School Leaders Supporting Teachers’ Mental Health

by

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LEADERSHIP SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH

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Abstract

This action research project examined school leaders’ role in supporting classroom teachers’ mental health within Prince Edward Island schools. The study explored the question: How can Prince Edward Island’s school leaders support the mental health needs of teachers in Prince Edward Island (PEI)? Using action research methodology, and specifically an action research engagement model I interviewed three classroom teachers from across PEI with between three and thirteen years of experience and conducted a focus group with five school principals from various schools in PEI with experience ranging from four to eighteen years. I undertook this work with the approval of the Royal Roads University Ethics Board, the Department of Education Early Learning and Culture’s (DEEC) External Research Review Committee and in line with the Royal Roads University Ethics Policy. A literature review investigated leadership models and teacher mental health and competencies fundamental to supporting teacher mental health. Key themes include teacher workload, teacher appreciation, teacher autonomy, teacher mental health, teacher collaboration, and the leadership competencies included in the ethical, appreciative, and servant leadership models. The key findings of this study explored the link between school leadership and teachers’ mental health and the ability of school leaders to create school cultures conducive to supporting and improving teachers’ mental health. The major recommendations offered actions the DEEC could undertake to facilitate leadership development in school leaders using leadership models supportive of teachers’ mental health and create opportunities to increase collaboration and shared learning that could foster schools as supportive, collaborative learning networks tasked with improving the collective capacity of students.
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I am very grateful to the staff of the Prince Edward Island Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture who have presented me with a working environment that feeds my interest in organizational innovation. I am particularly grateful to Tamara Hubley Little, EdD, who strives to create systems growth in the Leadership and Learning Division and who gracefully has reviewed this paper. I also thank my Director in English Programs, Derek McEwen, who is an inspiration as a leader who empowers those around him.

Lastly, this inquiry began by listening to the concerns of colleagues throughout the previous 19 years. It has been through the vulnerability they showed in their sharing of their joys and struggles that I have been driven toward this topic. Many of these individuals were close to me throughout this work. I am indebted to them for their concern for their profession, their love of their students, and their continued work toward supporting this profession.
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Chapter One: Focus and Framing

The Leadership and Learning Division of the Prince Edward Island (PEI) Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture is mandated to lead the implementation of changes to advance educational excellence in the province of PEI (Maclauchlan, 2016). The former English Language School Board described itself as a learning community that challenges and motivates each student to reach his or her potential (PEI English Language School Board, 2016, p. 4). The Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture is called upon, as the lead province in the Pan Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health, to work towards protecting and improving the “mental state and resilience of teachers and students” (Hussain, Christou, Reid, & Freeman, 2013, p. ix) as a core indicator of school health and student achievement for its 19,691 students and 1,563 teachers (Fullen & Gallagher, 2016, p. 4). When discussing mental health in schools, Canadian Teachers’ Federation President Mark Ramsankar stated, “Being able to talk about it (mental health) has really helped; it’s really forcing the action that we seek” (Trewin, 2015, para. 3). Increasing workloads, due to larger and more complex classes, and students who are struggling with their own mental health is affecting how teachers approach their work. This is creating teachers who are feeling both shame and guilt due to a sense of responsibility for their students (Chang, 2009). I think mental health is a major condition of student success that supports learning and that teachers’ mental health forms the foundation for successful mental health initiatives to empower teachers in this important area of education. This inquiry engaged key stakeholders in the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture with the goal of enhancing school leaders’ ability to support the main catalysts for these initiatives, classroom teachers, with their mental health needs.
Over the past decade, initiatives have been introduced by the various school jurisdictions in Canada to increase the awareness and decrease the stigma of mental illness in schools. In my former role as an Association Instructor with the Alberta Teachers’ Association, I was part of a team that created a very popular course titled *Unseen Hurts: Understanding Mental Health Issues in Our Schools* (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2015b). This course encourages schools to be proactive in student mental health and teaches preventative mental health practices. Its focus is on how to recognize and support students struggling with mental health issues. Teachers’ mental health needs are increasing because of the needs of their students and these teachers’ needs should be included in the conversation within the Leadership and Learning Division of the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture (DEEC).

I have worked as a classroom teacher since 1998 and have held various roles within education, including school administrator, contract negotiator and monitor, teacher workload inquiry chair, and Political Engagement Coordinator. I currently hold the position of Innovation and Social Studies Leader with the DEEC and continue to work both as a curriculum developer and professional development workshop facilitator writing, editing, and presenting PD workshops for teachers. These positions have allowed me to understand the defined and nuanced needs of teachers. I believe the DEEC is a very strong advocate for public education, students and teachers and that initiatives supporting mental health in schools have been a positive step in the DEEC’s agile mandate.

Action research provides a means to investigate and design more effective solutions to complex issues in a work or social setting (Stringer, 2014, p. 6) My role as an action researcher within my organization is to celebrate the DEEC’s work supporting mental health in schools while engaging school leaders in improving teachers’ mental health needs. This inquiry is
“organization development action research” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014, p. 123) and will invite leaders within the DEEC to explore how they can align mental health initiatives with the mission of the DEEC through the following question: How can the Leadership and Learning Division of the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture prepare school leaders to support the mental health needs of teachers in Prince Edward Island’s schools? Subquestions include:

1. What leadership models contribute to a school leader’s ability to support a culture that enhances teachers’ mental health?

