followership may be limiting some conditions that would nurture a healthier CoP.
4. Participants’ ideal future culture of FtF communication showed that HDCH staff value shared purpose and community and have room to grow in how they frame disagreement.

Conclusion 1: Conditions

Conditions for effective, healthy FtF encounters and CoP exist at HDCH. The best short answer to the inquiry sub-question 1, “What are the stories HDCH staff tell about memorable successes their team of colleagues has had at HDCH,” is “a lot of really engaging ones!” They shared stories with common elements which, as laid out in Chapter 4, offered the conditions that supported meaningful, successful teamwork and the positive outcomes that arose from such experiences. From what participants described, HDCH staff members have many strengths to build on in terms of its culture of FtF communication and its health as a CoP.

These spaces of FtF encounter are complex and rich; FtF is, after all, “the richest medium” (Men, 2014, p. 269) of communication. There are social, linguistic, and relational elements at play in any given interaction; in these encounters, language and social norms are maintained (Locher, 2004a), personal identity is created and negotiated (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003), and relationships are constituted (Sias, 2014). CoPs are “social learning systems” (Wenger, 2010, p. 1) where the “social appropriateness” (Bakar & McCann, 2016, p. 36) of communication is driven by culture, and participants in this inquiry described an invitational culture at HDCH. In their encounters, participants responded to that culture with vulnerability, helping to reinforce that culture and co-create its continued improvement. Engaging in what is good in the school’s CoP makes its CoP better. This proved to be true in team interactions as well as in one-on-one encounters. In this inquiry, there were many instances of individuals
experiencing an invitational culture, having time to connect, engaging in vulnerability, feeling accepted as a whole person, being heard, connecting to a shared purpose, collaborating, and experiencing personal or relational growth (refer to Study Findings). These FtF connections are critical elements of a CoP; doing these connections well nurtures relationships. Relationships—or community, which is a group of people in relationship—are intertwined with belonging (Block, 2008). The sense of belonging described by participants has provided evidence that in the school’s CoP, unity is being cultivated (Kerno & Mace, 2010) and that sense of belonging, strengthened. I went into these narrative interviews asking the question, “What communication skills, practices, and underlying values would contribute to more effective team communication,” but what I found in narrative interviews had more to do with conducive conditions rather than skills, practices, or values.

I believe the best way to illustrate what is good and beautiful about FtF and CoP at HDCH is with a narrative. The story of Participant 1, a more recent addition to the staff, showed this well. This participant’s experience of an invitational culture at HDCH began with their interview for their current job, during which they were:

able to be honest … about strengths and weaknesses and all those things, experiences in the past, and to feel a genuine sense of welcome … and to feel actually encouraged, and celebrated. As an interviewee, I was, I was stunned, … but the warmth and the real sense of human connection with, with the folks I interviewed with here, that I found quite touching. And I thought, “Well, maybe this isn’t going to work, but that sure was a nice interview.”
Then, early in Participant 1’s tenure at HDCH, they were having a lunchtime conversation with a couple of new colleagues. This participant has been navigating a complex family journey over the past few years, as one of their children has come out as transgender; this is often a fraught topic in Christian institutions, and so they have hesitated to share about their family in some settings. However, in this lunchtime conversation, Participant 1 took a risk and shared with two new colleagues that this story is part of their family’s experience. This was the response:

[One of them] asked me a question or two just to say, “Tell us what that’s been like?” I could see on both their faces, there was quite a—they weren’t jarred by it, but they were … somewhat touched by it. So, I felt like I could tell them a little bit about how that had transpired in my family and with our child, what the reality was like for us right now. This vulnerability resulted in one of the colleagues sharing a complex family journey of their own as well.

Further, Participant 1 experienced meaningful feedback about their work. After submitting their first set of report card comments, two Leadership Team members emailed them with specific, detailed appreciation: “For somebody who knows what they’re doing to lean in and say, ‘That was really well done,’ that means a lot.” So for Participant 1, from the Principal “making [them] feel safe” when they interviewed, to colleagues who made space for their family’s story, through to supportive and encouraging professional feedback, their experience showed that many of the necessary conditions for healthy encounters exist at HDCH. When staff individually experience those conditions, then like Participant 1, “anytime you have genuine acceptance in a place where you’re already feeling afraid, that … kind of makes me go, ‘I
wonder if this level of acceptance is possible in more of my life?" Such encounters strengthen the “emotional and affective bonds” (Sias, 2014, p. 383) among staff, and the web of relationships that is our CoP.

**Conclusion 2: Practices and Opportunities**

HDCH staff have many opportunities for practices that support good conditions and a culture of effective FtF encounters, both strengthening their relationships and growing their capacity to do good work our domain. The fact that so many good conditions for healthy encounter exist at HDCH is due in part to practices already in place, practices in the sense of a specific series of repeated activities (Pickering, 1995). It is the repetition that is significant here because time was a theme in both data sets as a condition that supported meaningful interaction, as demonstrated in the study findings. Reitz (2015) found that notions of busyness negatively impacted mutuality in dialogue, leading to encounters that were more transactional in nature. While it is common, in my experience, for staff to express being very busy and having limited time, HDCH staff have many regular opportunities for FtF communication with each other.

One of these regular opportunities is all-staff devotions at the start of each week, which staff members lead in turn. Another is the thrice-monthly, Collegial Connections professional development meetings that allow teachers and learning support workers to meet in their small group Professional Learning Teams. Once a month, all staff members connect for a dialogic Collegial Conversation. On Fridays after school, an optional staff snack time is held. In addition, there are monthly Department Heads and Department meetings and various teams and committees. HDCH also has a few Professional Development days each semester, which often include meals and meetings together. All these formal connections—several of which include
hospitality in the form of food, which serves to create a more engaging atmosphere (J. Brown & Isaacs, 2005b)—are in addition to the informal connections that happen day-to-day. These opportunities allow for communication practices, and as such, they are important to “collective learning, conflict and power, interpersonal relationships and meaning/interpretation” (Carroll, 2016, p. 100). Of course, the quality of dialogue as a “relational practice” (Gergen & Hersted, 2016, p. 179) makes a difference to if or how it nurtures relationships and the school’s CoP. When these practices, such as weekly team meetings, occur together with conditions that support connection, they are powerful. As an HDCH staff, members have many opportunities to learn together in relationship (Short, 1998), which in turn supports their relationships and the quality of their work.

Two specific ideas related to practice came up in narrative interviews and were discussed more in the Collegial Café (see Chapter 4). The first was “Little Building Blocks,” which are small FtF interactions. Participants explored the impact and possibility of these encounters through narrative and dialogue. Day-to-day interactions like these make up the school’s culture, and it is organizational culture that creates “expectations for caring action and interaction” (Smylie & Murphy, 2016, p. 14) in relationships. Participants described positive little building blocks as supporting relationship growth as well as contributing to new and improved practice of the work of high school education, as described in Chapter 4. Many of these small interactions are ones that we may perform automatically, guided by the norms for relationships and language that have been co-created over time as a community (Locher & Watts, 2005). For this reason, they may be unmarked (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003): that is, staff may not notice them as particularly polite or impolite; staff may not consider them to be especially meaningful. So, it is
not necessarily the practice on its own that has potential; it is the way staff approach these interactions that may determine whether community is nurtured or broken. Who people are at the macro level “is developed through relational interactions at the micro level” (Webb, 2018, p. 80). Participants’ conversations reflected that belief. An opportunity to encounter each other FtF becomes a practice when people are intentional about it.

The second area of focus related to practices was hearing and being heard. While this may not of itself be a practice; practices are what make these encounters possible. Being heard relates directly to the request in the 2018 audit, where some staff asked for more all-staff meetings and for increased dialogue (Pries et al., 2018). Café participants shared many benefits to being heard, including increased trust, affirmation, engagement, job satisfaction, and being seen as a human being rather than a commodity (see Study Finding 2). Such benefits have been found to occur in the context of servant leadership (Laub, 2010), and as the key distinguishing element of servant leadership is concern for follower needs, I believe that being heard satisfies a particularly human need (explored further in Conclusion 3). Participants agreed that HDCH has been shifting towards more opportunities for staff to hear each other, noting particular formal settings such as Professional Learning Teams, Collegial Connections meetings, and more (see Study Finding 3). In fact, participants suggested that more structures be put in place to more effectively hear each other and be heard, such as structured conversations and guiding principles for when we dialogue. In answer to the inquiry sub-question “What conversation, if begun today, could ripple out in a way that creates new possibilities how we relate to each other in our shared work,” participants seemed to agree that structures like the ones noted above, or policies to support them, are an answer.
In summary, HDCH staff have many practices that support good conditions for FtF interactions, and so for the growth of our community and our practice in our domain of high school education: we have many regular connections that give us time in person with each other; we have an increasingly dialogic conversation model; we understand that small encounters can be meaningful little building blocks; and we value hearing each other’s voices and want to see more structures to support that. These thoughts on practices answer, in part, inquiry sub-question 2, “What communication skills, practices, and underlying values would contribute to more effective team communication,” as well as sub-question 4: “What effective FtF communication practices might staff co-create?”