2. What competencies/abilities do effective school leaders need to support the mental health needs of teachers?

3. What conditions are necessary for teacher autonomy and sense of control to contribute to teachers’ mental health needs?

4. How might school leaders support teacher autonomy and sense of control?

Significance of the Inquiry

Stringer (2014) explained that pressures in professional practice reflect tensions in contemporary society (p. 1). Nationally, 20% of people are suffering from some form of mental health issue in Canada (Caron & Liu, 2010). Polanczyk et al. (2015) explained that 13.4% of children and adolescents worldwide suffer from a mental disorder. Positive mental health, for the purposes of this study was not limited to the absence of a mental disorder. Instead, this study focused on an understanding of mental health consisting of a person’s ability to enjoy life, a capacity to work with through challenges, emotional well-being, spiritual well-being and equity, respect for cultures and dignity within social environments (Government of Canada, 2006).

The Canadian Coalition for Children and Youth Mental Health stated the mental health of students is the number one issue facing schools today (Whitley, Smith, & Vaillancourt, 2013).
According to a recent workload study, the most commonly cited workload factor for teachers was the increased enrolment of high needs students and the changes this presents to the scope of their work (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2015a). This increase has been linked to discrepant economic conditions between families, increased use of high-stakes testing, and a correlated link between digital technology and student distraction (Bowles & Gintis, 2011; Rosen, 2012; Ryan & Weinstein, 2009). The change goal of this inquiry is to recognize teachers as main catalysts for improving school mental health. This inquiry will encourage school leaders to follow the DEEC’s mandate of contributing to the mental health strategy of the government of PEI (Maclauchlan, 2016).

The main stakeholders for this inquiry included teachers and school administrators or leaders and the Leadership and Learning Division (LL Division) of the DEEC. This inquiry has allowed members of the LL division and other divisions within the DEEC to follow the DEEC mission of building opportunities for success and developing shared understandings of their various roles in supporting school leaders in their quest to reinforce teachers’ mental health. Whitley, Smith and Vallaincourt (2012) stated that teachers need to have the foundational knowledge and skills to recognize mental health difficulties and know the steps to ensure students receive the care they need. This inquiry has affirmed teacher mental health as a foundational measure to be explicitly included within the DEEC’s approach to overall school mental health. The inquiry will educate the public of the central role of teachers in keeping schools mentally healthy. Should this inquiry not happen, the province’s individual school goals, one of which centres on student wellness including mental health, could fail due to a lack of support for the main catalysts of this initiative, the teachers themselves.
Organizational Context

The DEEC is deep in organizational change. In November 2015, the provincial government of PEI announced it would dissolve the English Language School Board after some disagreements between the Board and the Department of Education regarding responsibilities for various aspects of the education system (Campbell, 2015). As part of the new structure, the province has created three new advisory councils whose mission is to advise the DEEC in matters pertaining to education policy (see Appendix A for organizational chart). These advisory councils will put everyone in the room when education policy is created and act as checks and balances within the system (Archer & Cameron, 2009). The French Language School Board remained intact and continues to function. These changes were largely welcomed by educational stakeholders due to the apparent duplication of curriculum services and responsibilities within the old system (S. Willis, personal communication, August 15, 2016).

The DEEC is a new and complex organization, centralized in Summerside, supporting teachers and administrators across PEI for over 19,691 students and 1,563 teachers and administrators (Fullen & Gallagher, 2016, p. 4). The DEEC’s curriculum area works toward teacher professional development and curriculum innovation. The DEEC’s mission has not been updated. Although initially developed, the mission, values, and vision statement of DEEC continues to be a work in progress (T. Hubley-Little, personal communication, September 3, 2016). This restructuring also includes the Public Schools’ Branch, which is a crown corporation of the government of PEI and largely responsible for the logistical workings of schools on PEI. It

1 All personal communications in this report are used with permission.
is housed inside the structure of the DEEC as a result of dissolving the English Language School Board in 2015 (Campbell, 2015).

The new structure has presented great opportunities for the organization to develop its decision-making model. Many new staff began their contracts and secondments September 1, 2016, with their main roles centred upon the needs of schools beginning a new school year. This timing has put the opportunities for defining roles and structure on the sidelines. The DEEC is a governmental organization with the Minister of Education at the top of the structure as an elected member of the legislative assembly and appointed by the premier to the position, while employees fall underneath the Minister. This current Minister, Doug Currie, with his 20 years as a teacher and school principal, appointed the Deputy Minister Susan Willis, a retired teacher and school principal well regarded for her depth of knowledge and sound judgments (D. McEwan, personal communication, August 25, 2016). The organization is housed beneath these two individuals who report to the public and to the premier and executive council regarding education on PEI.

The full-time staff of the DEEC is comprised of approximately 100 individuals housed in the Holman Building in Summerside, PEI. The divisions of English Innovation, French Innovation, and Leadership and Learning comprise the areas of curriculum development and implementation, with the Public Schools Branch supporting with instructional resources. Each area has a director, and various leaders are contained under each director.

The governing majority Liberal party of PEI is a forward-thinking innovative government, with a premier who is extremely engaged in education and working within a structure that is unique to Canadian provincial education departments (D. Currie, personal communication, September 9, 2016). There are approximately 100 employees on various length
contracts within the DEEC. Some of these employees are members of the Prince Edward Island Teachers’ Federation and on secondment with the department, while others are employees on contracts ranging from 10 months to six years. These full-time employees report to directors who report to the Deputy Minister. The bureaucratic leadership model (Taylor, 2009) has largely structured the decision-making model framework of the DEEC in its first year.

Decisions within the DEEC are guided by directors in each division (see Appendix A for organizational chart). They work within budget allocations based on a provincial budget released in April of each year. School enrolments and provincial taxes determine the funding structure of schools on PEI, with collective needs and emerging trends factored in to determine the various needs of students: the true drivers of the DEEC’s work.

Interesting to note for this inquiry, the three positions tasked with school administrative support fall under the LL Division, but they also have a matrix relationship with the Public Schools Branch of the structural diagram (see appendix A for organizational chart). The Public Schools Branch is a separate crown corporation within the organization resulting from the dissolving of the English Language Schools Board in April of 2016. It deals with school logistics such as bussing, buildings, and the day-to-day operations of English schools on PEI. To support this new structure, in August 2016, a new Education Act was passed in the Legislative Assembly of PEI (PEI Legislative Counsel Office, 2016).

Social capitalization (Gladwell, 2016) is a measure of how well a nation helps individuals meet their full potential. It is my belief that the foundation of the DEEC lies in understanding that education innovation helps improve social capitalization of young people, thereby improving society as a whole. This is supported when describing the emergent learning partnerships model which states: “Together, we will ensure that all partners are focused on achieving the same goal:
for our learners to achieve excellence” (DEEC, 2016b, para. 1). Through open competitions for the various positions within the new structure, the DEEC has worked hard to have the best leaders within the organization and increase its transparency. It is important to note that the structure of the DEEC is one of its kind in Canada, with many educational jurisdictions watching closely for its success (S. Willis, personal communication, August 15, 2016). This transparency will be paramount if other jurisdictions hope to learn from these changes.

The LL Division within the DEEC offered a great venue for this inquiry. Its position within the curriculum branch and its direct connections with the Public Schools Branch allowed its sphere of influence to encompass areas of change throughout education in PEI. The fact that the three-person school administration support team is contained within the LL Division made it the best venue for this inquiry.

**Systems Analysis**

All organizations lie inside larger systems, such as industries, communities, and larger living systems, and these systems are bound by invisible fabrics of interrelated actions (Senge, 2006, p. 342). At its core, systems thinking is aimed at seeing how things are connected to each other within some notion of a whole entity (Peters, 2014). McNamara (2012) explained that complex systems interact with their environment and, therefore, are open systems. The DEEC is a complex emerging system that is influenced by several stakeholders, both internal and external. These influences come about sociologically, politically, and financially from various areas of education.

The driving factor for the DEEC are the students within PEI schools. The human system of each individual school wraps around this student-centred model. This system includes, first and foremost, the teachers in each classroom, along with resource teachers who support
classroom teachers, along with the school leaders (i.e., administration team) within each school. Moving outward the system increases in complexity. The changes within the DEEC in the past year have led to some opportunities to better understand the complex system itself; that said, individuals within the system, no matter where they lie within it, are driven by improving students’ life competencies through instruction.

The Minister and Deputy Minister of Education hold a central position within the hierarchy of the system. This area of the system drives programs and policies and is influenced by three newly appointed councils. The Learning Partners Advisory Council is comprised of stakeholders within and without of the education system and advises the minister on policies and strategies aimed at shaping a culture of learning on PEI to advance prosperity and quality of life (DEEC, 2015a, p. 1). Reporting directly to the Deputy Minister are the District Advisory Council and the Principals’ Council. The District Advisory Council is comprised of two high school students from each family of schools and one from each parent council/home and school association. It was developed to foster collaboration among school councils and the community and is mandated to identify education priorities within individual districts and communities (DEEC, 2016a, para. 1). The Principals’ Council is comprised of all principals in PEI and was established to strengthen a culture of collaboration among principals to support exemplary leadership and advise the Deputy Minister (DEEC, 2015b, p. 1). The Principals’ Council has principals and vice principals from each school’s human system and is impacted by the DEEC’s School Leadership Support Team. The School Leadership Support Team reports the needs of principals to the Public Schools Branch and liaisons between these two groups along with the Leadership and Learning Division.
The Public Schools Branch was established as a result of the dissolved English Language School Board in 2015, and its offices are located in Stratford, PEI, with a western branch working out of the Holman building in Summerside, PEI. It is tasked with the operational logistics of English schools along with the delivery of English curriculum developed by the DEEC’s English Innovation Programs division. Although the Public Schools Branch is external to the DEEC, it is very closely related to its work. The French Innovation section of the DEEC develops and supports the implementation of curriculum for French schools on the island. A traditional elected school board is tasked with the logistical operations of French schools on PEI and the delivery of this French curriculum to French schools on the island. Both the English and French Innovation sections of the DEEC have directors who report directly to the Deputy Minister of Education; both of these departments develop curriculum for schools on PEI and support the implementation of this curriculum.

The LL Division of the DEEC supports the human systems within schools in PEI directly. It is comprised of a number of instructional, assessment, literacy, and numeracy coaches who work directly with teachers in schools. This is coupled with its School Leadership Support team that supports the needs of administrators in PEI schools and gives them a voice in educational directives inside the DEEC.