**Conclusion 3: Leadership**

The understanding of leadership and followership may be limiting some conditions that would nurture a healthier CoP. When Collegial Café participants discussed hearing and being heard, the conversation turned to the role of organizational leaders in creating conditions to support being heard. Participants noted a tension between leadership leading execution of the work in the school’s domain and leadership providing space for all voices to be heard (see Study Finding 3). The way leadership was talked about in this conversation was largely in terms of role: the Principal or members of the Leadership Team. While participants stated that they preferred a collaborative leadership style, they seemed to talk about leadership in terms of the responsibility and behaviour of individuals in a leadership position, rather than leadership as “a collective property” (Carroll, 2016, p. 103). After reviewing the Collegial Café summary I sent out for a member check, one participant responded to the leadership role tension this way: “I
think this is about leadership, within a role, and the prescribed leadership work that is incumbent in the role, versus the organic leadership that takes place amongst people.”

In recent years, understandings of leadership in literature have become more expansive (Taylor, 2013), focusing beyond the leader or leader-follower dyad to this organic leadership. Raelin (2016), a proponent of leadership-as-practice, described leadership as “immanent collective action emerging from mutual, discursive, sometimes recurring and sometime evolving patterns in the moment and over time among those engaged in the practice” (p. 3). This view of leadership frames it not as enacted by one individual and received by others, but as co-created together through practices. I believe this kind of emergent, distributed leadership exists in the CoP of the HDCH staff, which, according to Wenger et al. (2002), is one indication of a healthy CoP.

While HDCH has fairly traditional educational leadership roles and structures by nature of being a school (Yoon, 2018), HDCH staff also exhibits a shared servant leadership or a culture of servant leadership (Crippen, 2012; Laub, 2010; Ragnarsson et al., 2018). I originally believed that the 2018 audit report request to school leadership for more opportunities for all-staff dialogue was a symptom of some kind of fundamental condition (Beckhard & Harris, 2009) in the organization, as I noted in Chapter 1. Now, I believe that the fundamental condition underlying the request is being human. Servant leadership literature describes the various psychological, spiritual, emotional, and relational needs that all people have, as noted in Chapter 2. The FtF and team encounters described by participants in this inquiry can be seen as stories of having their needs met—in many instances, by coworkers rather than by positional leaders in the organization. At HDCH, staff members often are other-oriented, prioritize each other’s needs,
and direct their concern away from the self towards others, which are all characteristics of servant leadership (Eva et al., 2019). A servant leadership culture allows for the development of strong relationships throughout the organization and the valuing of all voices (Crippen, 2012), and this seemed to be happening at HDCH. The HDCH staff are known for a high level of care for their students (Asselin & Whittle, 2019), and, anecdotally, staff members demonstrate a high degree of love and care for each other as well.

While I observed servant leadership in how staff spoke about their encounters with each other, they do not necessarily identify leadership in their interactions. Not seeing their leadership may be limiting what is possible in the school’s CoP. In terms of FtF encounters, Reitz (2015) found that a leadership perspective that focuses on what she called “heroic leadership constructions” (p. 2) had a detrimental impact on the quality of dialogue. This is in part due to issues of power. As HDCH exists in the context of education and institutions in our province, country, and in the Western tradition, power is a factor in how staff relate to each other and how they understand leadership. Power and the related social architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) of which staff are part may help sustain a heroic ideal of leadership that does not always serve the health of the CoP and our FtF encounters. I believe that broadening staff’s understanding of leadership to include conceptualizations of emergent and organic personal leadership might help them each take greater responsibility for their role in the CoP they create together and help them to see and engage more in the horizontal accountability that characterizes a healthy CoP (Wenger, 2010). To conclude, HDCH staff members’ views of leadership as more positional and less distributed may negatively impact conditions that support meaningful FtF encounters, and it
may prevent HDCH staff members from seeing the leadership and mutual accountability that already exists.

**Conclusion 4: Ideal Future**

Participants’ articulation of the ideal future culture of FtF communication shows that HDCH staff value shared purpose and community and have room to grow in how they frame disagreement. The share-out round of the Collegial Café was a chance for groups to draw a rich picture representing everything they envision an ideal culture of FtF communication would include. This was to answer inquiry sub-question 4: “What would ideal FtF communication among staff look like?” As described in Chapter 4, these pictures included shared purpose, collaboration towards collective wins, and unity in staff diversity; there were no representations of disagreement. The rich pictures helped to answer the values part of sub-question 2: “What communication skills, practices, and underlying values would contribute to more effective team communication?” I argue that the two main values shown by this ideal future are shared purpose and community.

Shared purpose is one of four themes that appeared both in the interviews and in the Café, and in fact, it was the theme with most occurrences across the data. Based on the findings, I would say that the shared purpose at HDCH is the mission and vision of the school. As noted in Chapter 1, the HDCH (n.d.) mission is “cultivating character through learning for lives of service to God” (Mission & Vision section, para. 1), and our vision is “to see all HDCH graduates become a faithful presence in the community that they serve” (para. 2). The staff’s shared purpose, then, includes a focus on relationships, on who students are and who they are becoming, on the provision of exceptional education from a Christian worldview, and on making an impact
beyond the walls of the school building. I should also note that based on the stories told in interviews, shared purpose was sometimes described more specifically than mission or vision: for example, a concern for and support of growth of the whole child (Participant 3). A shared purpose or shared vision is in fact a critical part of being an effective CoP; shared purpose is connected to having a shared domain and results in collaboration and commitment (Wenger et al., 2002). So some of the other elements of the ideal future described by participants—in particular, collaboration towards collective wins—actually depend on this first element of shared purpose.

The other two themes expressed in participants’ ideal future (i.e., unity in diversity and collaboration towards collective wins) demonstrate that participants hold community as an important value. Participants showed that they want to be on the same page with their colleagues, and they want to move forward together towards shared goals. Unity can come from the “sense of common history and identity” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 35) that is a hallmark of a CoP, and I believe staff have this shared identity at HDCH. However, Wenger (2010) noted that in CoPs, the use of the word community “risks connoting harmony and homogeneity” (p. 8). Why are harmony and homogeneity risky to connote? Because “a good dose of diversity” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 35) leads to better learning and more creativity. Inquiry participants showed an understanding that HDCH staff members are different people and may hold different perspectives and that at the same time, they can move effectively in an agreed-upon direction together.

Finally, the fourth theme was disagreement. I believe an ambivalent attitude towards disagreement shows how much participants value community. Disagreement did not come up
often in the narrative interviews. It is an element with which participants expressed discomfort in the Café and which they left out of the rich picture of their ideal future. Disagreeing was closely linked to identity by participants; a concern was expressed that disagreeing FtF could lead to division or would result in labelling (or being labelled) as “difficult.” The way disagreement was described seems to put it at odds with a willingness to be in community. If it is marked as impolite (i.e., if we have been “socialized into … cultural norms” (Angouri & Locher, 2017, p. 218) where disagreement conflicts with relationship), then no wonder staff did not include it in their ideal picture. However, whether consciously or unconsciously, framing disagreement as antithetical to community may inhibit HDCH staff’s ability to experience its advantages.

Having a divergence of views and working through difference together was acknowledged by participants as a valuable source of growth and improvement for HDCH staff. Wenger et al. (2002) affirmed that effective CoPs have trust, which allows members to “handle dissension and make it productive … use conflict as a way to deepen their relationships and their learning” (p. 37). Participants indicated that staff have many strong bonds and sufficient levels of trust to practice engaging in healthy conflict to improve the school’s CoP. Then the HDCH community could experience more of the “learning potential” (p. 12) that exists.

Participants’ comments about “individual responsibility” are worth mentioning again here, because there is an individual element to CoPs and disagreement. Flores et al. (2018) found that people with good emotional self-management are better able to mitigate the potentially negative effects of team conflict. As staff members grow in self-management, the CoP grows in its capacity to make disagreement productive and part of their learning. Much of where this
learning happens is, not surprisingly, in FtF interactions. It is in dialogic encounters where different perspectives can be heard and new meaning made.

Bahktin (as cited in Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011) saw conversations as “intersecting ideologies, ways of speaking, value judgments, and so on—not with the aim of bringing you around to my viewpoint, but of valuing and juxtaposing pluralistic viewpoints in creating new meanings and possibilities” (p. 1436). Bahktin asserted that these kinds of conversations that allow for diversity of thought were in fact the way toward the “commonly shared purpose” (p. 1436), which is so valued by HDCH staff. Likewise, J. Brown and Isaacs (2005a) declared that in World Café sessions, a “new sense of shared purpose” (p. 23) often emerges. In short, healthy FtF interactions are where people both discover and co-create their purpose, goals, and knowledge. This FtF communication is “not … a vessel or … a resource, but constituting phenomena” (Sergi, 2016, p. 126); this communication is where the relationships and the knowledge of the organization’s domain is co-created. As HDCH staff members improve their FtF communication, they would change how they learn and relate.