Influences on these departments would be first and foremost PEI students and their families. Other outside partners include the PEI government, the PEI public, the University of PEI’s education department, the DEEC’s various provincial members, the PEI and Canadian Teachers’ Federation, peer advocacy programs such as the PEI Department of Health and Wellness (2016), and other specific government agencies that influence education policy, such as the Canadian Mental Health Commission. The outside influences have the ability to support and
complicate the roles of the players in the system, and their influence must be weighed and balanced regularly to have the system performing well. Along with these influences are external influences that cause discord and can affect the system itself, such as the present ideology of the government in power and economic factors such as commodity prices.

Internally, DEEC stakeholders are many. Their own portfolios guide DEEC employees closely. For example, increased enrolment numbers would be seen differently by an instructional coach concerned with curriculum delivery compared to a member of the Public Schools Branch concerned about school buildings. These external and internal influencers are presented in Figure 1.
Figure 1. Internal and external systems influences on the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture.
As the taboo of mental health erodes, public pressure is mounting for governments to study how to foster this erosion while supporting the mental health needs of Canadians (Caron & Liu, 2010). Although traditional schools have been concerned with providing educational services, research and practice-based perspectives assert that schoolteachers are more involved as tier one mental health professionals (Rothi, Leavey, & Best, 2008). As the PEI public has become more aware of statistics like 13.4% of children and adolescents suffer from mental disorders in schools today (Polanczyk et al., 2015), this awareness has created pressure on organizations like the DEEC to begin to develop schools that are helping to support this large section of their school populations. Organizations like the DEEC must be aware of the increased anxiety and workload this can cause teachers and develop ways of helping school leaders proactively support these teachers’ increased needs.

Thesis Overview

This first chapter of this thesis provided a review of the inquiry project, detailing the main research question and sub-questions, followed by a description of the significance of the inquiry to the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture, and a review of the context of the inquiry both within the DEEC and in the schools in Canada. It concluded with a summary of the imperative for need for change needed in society related to mental health.

Chapter 2 is a literature review to establish the theoretical context for this inquiry through a review of two topics: (a) teacher mental health and (b) leadership models supporting trust.

Chapter 3 presents action research as the methodology employed in this study, looking specifically at the use of an action research engagement model. The chapter then details the inquiry team, project participants, and project methods, including how the data were collected using interviews and a focus group. Further, it describes how the study was conducted, how the
data were analyzed, and the steps taken to ensure validity. Finally, it concludes with an overview of the ethical issues relevant in the study.

Chapter 4 summarizes the findings from the data and offers conclusions based upon the findings and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. It also reviews the scope and limitations of the inquiry.

Chapter 5 summarizes the implications of the inquiry and offers recommendations based on the findings and conclusions, including an explanation of the organizational implications for the DEEC and possible topics for future inquiry.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Through this literature review, I intend to establish a conceptual context for the inquiry’s main question: How can the Leadership and Learning Division of the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture prepare school leaders to support the mental health needs of teachers in Prince Edward Island’s schools? This is a review of the literature related using the keywords: teacher workload, teacher resilience, teacher autonomy, leadership trust, teacher collaboration, ethical, servant and appreciative leadership. Two topics are explored in this chapter: (a) teachers’ mental health and (b) school leadership and trust.

I begin the first topic with literature outlining a foundational understanding of teachers’ mental health. Following this, literature associated with several factors related to teachers’ mental health are presented. This topic is intended to ground the conversation around the mental health needs of classroom teachers and inform discussion around the inquiry subquestions three and four: “What conditions are necessary for teacher autonomy and sense of control?” and “How might school leaders support teacher autonomy and sense of control?”

Under topic two, school leadership and trust, current literature on the importance of trust in school leadership is explored, which offer several leadership models centred on improving trusting relationships with followers. This research is intended to inform discussion around the inquiry subquestions one and two: “What leadership models contribute to a school leader’s ability to support a culture that enhances teachers’ mental health?” and “What competencies/abilities do effective school leaders need to support the mental health needs of teachers?”
Teachers’ Mental Health

As described in chapter one, this study is based on an understanding of mental health consisting of a person’s ability to enjoy life, a capacity to work with through challenges, emotional well-being, spiritual well-being and equity, respect for cultures and dignity within social environments (Government of Canada, 2006). The study itself focussed on the occupational parameters that can affect teachers’ mental health. I begin the examination of teachers’ mental health with an exploration of teacher workload, and then move into how it contributes to levels of resilience in teachers. From there, the relationship of teacher autonomy and collaboration as factors that relate to both workload and resilience in teachers are explored. This exploration intends to provide insight into relevant factors of teachers’ mental health and provide insight into how leaders can support the mental health needs of teachers.

Teacher workload. It is quite apparent within the research that workload increases for teachers is challenging teachers’ ability to build learning competencies within students. These competencies like critical thinking, collaboration, and problem solving are often the main measures for the public as they work with students who become working individuals. If organizational factors like teachers’ workload is hindering this competency growth, the public taxpayer, who holds the main accountability pillar in education, will surely be concerned. Teachers’ mental health needs are closely connected to workload and workload is an organizational factor. There has been a lack of research in the Canadian education system surrounding the importance of organizational factors that affect teachers’ mental health. Day and Qing (2009) confirmed this gap, stating,

There is yet too little research in education, which has sought to analyze the relational and organizational conditions which influence teachers’ capacities to manage emotions in
ways that enable them to manage their well being and to sustain their effectiveness.

(p. 28)

Organizational factors like teacher workload and new initiatives are increasingly leaving teaching “littered with successive and persistent government policy reforms that have increased teachers’ external accountabilities, work complexity and emotional workload” (p. 27). The authors acknowledged more demands are being made to contribute to the academic, social, and emotional well being of pupils. Thus, it is important that policy makers, teacher educators, and school principals “attend to teachers’ own sense of well being” (p. 15) by seeing teacher mental health as a foundation for overall school mental health. Teacher workload is an important piece of a teacher’s mental health. As Bauer et al. (2007) stated, “Teacher strain is caused by large class sizes, pupils’ behavior, high workload, frequent changes in the education system and lack of support from colleagues and school heads” (p. 443). Using their findings from a survey of 949 German teachers, Bauer et al. stated that 30% of the teachers showed a significant mental health strain due to the changing nature of their roles (p. 446).

This strain is a concern for stakeholders of the teaching profession who recognize the importance of teacher retention to the profession. Ferguson, Frost, and Hall (2012) found that years of experience is the only characteristic that predicts job satisfaction in teachers. Chang’s (2009) findings, however, correlated teachers’ perceptions of social support to teacher burnout, adding transactional factors give deep insight into why some teachers feel drained by problematic student behaviours (p. 196). If the education sector wants to keep job satisfaction high for teachers, addressing workload and burnout will need to be part of the conversation (Chang, 2009; Ferguson et al., 2012). By not addressing workload, the mental health of teachers and schools will be in jeopardy, teacher burnout will increase, and teachers will not remain in the
profession long enough to grow their job satisfaction (Bauer et al., 2007; Chang, 2009; Ferguson et al., 2012).

A key element of teacher workload is a loss of control in the classroom. Rothi et al. (2008) explained that teachers have a strong fear associated with loss of control in the classroom and need pragmatic solutions when teacher control is threatened. An immediate consequence of teachers’ improved self-efficacy was their feelings of regaining control, which recharged teachers’ abilities to manage their social and primary emotions (Day & Qing, 2009, p. 27). This control can be threatened by increases in class size and including high-needs students without adequate support in the regular classroom (Rothi et al., 2008, p. 1228). This inclusion debate has been a frequent discussion piece for education stakeholders. Chang’s (2009) findings related to teacher burnout supported the understanding that teacher control is a factor in teacher burnout, holding teacher frustration being triggered by externally mandated change or by reforms they do not believe in (p. 202). Chang added to the conversation the role guilt and shame play in teacher responsibility (p. 203). This shame and guilt is especially prominent in beginning teachers and can result in “resentment, burnout and cynicism” (p. 208). Therefore, it is important to improve teachers’ sense of control to reduce their levels of resentment and cynicism so that burnout can be reduced and teacher retention can improve. These factors should improve job satisfaction for teachers. (Chang, 2009; Day & Qing, 2009; Rothi et al., 2008).

Resilience. Changes within education are an ongoing issue in schools. New research takes the profession toward new initiatives aimed at improving learning for students but sometimes these changes create increases in workload for teachers. As workload changes, teachers who are resilient are better equipped to deal with these changes (Day & Qing, 2009). Gu and Day (2013) stated that a teacher’s capacity to be resilient fluctuates as a result of the
influences of the personal, relational, and organizational settings in which they work, and these fluctuations have a profound effect on teacher retention (p. 22). Gu and Day’s study showed that 40% of the 1,000 teachers questioned from English schools were considering leaving the profession because of disruptive student behaviour, and more than a fifth of these teachers had developed mental health problems as a result. Pretsch, Flunger, and Schmitt (2012) found that professional learning should include the development and fostering of resilience. This study looked at the high demands of teaching coupled with the low control teachers have over curriculum, student characteristics, organizational structures, and a lack of recognition. A similar study of resilience in teachers has not been undertaken in Canada, worth noting in itself, and Ferguson et al. (2012) stated that more research is needed in the area of predictors of teacher job satisfaction, particularly with Canadian teachers. However, given the operational similarities between Canadian, English, and German schools, it is reasonable to assume a similar pattern applies in Canada.

Interestingly, Pretsch et al.’s (2012) findings suggested that although resilience predicts well-being in teachers, it does not do so for non-teaching employees because the working conditions of non-teaching employees are characterized by different stress patterns than those of teachers. The diverse stressors in the teaching profession mean resilience is especially important for teachers (p. 331). Teachers are expected to be resilient, but to maintain this resilience, both a high level of mental health and a long career are needed (Ferguson et al., 2012, p. 28). Resilience variances between individual teachers can be supported when school leaders understand the role they play in supporting teachers and put strategies in place that help maintain and build this resilience (Peters & Pearce, 2012, p. 258). Hartney (2016) suggested being mentored by a more experienced or senior colleague is an important aspect of learning resilience for teachers (p. 134).
It follows, then, that the teacher who is supported by colleagues and a school leader to build resilience will have improved levels of job satisfaction and a long career (Ferguson et al., 2012; Hartney, 2016; Peters & Pearce, 2012; Pretsch et al., 2012).