While these four conclusions answer the inquiry sub-questions, they do not directly answer the inquiry question: “By what means can the staff of HDCH nurture our CoP?” I suggest that the recommendations in Chapter 5 are answers to this question.

**Scope and Limitations**

This study was intended to focus on the CoP and FtF communication of the HDCH staff and, in particular, the narrated experiences and the dialogue-based learning of the study participants.
Throughout the study, I found it challenging to balance the timeline required to complete for a November 2020 graduation with my master’s degree with the rhythms of the high school year at HDCH. This became particularly apparent with the timing of the Collegial Café. I was not ready to run it in December, which was my original plan. In order to allow for adequate analysis of narrative interview data, the date was pushed back to January 20. Unfortunately, at that time of year, teachers have a great deal of work wrapping up the first semester and preparing for the second. Since there would not be a more accessible date until late February, over a month later, I decided to go ahead on January 20. The result was fewer participants at the Café than I would have hoped. Taking into account overlap with narrative interview participation, a total of nine staff participated in this inquiry out of the 55 people eligible. I hope to hold a World Café with staff again in future, but outside the context of an inquiry project, so that participation is within the bounds of staff’s regular work.

We had one “ethical hiccup” in the running of the study. Early on, due to a miscommunication between me and the internal Inquiry Team member, I saw the name of a narrative interview participant who reports to me. With the approval of my supervisor and second committee member, this is how I handled the breach: I asked the internal member to let this prospective participant know that I was aware of their identity. This way, they had full knowledge of what I knew and an opportunity to choose to continue with the study or not. The Inquiry Team member also affirmed that the transcript of the interview would be scrubbed for identifying information before it came to me and reminded them that their consent to participate would, as always, be ongoing through the process and that they could withdraw at a later time. I believe this solution honoured the person’s humanity by giving the choice to them and mitigated
power over enough for them to feel comfortable continuing. The individual decided to continue their participation.

**Chapter Summary**

Through this inquiry, I developed four findings. First, staff narratives demonstrated that common elements lead to meaningful FtF interactions. Second, staff indicated that practices and structures make a difference in the quality interactions by impacting those conditions. Third, staff named that leadership and collaboration are necessary and can be in tension with each other. And fourth, staff described an ideal future culture of face-to-face communication including meaningful shared purpose, unity in diversity, and collaboration towards collective wins. When I analyzed these findings together with literature about CoPs, FtF communication, and servant leadership, I concluded the following. First, that conditions for good FtF communication and CoP exist at HDCH. Second, that we have practices that support those good conditions. Third, that the way staff understand leadership may be limiting some conditions that would nurture a healthier CoP. Finally, I concluded that the ideal future described by staff showed how they value shared purpose and community. In Chapter 5, I detail the implications of these findings and conclusions for HDCH, including the specific recommendations for next steps in our FtF and CoP growth.
Chapter 5: Inquiry Implications

Study Recommendations

My inquiry question, “By what means can the staff of HDCH nurture our CoP,” is answered by the recommendations presented in this chapter. In this chapter, I lay out eight recommendations that I believe will support HDCH staff in nurturing their CoP; these are being refined and revised based on dialogue with HDCH’s Principal and the rest of the Leadership Team. Following the Study Recommendations, I discuss the Organizational Implications of the recommendations and the goal of improving the CoP through FtF communication as well as the Implications for Future Inquiry. Finally, I summarize the research as a whole.

When I considered how to organize the recommendations for this project, they seemed at first to land in three groups: (a) celebrations, (b) strengths to build on, and (c) areas for developing awareness. When I re-read Crippen (2012), I was struck by her suggestion that school staff build their team by participating in development exercises that “enhance mutual understanding, identify strengths and recognize areas for improvement” (p. 197). While she was not strictly focused on FtF communication or CoPs, the areas of focus she mentioned are useful for framing what I hope the recommendations may accomplish. Each recommendation supports one or more of these areas of growth. See Table 2 for which areas of focus apply to each recommendation. Note that the recommendations are presented in timeline order. This timeline has been extended from what it might have been; due to the Covid-19 pandemic, staff members are working from home. Depending on the health requirements in place for the 2020-2021 school year, the implementation of these recommendations or the recommendations themselves may be adjusted to account for virtual as well as, we hope, some in-person FtF connections.
### Inquiry Recommendations and How They Support the Nurturing of the CoP at HDCH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Enhance Mutual Understanding</th>
<th>Identify Strengths</th>
<th>Recognize Areas For Improvement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 2020</td>
<td>Recommendation 1: Celebrate what is good in HDCH’s staff FtF and CoP by sharing the findings and conclusions of this Inquiry Project with staff and with the Board of Directors.</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer 2020, November 2020</td>
<td>Recommendation 2: Survey staff about their experiences of Collegial Conversations and other activities through which they believe they are growing a culture of dialogue.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August PD Days</td>
<td>Recommendation 3: Short presentation to staff about the complexities of FtF encounters: what is involved in speaking up and listening up in both formal and informal encounters. This will be followed by opportunities to practice (Recommendation 4).</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>August PD Days</td>
<td>Recommendation 4: Engage all staff in a small group protocol to refine a shared ideal future of FtF communication culture. From this data, Leadership Team/PD Team will distill into rubric so staff progress towards their goals can be measured.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>August PD</td>
<td>Recommendation 5: That staff learn more about leadership-followership and collaborative leadership; that they engage in an activity of reflecting on their shifting place in a leadership-followership or collective leadership space.</td>
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<td>20-21</td>
<td>Recommendation 6: Create opportunities to share stories with each other by soliciting staff stories, in response to specific prompts, for their weekly “Sunset” memo.</td>
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Recommendation 1: Celebrate What is Good in HDCH’s Staff FtF and CoP by Sharing the Findings and Conclusions of this Inquiry Project with Staff and with the Board of Directors

As noted in Chapter 4, there is much that is good in HDCH’s CoP and culture for FtF communication. HDCH has some conditions that allow for effective, healthy FtF encounters and CoP (Conclusion 1). HDCH has practices and opportunities that support those conditions, strengthening staffs’ relationships and growing their capacity to do good work (Conclusion 2). Staff value shared purpose and community (Conclusion 4). Participants also noted that HDCH’s narrative is shifting towards a growing culture of dialogue (see Finding 3). Since the data collection for this inquiry, HDCH staff members have seen further evidence of this good as their CoP has moved online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In these less-than-ideal circumstances, staff members are making use of new ways of connecting with each other and are sharing and co-creating new knowledge and new practices.
One way to encourage continued good is to name and celebrate specifically what is good together as a staff, thus identifying strengths as Crippen (2012) suggested. Wignall (2013) stated that celebration is an important practice in which many leaders do not engage enough; he suggested that celebration has a necessary emotional function that “provides the ‘why’ that sustains when the ‘what’ and ‘how’ are faltering” (para. 1). Celebration is a practical way to take an appreciative stance: that is, put a focus on what is positive to frame positive images of a positive future (Bushe, 2012) and thus support change going forward. Celebration is something the staff have practiced at HDCH. In June 2020, I had the opportunity to share the findings and conclusions of this inquiry with all staff during a Zoom meeting; I encouraged them to celebrate the many strengths of our CoP. Normally, to celebrate, we would eat together, but unfortunately, that is not possible at this time. My goal was to emphasize the good, while it will be important to allow space for the complexity of multiple stories; if only an unambiguously positive narrative is shared, meaningful dialogue could be quashed (Bushe, 2012). I will also share these celebrations with the HDCH Board in September 2020.

**Recommendation 2: Survey staff about their experiences of Collegial Conversations and Other Activities Which We Believe Are Growing a Culture of Dialogue**

In this inquiry, I found that HDCH staff members have practices and opportunities that support good conditions for effective FtF encounters (Conclusion 2). During the Collegial Café, participants agreed that HDCH is moving towards a more dialogic FtF culture (Finding 3). They wondered if the rest of staff felt the same and suggested that all staff be surveyed for feedback. Such a survey would help identify strengths and recognize areas for improvement. It would also help address this study’s limitation of the number of staff involved (see Chapter 4) by engaging
more staff in an inquiry process. The plan is to survey staff twice: first, in the summer of 2020 to hear about their experience of the 2019-2020 school year up to March 13; second, in November of 2020 to see how things are going in the first part of the new school year. The survey would be anonymous and created together by the Leadership Team. Results would be shared with the staff. This feedback would further help the Leadership Team to reflect on all the recommendations of this study and consider if a reordering or redesigning might be in order.

**Recommendation 3: Present to Staff about the Complexities of FtF Encounters and What is Involved in Speaking Up and Listening Up in Both Formal and Informal Encounters**

This recommendation will be followed by opportunities to practice (see Recommendation 4). Little building block interactions and hearing and being heard became important topics in this inquiry project, particularly related to inquiry sub-question 2: “What communication skills, practices, and underlying values would contribute to more effective team communication?” Little building block encounters, which can happen anywhere at any time, lay the foundation and build the culture for our relationships and our work together (Finding 2). While HDCH staff members have numerous good practices (Conclusion 2), being mindful of the impacts of small actions and of how they listen to and speak with each other will support continued health for the CoP. In order to enhance mutual understanding, the plan is to bring staff awareness to the complexity of interactions. Speaking and listening is “a social dance” (Reitz & Higgins, 2019, p. 104), where all parties weigh trust, power, understanding, politics, and more as they decide what to say and what to hear. Also, people often hold unidentified big assumptions that may get in the way of their best intentions to act for good (Kegan & Lahey, 2001b). Reitz and Higgins (2019) posited that as speaking and listening happens between people, “we need to work at a group level to
create safety, as well as the individual competency level” (p. 121). Through this instruction, people can enhance mutual understanding. Inquiry sub-question 2 went unanswered in one important respect: This inquiry project did not identify particular communication skills that would contribute to more effective team communication. Instruction such as that proposed for Recommendation 3 could begin to bring staff awareness to some of those skills, particularly when followed by an opportunity to practice. There is no shortage of literature with practical suggestions for how to practice self-awareness and communication. We will consider ideas and activities from authors who have written about dialogue (Gergen & Hersted, 2016), emotional intelligence (Johnson, 2010), communication skills (McKay et al., 2018), and language (Kegan & Lahey, 2001a). This instruction and practice will happen at HDCH’s August 2020 PD Days.

**Recommendation 4: Engage All Staff in a Small Group Protocol to Refine a Shared Ideal Future of FtF Communication Culture**

From these data, the Leadership Team will develop a rubric so, as a staff, members can measure collective progress towards shared goals. Participants described an ideal future culture of FtF communication that includes meaningful shared purpose, unity in diversity, and collaboration towards collective wins (Finding 4) and that shared purpose and community are key values (Conclusion 4). I believe that asking all staff to dialogue about their ideal culture of FtF communication would enrichen the shared picture of an ideal future and provide a more fulsome answer to the inquiry sub-question: “What would ideal FtF communication among staff look like?” One of the members of the Leadership Team, upon seeing the draft study conclusions, wondered if a rubric or a checklist could be made so that HDCH staff could assess their practices and structures:
Maybe it’s just the teacher in me, but … I think this will allow us to see if we actually are reaching our goals…. And I think once we start to name some of the practices or understanding of leadership … we can actually move more quickly or perhaps more methodically or more purposefully to that ideal future.

I believe that co-creating this rubric with staff would be a very effective way to engage them in goal setting, through developing public agreements (Kegan & Lahey, 2001a) or collective commitments (DuFour et al., 2008) together. The plan is to engage in this activity during the August 2020 staff PD days, after the recommended instruction.

**Recommendation 5: That Staff Learn More about Leadership-Followership and Collaborative Leadership and that They Engage in an Activity of Reflecting on Their Shifting Place in a Leadership-Followership or Collective Leadership Space**

I believe that role leaders in our organization, in particular the Principal, Leadership Team, Department Heads, and Board Directors, not only model servant leadership, but also name it. However, role leadership seems to have more weight in staff perception than the leadership that exists among staff and that they provide to each other (Conclusion 3). As a way to begin addressing the opportunity of Conclusion 3, the plan is to lead a brief instruction with staff about different perspectives on leadership. Staff will then be asked to reflect on their own leadership-followership as suggested by (Crippen, 2012), followed by a conversation in small groups. This will help to address inquiry sub-question 2 about “communication skills, practices, and underlying values” as well as help to nurture the CoP and increase opportunities for collaboration (Conclusion 3). This activity will be part of the August 2020 PD days. The Leadership Team
noted that acting on Recommendations 3, 4, and 5 during the August PD would show that FtF communication is a priority for the organization.

*Recommendation 6: Create Opportunities to Share Our Stories with Each Other by Soliciting Staff Stories, in Response to Specific Prompts, for the Weekly “Sunset” Memo*

Hearing my colleagues’ stories was the most powerful part of this inquiry experience for me. A couple of days after having conducted interviews, I noticed that I was interacting differently at work. I had unconsciously begun to make space in my day for more and more significant conversations with colleagues; I was asking more questions and listening longer to their responses. The practice of listening attentively to participants’ narratives made me more likely to listen at other times as well.

There is already evidence of conditions for healthy FtF encounters at HDCH (Conclusion 1), and HDCH staff have practices and opportunities that support these conditions (Conclusion 2). To reinforce that good, I believe it is critical to create space for ways of making meaning that are not just in the “logio-scientific” (Stauffer, 2014, p. 163) mode, but that allow staff to engage in other ways of knowing. There are many benefits to the narrative mode that the logical mode does not offer, including different kinds of social interaction and the engagement of the imagination. Effective narrative can “pull the reader/listener into the story world—and moves us emotionally through imaginative identification” (Reissman, 2008, p. 9). Narratives are never unidirectional; they are always created for a particular audience in a particular moment, and the audience interprets and makes meaning (Reissman, 2008). So, as staff members share their stories with each other, they co-create them. Thus, sharing stories with each other helps to
answer the inquiry sub-question: “What effective FtF communication practices might staff co-create?”

In order to encourage thinking and sharing in narrative ways, one existing structure that HDCH hopes to reimagine is its weekly Friday “Sunset” memo. This has celebrations and thanks from the week as well as any details that staff may need to remember. Normally, a member of the Leadership Team has written the introductory blurb to the memo; instead, staff will be asked to consider writing a short narrative to share from targeted prompts, such as “Describe a time when collegial relationships deepened your professional growth.” While these interactions are not FtF, the memos are most often read together in the staff room over snacks. It is believed that these will help support an increasingly narrative culture among staff. This recommendation will be for the whole 2020-2021 school year.

Recommendation 7: Continue to Ensure Each PD Day and the Majority of HDCH Other Formal FtF Settings Have at Least One Dialogic Element by Making Growth in Interaction One of the Learning Goals

Because HDCH is comprised of so many educators to whom good pedagogy is important, there is already dialogue going on as part of the growth and learning. The desire is to continue to intentionally incorporate opportunities for staff to hone their communications skills (such as are mentioned in Recommendation 3) and grow in relationship and learning together. Ideally, these dialogic activities will be connected to other work already being done. We have done this before: for example, the February 2019 PD Days were designed around the question: “How can we best support students who are marginalized due to sexual orientation and gender identity?” There were several interactive activities during these two days, which allowed participants to practice
engaging in dialogue with each other—even though improving FtF communication was not the primary goal of the learning. There are many resources to draw on for dialogic group work, such as are found in J. Brown and Isaacs (2005b), Kaner et al. (2014), and Lipmanowicz and McCandless (2013). These activities would help in all three areas of focus: (a) enhance mutual understanding, (b) identify strengths, and (c) recognize areas for improvement. This would help reinforce the collaboration of Finding 3, the conditions of Conclusion 1, the practices of Conclusion 2, and keep staff moving towards the ideal future of Conclusion 4—even the part about disagreement. To ensure this focus is maintained in staff times together, the Leadership Team suggests it be made part of the learning goals for such events. As well, a short “exit ticket” could be developed for staff events that allows for feedback so staff can continue to assess their growth, using the rubric as a measure. This recommendation would go throughout the 2020-2021 school year.

**Recommendation 8: Conduct a Restorative Practices Refresher That Reminds Staff of the Tools They Already Have for Navigating Conflict As Well As Ensuring They Are Aware of the Value of Multiple Perspectives and Disagreement**

HDCH already uses restorative practices in how staff members interact with students and how they ask students to interact with each other. These practices support both proactively working towards healthy relationships in the community as well as tools for responding when relationship is broken (HDCH, 2008). Some restorative tools are in place already, as well as staff who are trained lead others in this restorative practices. With such resources in place, this framework could also be used as staff consider their relationship with disagreement and conflict (Conclusion 4) and how they might look at such contexts differently in order to take advantage
of their possibilities for growth and learning (Wenger et al., 2002). I envision this being a workshop with all staff during the February 2021 PD days. Ideally, this would be followed by an opportunity to practice as staff engage together in addressing a complex problem. Such a workshop may help staff members to both enhance their mutual understanding and recognize areas for improvement, while answering sub-question 2: “What communication skills, practices … would contribute to more effective team communication?”

I believe that these eight recommendations would allow HDCH’s staff to nurture their CoP together. I look forward to reviewing HDCH staffs’ progress as we go through the 2020-2021 school year.

**Organizational Implications**

There are considerations about the implications to the organization of pursuing these recommendations. These include stakeholder engagement, change and threats to change, inquiry and leadership, and the system of staff communication, which I discuss in this section. Following those discussions, I suggest how this project might contribute to literature about servant leadership and organizational communication, and I then provide a status update of the state of the inquiry project now.