Relationship building is a key element for strong leadership. Kouzes and Posner (2007) affirmed this stating: “Leadership is not about Organizational power or authority, it’s not about being CEO. . . . It’s about relationships, credibility and what you do” (p. 338). Literature around teacher resilience supported the notion that school leaders play a vital role in supporting the mental health of teachers insofar as school leaders play a major role in teachers feeling supported professionally and personally (Peters & Pearce, 2012; Pretsch et al., 2012; Rothi et al., 2008). In North American schools, committed and trustworthy leaders at all levels are at the heart of building an individual and collective sense of resilience in organizations (Gu & Day, 2013, p. 38). Hartney (2016) listed factors that lead to resilience in teachers, including a sense of agency and a strong support group, such as a “competent and caring leadership team” (p. 134). Peters and Pearce’s (2012) work supported this concept, adding that positive staff relationships help to sustain commitment and promote resilience in the emotional and unpredictable nature of teachers’ lives (p. 257). It follows that schools interested in having committed, resilient teachers require leaders interested in supporting the emotional needs of their followers.

**Autonomy.** Autonomy is a need for all individuals that begins the moment a person is born. Inherent to the teacher autonomy is a professional need to make professional decisions regarding their students’ needs. Hargreaves and Shirley (2012) confirmed the inherent need for autonomy in teachers speaking about world leader Singapore’s key to improving their education system. The authors explained that in Singapore, “prescription has been replaced over time by a system that treats teachers as respected professionals with good judgment” (p. 90). However,
research indicated an international tendency of decreasing teacher autonomy (Ballet, Kelchtermans, & Loughran, 2006). Grimmett, Flemming, and Trotter (2008) linked new education policies as an “attempt to de-professionalize teachers as servants of the state merely carrying out public policy” (p. 18). Hyslop-Margison and Sears (2010) presented that economic downturns and neo liberal frameworks are threatening the role of teachers by shifting their role from creative instructional designers who establish curricular objectives to evidence-based practitioners who are driven by standardized tests (p. 2). Hyslop-Margison and Sears contended that external accountability frequently thwarts the professional collaboration required to enhance pedagogy and education (p. 7). Based on her work on teacher stress, Hartney (2008) looked at the importance of teachers maintaining a sense of ownership over their work and that self-efficacy related to this ownership is paramount to an “avoidance of negative stress” (p. 54).

School jurisdictions concerned about teachers having ownership over their work and improved levels of mental health can support teacher autonomy in schools. “A central and defining characteristic of professions in modern society has traditionally been their high level of relative autonomy” (Chan, Fisher, & Rubenson, 2007, p. 9). Teacher autonomy is directly related to job satisfaction and self-efficacy, and this teacher autonomy can greatly affect student learning in the classroom (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009). Teachers working within school models driven by external measurements are feeling a lack of professional choice in what and how they teach. Furthermore, the importance of autonomy in teachers is a social concern as public taxpayers expect students to improve autonomy as they move through the school system. This connection is supported by Rothi et al.’s (2007) work, which showed that teachers who feel more controlled in their own practice provide less autonomy support toward their students. Leroy, Bressoux, Sarrazin, and Trouilloud (2007) supported these findings, adding, “When
teachers’ self-efficacy is lowered, this causes a reduction in the use of practices favourable to satisfying students’ autonomy needs” (p. 538). Leroy et al. presented that the stronger the self-efficacy within a teacher, the more the teacher uses a humanistic approach related to task mastery for students. School jurisdictions continue to create curriculum models that focus on student competencies many of which are built around improved student autonomy. If jurisdictions and more specifically, school leaders are interested in improving autonomous learning for students, improving teachers’ autonomy should present a logical leverage point. (Leroy et al., 2007; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

Teaching is a profession that focuses on trust. This trust is built through relationships built with students, parents and professional colleagues. This trusting relationship provides a supportive network for teachers as the profession deals with the stressors related to change. Leithwood’s (2012) work looked at the importance of these professional relationships and posited that leadership affects student learning when it is targeted indirectly at working relationships that indirectly improve student achievement. Fullan (2014) believed leaders must “invest in capacity building to improve student results” (p. 67). Although professional learning communities are established in many jurisdictions many of these meet outside of the school timetable. Hyslop-Margison and Sears (2010) connected these professional communities to capacity building constructs that empower teachers: “While educators should be accountable in the same manner as other professionals, such accountability is best achieved by a vital professional community and not by external fiat” (p. 4). Therefore, the school leader interested in supporting student success would support teacher and student autonomy by helping foster a professional community where teachers’ efficacy is high and collaboration is embraced; this
would best be served within a school timetable (Leithwood, 2012; Leroy et al., 2007; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009).

**Collaboration.** Like many pursuits mastery in teaching comes from practice and learning how to construct healthy classrooms where rich learning can occur. This learning comes from making mistakes and collaborating with other teachers to fix them. Collaboration is an organizational approach for schools wishing to break the isolationist nature of teaching plagued by teachers who work along with students with little time to engage in dialogue about teaching practice (Hadar & Brody, 2010). The authors contended breaking this isolation creates a safe environment, where “sharing, daring and support became commonplace” (p. 1649). Meirink, Imants, Meijer, and Verloop (2010) explained that “collaboration implies that the teachers who are involved share responsibility and authority for making decisions about their common practices” (p. 164). I believe that this sharing becomes empowering for the individual teacher when both voices bring their strengths and vulnerabilities to the conversation and where relationship support is strong. Meirink et al. (2010) supported this notion explaining that the richest collegial interaction provides a level of interdependence and instructional problem solving and planning (p. 164), and it is this interdependence in the working relationship that plays a key role in teacher learning (p. 175).