**Stakeholder Engagement**

This inquiry process has most often felt lonely; a lot of the hours I have spent so far have been by myself, immersed in and analyzing qualitative data, working through how to arrive at conclusions and recommendations that might be meaningful for HDCH. However, I have engaged throughout with my partner, the Principal of HDCH. He helped to shape the focus of the inquiry, has provided feedback to data gathering questions, and we have spoken together about
findings, conclusions, and recommendations as they have been developed. Likewise, though less frequently, the HDCH Leadership Team members have provided listening ears and feedback to this work. Because of the status of the current inquiry and because most recommendations would be implemented in the next school year, the engagement of my partner and the Leadership Team would be both ongoing and critical to any growth or change we might hope for. Together, we will consider the timing and implementation of these recommendations along with the other professional development needs of the staff and determine if the recommendations or timeline need adjusting. So the next stages of ARE—reflection on action, evaluation of action and engage forward, and recontextualize and reconstruct for organizational change (Rowe et al., 2013)—will be done together with the Leadership Team or Leadership Team and staff. While the Board of HDCH is not involved in day-to-day operations or in managing the implementation of the recommendations, I will be sharing an overview of this inquiry with them, hopefully at the September 2020 Board meeting.

Change and Threats

I would suggest that the kind of change proposed in this project is not disruptive change, but developmental change. For this reason, positional leaders in the organization will not necessarily be required to change their roles or major processes. The recommendations are not policy related but can be implemented within existing structures. The recommendations are more about doing things differently, picking up new skills, looking with a new lens at how we are together as a CoP. I believe that if none of these recommendations were implemented, we would lose an opportunity to become better at our FtF encounters and to deepen our relationships and our learning. This would be unfortunate for our staff CoP and even more unfortunate for our
school community, whose students and families stand to benefit from our growth and learning in this area, as discussed in Chapter 1.

I see two potential threats to implementation. The first is time. There are always more topics that we want to address as a staff than we have time for during our PD: for example, keeping up with requirements from the Ministry of Education and continuing to invest in the development of project-based teaching and the implementation of Christian worldview in our courses. This year, we have had to shift to emergency remote learning, and it is possible that in the next school year, we may be full or partly remote as well. These adjustment take significant time. The second threat is related: a continuation or resumption of the need to do education from home due to Covid-19. This drastically changes the FtF nature of our community, not to mention adds a lot of change and stress to staff, students, and families. This would be a much more difficult context in which to carry out the inquiry recommendations or, at the very least, may require that we adjust some of these recommendations for the virtual context.

Inquiry and Leadership

The leadership implications for implementing these recommendations are a willingness to give PD time to this work, which the Leadership Team has demonstrated by prioritizing it for our PD Days in August, a willingness to learn more about CoPs and FtF communication, and a continued willingness to model healthy FtF communication and collaborative servant leadership. Role leaders like the Leadership Team will need to be mindful of implications across our work, and not just within PD. How might what we are learning impact other decisions we make? How might our growth impact how we think about governance? We may need to look differently at our staff as not only role groups or one CoP, but also as multiple CoPs of which we may not be
aware. For example, our teaching staff and learning support workers share workrooms with desk space for up to eight people. CoPs often form in these spaces. Are such groups resourced; are they meaningful, healthy, and places of growth?

**The System of Staff Communication**

As I noted in Chapter 1, my preliminary systems map of HDCH staff communication missed some important elements: the people, the complexity of conditions that allow for meaningful FtF encounters, the relationships, and people’s needs. So I drew a new systems map (see Appendix A) that reflects my new understandings. I see the system of communication as comprising staff, their peer colleagues, and their positional leaders. These people interact to produce conditions for meaningful encounters (as described in Finding 2 and Conclusion 2). When those conditions exist, then staff needs are met and meaningful encounters ensue, with the result of personal, professional, and relational growth and increased collaboration. All this growth reinforces relationships, good conditions, and the meeting of needs, which in turn leads to more and better encounters. Conversely, when conditions are not sufficient, there are fewer needs met, FtF encounters are of reduced quality, there is less growth, and more harm is possible. These negative impacts in turn stifle the conditions where staff needs are met.

There are two particular levers of which this study has made me aware. Initially, I saw having a new Principal this school year as a possible lever for change, since that is a natural point for a shift. What I did not expect was how important peer colleagues would be for the creation of good conditions and the meeting of needs; staff members are important levers for change for each other. As well, when I spoke of “perspectives on leadership” in the original systems map (see Appendix A), I thought those perspectives would have to do with staff
understanding the role of positional leaders, but what I have found in my research is that the potential here is for staff to understand how they themselves provide leadership to each other and how they collaborate to create good conditions and meet each other’s needs (see Conclusion 3). This map also allows space for productive disagreement; when the good conditions exist and needs are met, disagreement can happen as part of meaningful FtF or team encounters and still potentially result in growth, reinforcing a healthy cycle.

*Third Person Research*

I believe this inquiry has helped to fill in some of the qualitative colour that may be missing from associated literature. Servant leadership studies have some limitations in terms of methodology and method. After surveying 20 years’ worth of literature, Eva et al. (2019) stated, “Servant leadership research is being held back by an over-reliance on cross-sectional, single-respondent survey designs” (p. 124). They suggested that researchers consider field experimentation, better survey design, and in place, they went so far as to support combining qualitative research with quantitative (Eva et al., 2019). There are exceptions to this limitation, such as in Liu’s (2019) narrative inquiry and Song’s (2019) phenomenological inquiry. Even so, I believe that this inquiry project, being exclusively qualitative, adds to the conversation and demonstrates that qualitative ways of knowing and inquiring are instructive.

Another opportunity that exists in research is connected to learning more about organizational members rather than just positional leaders. Reitz (2015) noted that “empirical based research [in social constructionism] has still retained an overwhelming preference and obsession for … the person in a higher positional role” (p. 201). She mourned the gap this has left in understanding the “‘colourful’ space between” (p. 201) people in organizations. I would
argue that some of the most beautiful colour in this inquiry data has arisen in the space between peers, and often shared from the perspective of a person traditionally considered a follower. Likewise, literature about organizational communication has tended to focus on organizational leaders or on the leader-follower dyad (Sias, 2014). As this inquiry focused more on peer-to-peer relationships, I believe it has helped to enrich understanding of organizations and the people who constitute them.

**The Rest of the Story**

The Principal and Leadership Team have given input to revising and prioritizing these recommendations. Execution of these recommendations has become somewhat more complex now that staff members are all working from home. Some actions will certainly need to be deferred to the next school year; staff is experiencing enough change already. In completing the 2020 school year, the collective win was ensuring that students had the best possible learning opportunities they could under difficult circumstances and ensuring that the health and wellness of our staff and students came first. As demonstrated in Chapter 4’s study findings, HDCH staff have great strengths to draw from; I believe our CoP has demonstrated its nimbleness and the strength of the relational bonds where extensive knowledge is being shared and meaning made together.

The next steps with the staff of HDCH will be completing Recommendation 1, by sharing these findings and celebrations with the Board, and Recommendation 2, by surveying staff about their experiences with dialogue during this school year. The other recommendations will be addressed next school year. I am fortunate to work with a group of passionate educators who are experienced and willing to innovate. I believe they will be better able than me to suggest how
best to scaffold the plans we have to nurture our CoP. As part of the leadership team, I will continue to be part of shepherding this effort towards growth. As well, I have been asked to join our school’s PD team. This team is comprised of Vice-principals and any interested teaching staff. They work together to design and deploy PD at the school. I am excited to help bring a focus on CoP and FtF into this team’s work, both through content and, more importantly, process.

While we need to wait to implement most recommendations, I believe there has already been some change. I know this is true for me. I have learned a great deal during this process about the power of narrative, the power of dialogue, and how much it means to me personally to be engaged in FtF connection with other people. As well, participants indicated that their experience of participating was valuable. I trust that this supported them in paying attention to the meaningful connections of which they are part.

Implications for Future Inquiry

There are some questions and suggestions that came to mind as I have been going through this inquiry process. Noted here for future reference, they are: (a) the use of narrative inquiry in a faith-based organization; (b) the impact that new structures or habits might have on FtF communication and CoP health; (c) whether discomfort with disagreement might be a side-effect of the focus on community and unity in faith-based organizations; and (d) how the individual’s understanding of the self in relation to the organization may impact the CoP.

First is the potential investigation into narrative inquiry and faith. I found that the engagement in narrative interview was a powerful experience for me, and I hope that it was for participants, as well. Narrative as a way to understand and make meaning has a long history in
Christian faith. From the history books of the *Old Testament* to Jesus’ parables, from the stories of saints and paragons of the faith to a significant publication industry for Christian books, we are people of stories. I wonder how engaging in more narrative inquiry in our organization, in Christian schools, and perhaps even in other Christian institutions could prove effective and powerful and support the growth of the community we speak of as—as my partner put it—“part of our core identity” (D. Todd, personal communication, June 9, 2019).

A second area for further inquiry is what impact the implementation of this inquiry’s recommendations might have on our CoP and FtF communication. It would be valuable for me to consider engaging in narrative and/or dialogic inquiry with our staff to see what might have shifted over time after staff members begin engaging in learning and increase awareness around these topics as well as participating in practices that support their growth.