Fullan, Hill, and Crévola (2009) argued teacher professional learning and collaboration need to be refined and focussed all the time, and this learning is a never-ending proposition. This collaborative practice can enhance teachers’ feelings of skillfulness, and teachers are often committed to renewing teaching skills each year (Hadar & Brody, 2010). I believe that school leaders who support collaborative time can improve teaching practice and create supportive environments that cultivate innovative practice. They should also recognize the different levels
of willingness to collaborate within individual teachers. Dove and Honigsfeld (2010) suggested collaborative programs should be carefully planned and should begin slowly to get all stakeholders on board while allowing teacher leadership to emerge. This emerging teacher leadership, in the form of coaches and lead teachers, should be recognised and developed as an important means to provide instructional support to teachers (p. 5). Furthermore, since these lead teachers may have considerable expertise regarding instructional practice, it would likely be effective to distribute leadership to these lead teachers and promote collaboration (Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy, & Louis 2008). I have seen schools thrive within a distributed leadership models where teachers are empowered as professionals who collaborate, listen, and learn.

There is a social network in a school in which improvements, academic and otherwise, happen. School leaders are often focussed on improving student results and rely on the innovation of teachers within this sometimes complex social network. Moolenaar, Daly, and Sleegers (2010) wrote the more a principal is embedded in the social network of the school, the more teachers were willing to take risks central to improving the school, and the more frequently teachers interact, the more innovation will occur. Moolenaar’s (2012) later work on the social network of teacher collaboration presented an interesting discussion on teachers’ relationships within schools. This lens peered into the “patterns of social relationships among teachers that result from their interactions and practice” (p. 8). Moolenaar (2012) recognized teachers’ individual similarities can greatly affect how quickly they collaborate with each other (p. 13). Moreover, these relationships shape conditions needed to change teacher practice by fostering a safe, nurturing climate that can create increases in school-wide capacity for teacher development (p. 25). Furthermore, these relationship patterns of collaboration offer a valuable starting point to an enhanced understanding of successful and failed school reform initiatives (p. 25). In a school
with a healthy collaborative environment fostered through an inclusive social network, teachers feel safe to take risks in their practice. These innovation risks may not always work but they will push boundaries and challenge the status quo. In my experience in schools, teachers with smiling colleagues and leaders, support each other and embrace new initiatives aimed at student success.

Esteem for collaboration can vary. It is also important to note how the onset of collaboration can often create anxiety in teachers as they approach unfamiliar ways of teaching (Musanti & Pence, 2010). I believe this could stem from teachers having either a lack of opportunities for healthy collaborations or poor experiences with collaboration. Richter, Kunter, Klusmann, Lüdtke, and Baumert’s (2011) study of teacher uptake of learning opportunities across their career presented stages of a teacher’s career where phases of openness to collaboration are apparent. Richter et al.’s findings showed an increase in self-directed learning for older teachers, but a decline in teacher collaboration over the teacher’s career (p. 124). Moolenaar (2012) confirmed this finding, stating, “Older and more experienced teachers are found to engage in work discussions to a lesser extent than their younger and less experienced colleagues” (p. 15). If school leaders want to foster healthy collaboration they must be keenly aware of the needs of those teachers at different levels of experience and how this might affect their willingness to collaborate. However I believe these same leaders must also recognize that factors that fall outside of experience can also impact a willingness to collaborate.

Collaboration can often be seen as a problematic term. Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, and Bransford (2005) explained that many schools make efforts to cooperate, but true collaboration is less common because each teacher is working within an efficiency model to make their own individual, autonomous practice more efficient. Therefore, school leaders must
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find ways of creating collaborative opportunities that improve teacher efficiency. Many schools have done this by embedding collaborative time into their timetables. In their discussion on co-teaching, Murawski and Hughes (2009) described collaboration as an umbrella term that includes co-teaching and covers many instructional practices. They wrote: “Simply putting two educators in the same room is neither sufficient nor necessarily collaborative” (p. 269). Friend, Cook, Hurly-Chamberlain, and Shamberger (2010) supported this point, suggesting co-teaching, only when performed as a collaborative task involving all contemporary school endeavours inside and outside the classroom, can create innovative options within a single system that are more responsive of today’s learners (p. 23). Therefore, successful collaboration must be centred around collaborators working inside and outside of the classroom and given the ability to work together in addressing all concerns regarding the students they are working with (Friend et al., 2010; Hammerness et al., 2005; Murawski & Hughes, 2009). These relationships help teachers and leaders develop relationships that can support trust. This trust is largely established by leaders who use proven leadership models that build trusting relationships.

Leadership Models Supporting Trust

I recognize that trust for any leader is a key element for his or her success. In schools, this trust results from a school leader focusing on individual relationships while realizing the important role he or she holds in supporting teachers. When these needs are supported the teacher is in the best position possible to do fulfill his or her role. In this section a brief overview of literature related to the importance of trust for leaders and followers is presented in this topic. Literature is presented that summarized opportunities housed within three leadership models to promote genuine, trusting relationship building between the leader and the follower. By fostering trusting relationships, leaders using these models can better support teachers’ mental health.
These models include (a) ethical leadership, (b) servant leadership, and (c) appreciative leadership.