Third, I believe that inquiry into an identity of Christian community and the desire for unity that accompanies it could be fruitful. As I realized that our staff seems to have a discomfort with disagreement, I wondered if that discomfort might be related to this desire for unity—a sort of shadow side of something that is very good. This is a question which may warrant further inquiry in our organization, and I would be curious to know if it may occur in other faith-based organizations as well.

In our school, when teachers are planning how they will connect curriculum to Christian worldview, many ask, “What is my deep hope for my students in this course this year?” or “How will the story of what we learn in International Business or Biology or Construction Technology or Writers’ Craft connect the ‘Big-S Story’ of God’s work in our world?” So it seems appropriate that as I consider this inquiry project, as I reflect on what my colleagues have shared with me.
and taught me, as I keep in mind the wealth of scholarship that exists to support our learning, I ask a similar question: What is my deep hope for our staff CoP as we start implementing the recommendations of this project? I hope that we each individually understand that our organization “is made up of [our] relationships and the specific interactions [we each] have with specific individuals, in specific context, over specific issues” (Short, 1998, p. 17), or as Block (2008) put it, that we co-own and co-create our community. I hope that such a sense of ownership leads to practical action towards nurturing our CoP. I hope that we get better at leading and being led by each other, and together, we create the practices that support our growth and learning. As Wenger (2010) asserted, we are “the learning contribution we have to offer” (p. 14).

My hope, and the hope of the Principal of HDCH, is that this research project with its engaged methods has helped cultivate a healthier staff CoP. I hope that our learning will not be limited to this one staff in one particular school but that I hope we can share our learning with other schools. I hope that we can model effective FtF communication and collegiality for our students, who may likewise be impacted (Barth, 2006). I hope we grow as authentic models for our students, living as a community of servant leaders and followers, designing and supporting student learning in such a way that their education becomes a “practice of freedom” (hooks, 2003, p. xv): I hope that our students will learn to work, both now and in future, with humility towards positive change for their communities and their world.

**Thesis Summary**

It was the goal of my Partner and me that this inquiry project support the growth of the HDCH staff’s CoP, in particular, through our in-person FtF communication: “By what means
can the staff of HDCH nurture our CoP?” At HDCH, we believe that relationships are fundamental to what we are as a faith-based school as well as to the learning of our students and staff.

As I developed the Literature Review for this project, I focused on Communities of Practice (e.g., Kerno & Mace, 2010; Wenger, 2000), face-to-face communication (e.g., Locher, 2004a; Sias, 2014), and servant leadership (e.g., Crippen, 2012; Greenleaf, 1977; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). As I read and learned, I was struck by the thread of relationship that wove through all three themes. Relationships constitute a CoP; relationships are often constituted in FtF interactions; and servant leadership has been found to develop safe, strong relationships and webs of relationships (see Chapter 2). While all these themes are complex and multifaceted, they are all relational. So it is no surprise, then, that I chose relational methodologies for my inquiry: action research engagement and insider action research, but with an eye, still, to issues of power. The methods were relational as well: Five staff members were able to tell their stories of meaningful team and FtF encounters during narrative interviews, and six staff engaged in meaningful dialogue about FtF and CoP in the Collegial Café.

From these methods, I engaged in data analysis and developed four findings and four related conclusions. First, I found that staff narratives shared common elements, demonstrating conditions that support meaningful interactions and the beneficial outcomes of interactions. I concluded that conditions for effective, healthy FtF encounters and CoP exist at HDCH. Second, I found that staff members believe that practices and structures make a difference in the quality of their FtF interactions by impacting the supporting conditions. I concluded that we have practices and opportunities that support good conditions for effective FtF encounters, both
strengthening our relationships and growing our capacity to do good work in our domain. Third, I found that staff believed that leadership and collaboration are necessary and often in tension with each other. I concluded that our understanding of leadership and followership may be limiting some conditions that would nurture a healthier CoP. Finally, I found that staff described an ideal future culture of FtF communication that includes meaningful shared purpose, unity in diversity, and collaboration towards collective wins; they did not represent conflict or disagreement. I concluded that this ideal future showed how HDCH staff value shared purpose and community and have room to grow in how they frame disagreement.

The recommendations included this inquiry are meant to support our growth as a CoP in all the areas mentioned in this report. As Crippen (2012) suggested, we will enhance our mutual understanding, identify our strengths, and recognize areas for improvement. The full list of recommendations can be found in Table 2, but I will highlight a few of them: We will recognize and celebrate what is good in our CoP at HDCH; we will have a restorative practices refresher workshop to remind us of tools for healthy conflict; and we will create opportunities to share our stories with each other. By means such as these, we will nurture our CoP.

What I have found most encouraging about this inquiry is that we have much to celebrate at HDCH. As I engaged in a systems analysis recently, I was struck by how those strengths—conditions for good FtF encounters and teamwork, healthy practices, dialogue—are part of a reinforcing loop (see Appendix A). The fact that these strengths exist at HDCH allows for a healthy CoP; that healthy CoP continues to nurture these good conditions. I believe that by being mindful of where our good health comes from, celebrating the good, working on the not-so-
good, and most of all enhancing our mutual understanding, we can continue to nurture our CoP and each other.
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Figure A1. A preliminary analysis of the system of leadership, decision-making, communication and their impact on trust, alignment and community among staff. This was developed before data collection.
Figure A2. Revised Systems Map of Staff Communication
Appendix B: Narrative Interview Agenda

Preparation – 30 minutes

- Arrive at interview location
- Ensure technology is working, all set up is complete
- Journal out my assumptions

Introduction - 10-15 minutes

1. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my inquiry project about Community of Practice and face-to-face communication among HDCH’s staff.

2. First, I want to reiterate what a “community of practice” is
   1. It’s a group of people connected by a shared purpose, whose learning primarily happens through the relationships among them. It’s a community, but a community with a common goal.
   2. The inquiry question for this project is, “By what means can the staff of HDCH nurture our community of practice?”
      1. And my particular focus has to do with face-to-face communication

3. I want to highlight a few things from the inquiry invitation letter.
   1. First, your participation today is totally voluntary. If at any time during this hour or in future you decide you don’t want to continue your participation, you are welcome to withdraw without prejudice.
   2. I’ll be recording today’s interview. This will help me remember what you share with me today. Following the interview, I will be preparing a transcript for your review and approval.
   3. The themes from these interviews will form the basis for a World Café dialogue among up to 25 staff in the new year, and you’re very welcome to attend as a participant.

4. Here is what you can expect during this interview. First, my role today is as listener. I may ask a clarifying question, or offer you a prompt, but otherwise, I’m all ears. This is a time for you to tell your stories related to this topic. I’m looking forward to hearing your stories and I’m grateful you’re willing to share them. I will be jotting a few notes during the session. These help me to track our conversation or note any follow up questions I might have. Please know that I’m listening, it’s just to help me track.
   1. Do you have any specific questions, comments, or concerns before we begin?
Interview - 60 minutes

In this interview I explore your personal experience of effective teamwork, and of face-to-face communication.

1. First, to set the stage, tell me a story about a memorable, fulfilling work initiative you have experienced with a team of HDCH colleagues.
   - Possible follow up questions
     - What did the team do to make this so memorable/fulfilling?
     - How did the team work together?
     - What would a ‘fly on the wall’ have seen as you interacted together?
     - In what ways might this experience impacted how you work with others?

2. Describe a time when you experienced a fabulous face-to-face interaction.
   - Possible follow up questions
     - What made it such a meaningful/memorable experience?
     - What stands out to this day about that experience?
     - Describe the setting for me.
     - In what ways might this interaction have impacted your relationship with those involved?

3. Describe a time when you experienced a very meaningful face-to-face interaction with an HDCH colleague.
   - Possible follow up questions
     - What were you thinking at the time?
     - How did that make you feel?
     - What have you thought about it since?

Thanks & Wrap up

1. Those are all the questions I have for you. Is there anything else you’d like to express before we’re done?

2. Thank you for sharing your time and your stories with me. I appreciate your willingness to be part of this inquiry.

3. What’s Next
   - In the coming couple of weeks, I’ll be transcribing your interview.
   - Once that’s done, I’ll send it to you for your review and your input.
   - If you have any questions in the meantime, please get in touch. I’d be happy to connect with you.
4. Participation
   - Finally, remember that your participation is totally voluntary, and if at any time you want to withdraw, you are welcome to do so.

Self-debriefing - Up to 60 minutes

*Free-associate around the topic of this interview: Write down everything I can think of, feelings, impressions, content, etc.*
Appendix C: Collegial Café Agenda

Purpose:

- Develop questions related to:
  - Inquiry question: “By what means can the staff of HDCH nurture our community of practice?”
  - And these two of the four inquiry sub-questions:
    - “What are the stories HDCH staff tell about memorable successes their team of colleagues has had at HDCH?”
    - “What communication skills, practices, and underlying values would contribute to more effective team communication?”
    - “What would ideal face-to-face communication among staff look like?”
    - “What effective face-to-face communication practices might staff co-create?”
  - The goal is that in or by the final share-out round, we co-create some recommendations for ourselves around our communications practices.

Intro

Collegial Café

Menu

9:30 Introduction
9:45 Round 1 Conversation
10:15 Round 2 Conversation
10:45 Round 3 Conversation
11:10 Share Out – Rich Pictures
11:50 Thanks, Close & Lunch
9:30  Set the stage (purpose, WC guidelines and etiquette), explain the agenda for the afternoon, point out resources and encourage participation, ask for questions, remind about consent, refreshments, get settled at tables.

- purpose: to explore how the staff of Hamilton District Christian High could nurture our *community of practice* through face-to-face communication.
  - a Community of Practice is an organic, informal network of relationships through which members make meaning, learn, and develop their identities. It describes the social rather than organizational structures in which learning happens. Members of a CoP share relationships, purposes, common language, a domain of interest, and some practices, among other things.

1. What would ideal face-to-face communication among staff look like?
2. What effective face-to-face communication practices might staff co-create?

- Setting the context: “the commitment is to creating a more relational kind of talk as distinct from achieving a particular outcome”
- As a warm-up, ask “Remember a time when you had a great conversation where real learning or new insight occurred—what enabled that to happen?” (Brown & Isaacs, 2005, p. 58).

**Round 1**

9:45  Conversation

*Q: One participant talked about interactions with colleagues as “little building blocks” that could become “something quite meaningful” over time. Describe a time when a small action or interaction was meaningful for you.*

10:05  Summary reflections

10:08  Transition to new groups
Round 2

10:15 Conversation

*Q: One participant said, “there has to be an opportunity for us to let our voices be heard with each other.” What’s important to you about such opportunities to hear and be heard at HD?*

10:35 Summary reflections

10:38 Transition to new groups

Round 3

10:45 Conversation

*Q: What conversation, if begun today, could ripple out in a way that creates new possibilities how we relate to each other in our shared work?*

11:05 Summary reflections

Share Out

11:10 Create Rich Pictures
Rich Picture Guidelines

- Represent everything you envision that an ideal culture of our face-to-face communication would include.
- Keep it unstructured. (Describe a situation, rather than a timeline, comic strip, or single metaphor.)
- Include multiple stories and points of view – these help make it rich!
- Try not to use words; stick with images. (You can label if you need to.)
- Feel free to include values, emotions, observations, emotional climate, social roles, beliefs and norms, etc.
- Show relationships between elements (e.g. use arrows to show connections).
- Include yourselves in the picture.
- Give everyone a chance to contribute. (Everyone should have a marker.)
- Give your picture a title.

(Armson, 2017)

11:30 Gallery Walk

11:40 Town Hall share-out

Thanks & Close

11:50 And pray for lunch
Appendix D: Inquiry Team Member Letter of Agreement

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership Degree at Royal Roads University, Cheryl Webb (the Student) will be conducting an inquiry study at Hamilton District Christian High (HDCH) to. The Student’s credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership, at [phone #] or email [email address].

Inquiry Team Member Role Description

As a volunteer Inquiry Team Member assisting the Student with this project, your role may include one or more of the following: providing advice on the relevance and wording of questions and letters of invitation, supporting the logistics of the data-gathering methods, including observing, assisting, or facilitating an interview or focus group, taking notes, reviewing analysis of data, and/or reviewing associated knowledge products to assist the Student and HDCH’s change process. In the course of this activity, you may be privy to confidential inquiry data.

Confidentiality of Inquiry Data

In compliance with the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Policy, under which this inquiry project is being conducted, all personal identifiers and any other confidential information generated or accessed by the inquiry team advisor will only be used in the performance of the functions of this project, and must not be disclosed to anyone other than persons authorized to receive it, both during the inquiry period and beyond it. Recorded information in all formats is covered by this agreement. Personal identifiers include participant names, contact information,
personally identifying turns of phrase or comments, and any other personally identifying information.

**Bridging Student’s Potential or Actual Ethical Conflict**

In situations where potential participants in a work setting report directly to the Student, you, as a neutral third party with no supervisory relationship with either the Student or potential participants, may be asked to work closely with the Student to bridge this potential or actual conflict of interest in this study. Such requests may include asking the Inquiry Team Advisor to assist in facilitating a large-group method.

Personal information will be collected, recorded, corrected, accessed, altered, used, disclosed, retained, secured and destroyed as directed by the Student, under direction of the Royal Roads Academic Supervisor.

Inquiry Team Members who are uncertain whether any information they may wish to share about the project they are working on is personal or confidential will verify this with Cheryl Webb, the Student.

**Statement of Informed Consent:**

I have read and understand this agreement.

______________________________  ________________________________  _______
Name (Please Print)                      Signature                      Date
Appendix E: Research Project Information Letter

Nurturing our Community of Practice: Collaborating to Strengthen
Face-to-Face Communication among the Staff of Hamilton District Christian High

This research project is part of my requirements for a Master of Arts in Leadership at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership Studies: [email address] or [phone #].

Purpose of the study and sponsoring organization

The purpose of this project is to explore how the staff of Hamilton District Christian High could nurture our community of practice through face-to-face communication.

What is a community of practice (CoP)? It is an organic, informal network of relationships through which members make meaning, learn, and develop their identities. A CoP describes the social rather than organizational structures in which learning happens. Members of a CoP share relationships, purposes, common language, a domain of interest, and some practices, among other things. In order to explore how we can grow at HDCH, my inquiry question is: By what means can the staff of HDCH nurture our community of practice?

I hope to address this question by exploring the following through research:
1. What are the stories HDCH staff tell about memorable successes their team of colleagues have had at HDCH?
2. What communication skills, practices, and underlying values would contribute to more effective team communication?
3. What would ideal face-to-face communication among staff look like?
4. What effective face-to-face communication practices might staff co-create?

Your participation and how information will be collected

The research will consist of an optional narrative interview and an invitation to a World Café.

The narrative interviews will each last about an hour and will be held during 2019. Participants to be invited to interview will be selected through a process of purposive sampling in order to ensure, as much as possible, a diversity of perspectives. I will be asking open-ended questions and providing space for the interviewees to tell their stories of face-to-face communication at HDCH. The questions will relate to sub-questions 1 and 2 (above). These interviews will be recorded and transcribed, and opportunity given for participants to read over and edit their respective transcripts. Then data will be analyzed thematically for common plotlines, which will be the basis of the questions for the next method.
The World Café will be held following interview data analysis. It will last about two hours. All staff other than the Principal and my husband will be invited to attend. A World Café is a large-group conversation process that fosters dialogue, the sharing of knowledge, cross-pollination of ideas, and developing action for change. World Café has seven design principles: set a clear purpose for the conversation; create a welcoming setting; choose questions that matter and are compelling; encourage participation by everyone; listen together for themes, patterns and insights; connect various perspectives; and share what has been learned with the full group so patterns of wholeness can be discovered.

Through multiple small group dialogues, mixing groups, providing opportunities for expressing ideas through writing and drawing, and having a full-group share-out, staff will have the opportunity to discuss an ideal future of face-to-face communication at HDCH, as well as to co-create recommendations towards this future. The session will not be recorded; the notes, sketches and summary conversation sheets produced during the session will be the data for further analysis.

**Benefits and risks to participation**

The potential benefits to participation in this research project may include increased voice and collaboration among staff, which I believe will support the continued improvement of relationships and community. A healthier staff community would likewise benefit students and their learning, as well as parents. And as the goal of learning at HDCH is for students to live lives of service to God by working for good in their communities, it is my hope that increased community among our staff may positively benefit the communities where our students and alumni live, work, and serve.

The only potential risk I can see is that when participating in the World Café, it would be possible that some staff do not feel comfortable to be completely honest. This is why I may rely on Inquiry Team members for support, and why staff themselves will act as table hosts.

**Inquiry team**

I have an Inquiry Team made up of Richard Van Egmond, a fellow Masters student (Michelle Paquin), an external researcher (Kim Radersma), and an external facilitator (Chris Wignall). Richard will extend invitation and track RSVPs for participants, Michelle will provide feedback on the research process and on data analysis, Kim may conduct some interviews, and Chris will facilitate the World Café.

**Real or Perceived Conflict of Interest**

The fact that my husband Owen is also on staff is not a conflict of interest, per se, but does raise questions of confidentiality. See below for more information. I disclose this
information here so that you can make a fully informed decision on whether or not to participate in this study.

**Confidentiality, security of data, and retention period**

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information I collect will be maintained in confidence with hard copies (e.g., consent forms and notes) stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home. Electronic data (such as transcripts or audio files) will be stored on a password-protected personal laptop. It is possible that some digital information may be stored on servers located in the United States. Please be aware that American governments, courts, or law enforcement and regulatory agencies may be able to obtain disclosure of such data through the laws of the United States.

Information obtained through this inquiry will be recorded in hand-written format or audio-recorded and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand.

All documentation will be kept strictly confidential, including from my husband, Owen. I will keep all data for the period until November 2021, one year after my graduation, and at that time it will be destroyed. The data for an identifiable individual who withdraws from the study will not be retained. Due to the nature of the World Café, it will not be possible to keep individual participants anonymous from me, Inquiry Team members, or any staff person who attends as a participant. But I will ask that participants respect the confidential nature of the research by not sharing names or identifying comments outside the group.

**Sharing results**

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master of Arts in Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with the Board and Leadership Team of HDCH. The summary and recommendations of my report will also be shared back with HDCH’s staff. Potentially, I may also share my findings in journal articles, books, or conference presentations.

**Procedure for withdrawing from the study**

If you participate and then choose to withdraw from the study, please contact Cheryl Webb at [email address] or [phone #], or Richard Van Egmond at [email address]. At that time, any data that is identifiably yours will be removed from the study and will no longer be retained. Anything collected in the World Café, however, might not be possible to identify for removal.

You are not required to participate in this research project. By replying directly to the e-mail request for participation or signing the in-person consent form, you indicate that you have
read and understand the information above and give your free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.
Appendix F: Email Invitation to Participate in Narrative Interview

Dear HDCH Staff members,

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project that Cheryl Webb is conducting. This project is part of the requirement for her Master of Arts in Leadership at Royal Roads University. This project has been approved by Duncan Todd and I have been asked to contact potential participants for this purpose.

The purpose of this project is to explore how the staff of Hamilton District Christian High could nurture our community of practice through face-to-face communication. What is a community of practice (or CoP)? It is an organic, informal network of relationships through which members make meaning, learn, and develop their identities. A CoP describes the social rather than organizational structures in which learning happens. Members of a CoP share relationships, purposes, common language, a domain of interest, and some practices, among other things.

1. What are the stories HDCH staff tell about memorable successes their team of colleagues have had at HDCH?
2. What communication skills, practices, and underlying values would contribute to more effective team communication?
3. What would ideal face-to-face communication among staff look like?
4. What effective face-to-face communication practices might staff co-create?

Due to time constraints, there will be a limited number of interviews. Interview slots will be assigned by purposive sampling: first-come, first served but with a view to ensuring...
representation from different staff roles including teachers, support staff, and possibly a Leadership Team member.

This phase of the research project will consist of narrative interviews conducted offsite. A narrative interview is a one-on-one connection in which an interviewer asks open-ended questions that support an interviewee in sharing his or her stories related to the topic. The interview is estimated to last approximately one hour. The analyzed results of all the interviews will be used to frame questions about staff face-to-face communications for the next phase of the study, a large-group activity called a World Café. There, staff can collaboratively shape what they want for communication among HDCH staff. Data from the interviews and the World Café will also inform a report and recommendations to HDCH Leadership Team and Board as well as Cheryl’s thesis.

The attached information letter contains further information about the study conduct and will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether or not you wish to participate. Please review this information before responding. You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any point, until such a time as you review and approve the transcript of your interview, without prejudice.

I realize that due to a collegial relationship with Cheryl, you may feel compelled to participate in this research project. Please be aware that you are not required to participate and, should you choose to participate, your participation would be entirely voluntary. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw without prejudice, at any time. Please note that if you choose to withdraw after you have reviewed and approved the transcript of your interview, it may be difficult to remove all your data from the inquiry. If you do not wish to participate,
simply do not reply to this request. Your decision to not participate will also be maintained in confidence. Your choice will not affect your relationship with Cheryl or your employment status in any way.

If you report directly to Cheryl, you are still welcome to participate. I will arrange a time for you to meet with an external interviewer. This individual will facilitate the interview, ensure the interview is transcribed, and will scrub the transcript of identifying information. We will ensure your confidentiality in this way.

Feel free to contact Cheryl or me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes.

If you would like to participate in this research project, please contact me at this email address by Monday, November 25, 2019.

Regards,

Richard Van Egmond

[email address]
Appendix G: Consent Form for Narrative Interview

Nurturing our Community of Practice: Collaborating to Strengthen

Face-to-Face Communication among the Staff of Hamilton District Christian High

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 19 and have read the attached information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project and to have data you contribute used in the thesis and any other presentations, articles, or journals.

I consent to audio recording of the interview, and to quotations and excerpts expressed by me through the narrative interview being included in this study, provided that my identity is not disclosed.

Name: (Please Print): ________________________________

Signed: __________________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________
Appendix H: Invitation to Collegial Café

Dear Staff,

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project that Cheryl Webb is conducting. This project is part of the requirement for her Master of Arts in Leadership at Royal Roads University. This project has been approved by Duncan Todd and I have been asked to contact potential participants for this purpose.

The purpose of this project is to explore how the staff of Hamilton District Christian High School could nurture our community of practice through face-to-face communication. What is a community of practice (or CoP)? It is an organic, informal network of relationships through which members make meaning, learn, and develop their identities. A CoP describes the social rather than organizational structures in which learning happens. Members of a CoP share relationships, purposes, common language, a domain of interest, and some practices, among other things.

To this end, the project inquiry question is: By what means can the staff of HDCH nurture our community of practice? Cheryl hopes to address this question by exploring the following through research:

1. What are the stories HDCH staff tell about memorable successes their team of colleagues have had at HDCH?
2. What communication skills, practices, and underlying values would contribute to more effective team communication?
3. What would ideal face-to-face communication among staff look like?
4. What effective face-to-face communication practices might staff co-create?
All staff, other than Duncan Todd and Owen Webb, are being invited to participate in this phase of the project, a World Café. World Café is a method for collaboration and large-group dialogue. Since this one is about how we work together, we’re calling it a Collegial Café. The event is estimated to last approximately two and a quarter hours. It will be held on Monday, January 20 from 9:30 – 11:45 am in the Big Room at HDCH. You’re welcome to stay afterwards for a light lunch to thank you for your participation.

The attached information letter contains more detail about the study conduct and will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether or not you wish to participate. Please review this information before responding.

I realize that due to your collegial relationship with Cheryl, you may feel compelled to participate in this research project. Please be aware that you are not required to participate and, should you choose to participate, your participation would be entirely voluntary. If you do choose to participate, you are free to change your mind up to the event itself without prejudice; because of the nature of a World Café, it may not be possible to remove your contributions from the data after the fact. If you do not wish to participate, simply do not reply to this request. Your choice will not affect your relationship or your employment status in any way. If you do decide to participate I will send out a brief consent form for you to sign as part of the standard process for this type of project.

Please feel free to contact Cheryl at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes. If you would like to participate in this research project,
please contact me by email Thursday, January 16.

Regards,

Richard

Follow up Invitation

Looking for a change of pace at a busy time of year—and a free lunch?

Join us for the

**Collegial Cafe**

**When:**  Monday, **January 20** from 9:30 am - 11:45 am  
(refreshments provided & lunch to follow)

**Where:**  The Big Room

**What:**  Participate in a research project: have a voice in our **face-to-face communication** and our **HDCH collegial community** through engaging in conversation with colleagues.

**RSVP:**  by **Friday, January 17** to Richard VE

For full details  
see Richard Van Egmond’s email of Jan 14  
or chat with Cheryl
Appendix I: Consent Form for Collegial Café

Nurturing our Community of Practice: Collaborating to Strengthen Face-to-Face Communication among the Staff of Hamilton District Christian High

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 19 and have read the attached information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project and to have data you contribute used in the thesis and any other presentations, articles, or journals.

As the researcher, I will maintain your confidentiality, but I cannot promise this on behalf of other participants. However, I will request that all participants respect the confidential nature of this study and not share identifying information with others.

☐ I consent to the material I have contributed to and/or generated (e.g., flipchart notes, table notes, conversation summary sheets) through my participation in the Collegial Café be used in this study.

☐ I commit to respecting the confidential nature of the World Café by not sharing identifying information about the other participants.

__________________________
Name: (Please Print):

__________________________
Signed:

__________________________
Date:
Appendix J: Collegial Café Conversation Summary Sheet

Conversation summary statements capture your thoughts in concise bullet points.

Conversation 1 Summary (2 minutes)

The conversation you just finished sparked by Question 1...

What are the key messages that you are taking away about the nature or impact of “little building blocks”?

- 
- 

What reflections did you hear from others that were good reminders for you?

- 

Conversation 2 Summary (2 minutes)

As you reflect on Question 2...

What are the key messages you are taking away from this conversation about hearing and being heard?

- 
- 

What are the key takeaways or reminders you heard as you listened to others talk about Question 2?

-
Conversation Summary Sheet (side 2—continued)

Conversation summary statements capture your thoughts in concise bullet points.

Conversation 3 Summary (2 minutes)

What are your reflections after participating in a discussion of Question 3?

- 
- 

What ideas did you hear from others as you listened to them talk about new possibilities for how we relate?

- 

World Café Integration (2 minutes)

What was valuable about going through this exercise together with colleagues?

Summary Sheet created by Leslie Smith, President and Founder, Full Circle Learning and Consulting.