**Ethical leadership.** Teachers want to know that decisions made by school leaders are done for the right reason. Ethical school leadership requires administrators “to understand how to lead from an ethical center, while keeping in mind a complex number of factors including an awareness of the viewpoints of a multitude of stakeholders” (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2014, p. 1). The ethical leader uses ethics “as a personal guide to action, particularly as supports to resolving ethical dilemmas” (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007, p. 209). I believe a school leader who makes a difficult decision with opposing polarities will be supported by teachers if they recognize that the decision has an ethical foundation. The comprehensive school health framework being employed by schools throughout Canada, and the increasing acceptance of mental health as a major school need within these models, asks school leaders to make an altruistic, honest, and upright decision and shift emphasis from a curriculum-centred model to a person-centred model (Chughtai, Byrne, & Flood, 2015). This shift also asks teachers to use increased agility in dealing with individual student needs. This shift asks teachers and leaders to include mental health as an ethical decision that is best for schools.

Avey, Wernsing, and Palanski (2012) suggested ethical leadership has a direct influence on ownership in the workplace. The authors contended that ethical leadership may influence employee well-being by encouraging employees to voice their concerns and ideas for improvements, which, in doing so, improves the employee psychologically (p. 29). Enhancing this ethical conduct and meaningful work must be supported by the organization and be seen “as both an individual and collective responsibility” (p. 126) while being aware and open regarding “implicit and explicit encouragement of immoral behavior” (pp. 126–127). I believe a school
where immoral behaviour cannot be dealt with among staff could foster an environment where student immoral behaviour is not dealt with. Stefkovich and Begley’s (2007) point out that leaders should know their own values and ethical predispositions and be sensitive to the value orientations of others. Ethical tolerance differs between individuals and leaders must recognize what is acceptable to one may not be acceptable to another.

Shain (2009) took this need for ethical decision making and placed it in the realm of a psychologically safe workplace. He explained leaders must realize “the risk to employee mental health that results from negligent, reckless and intentional acts of omissions on the part of employers, their agents and employees” (p. 43). These decisions are ethical in nature and can be toxic to a workplace such as a school. By contrast, Brown and Treviño (2006) stated that ethical leadership is related to “positive follower attitudes because of ethical leaders’ honesty, trustworthiness, caring and concern for employees and other people, and their fair and principled decision making” (p. 608). They concluded that ethical leadership is positively related to job satisfaction, motivation and commitment of followers.

Ashkanasy, Windsor, and Trevino (2006) posited that organizations hoping to support ethical attitudes in their leaders must recognize that a moral, ethical ethos must be supported to avoid unethical transgressions (p. 449). This sentiment suggests organizational cues influence managers’ ethical decision making, and the authors presented a correlation between an “organization’s rewards system and managers’ ethical decision making” (p. 464). Interestingly, an organization recognizing internal unethical cues can mitigate these cues and create a psychologically safe workplace with committed employees by looking openly and critically at these cues (Ashkanasy et al., 2006; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Shain, 2009). Therefore, schools look to jurisdictions to take the lead ethically and give cues to school leaders. When this
happens, things like hiring decisions and new initiatives such as the DEEC’s focus on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Report can create a model for ethical decision making.

Bisel, Kelley, Ploeger, and Messersmith (2011) reminded us how hierarchical order matters when it concerns unethical behaviours within organizations. Leaders within these organizations must find ways of addressing negative feedback and dissent that may be connected to unethical, hierarchal behaviour. Furthermore, by addressing this dissent early, regardless of which level of the hierarchal structure the dissent comes from, leaders can avoid a dysfunctional cycle that can produce a culture where ethical questioning is silenced (p. 478). When this negative feedback and dissent is given voice, addressed, and mitigated, steps can be taken to prevent ongoing unethical behaviour (p. 479). This silence regarding unethical issues in the workplace can produce indifferent employees who develop the attitude of “get along, go along” and can lead to high levels of employee dissatisfaction (Beheshtifar, Borhani, & Moghadam, 2012, p. 280). According to Andrews and Wan (2009), employee dissatisfaction can lead to a sense of powerlessness and frustration, low levels of professional practice, and high propensity to leave the profession. I have seen this indifference and silence creep into schools and would suggest that school jurisdictions and school leaders must work to empower teachers by addressing unethical behaviour.

Servant leadership. I see schools as places that need teachers who are supported and who are happy to be in the building. When these teachers are happy they can build esteem in their students as they fulfill their role. Servant leadership presents an model for school leaders hoping to build esteem in their followers. Greenleaf (1977), one of the original scholars on servant leadership, explained servant leaders care for others in that they listen and are understanding, accepting, and empathetic. Rivkin, Diestel, and Schmidt (2014) have shown the
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servant leadership model to have a negative relationship to emotional exhaustion complemented with data showing that servant leadership stabilized employee’s psychological health when measured against employee’s indicators of strain, such as ego depletion and need for recovery (p. 16). Rivkin et al. found servant leadership to foster psychological health by helping to keep it “stable, robust, generalizable and invariant” (p. 16). Moreover, because this study was conducted across various occupational and organizational contexts, its results showed servant leadership to shine across various work environments. Mitigating emotional exhaustion and increasing the psychological health of teaching staff is important for schools since principals and teachers are the main determining factors of the quality of education in schools (Sisman, 2004). Van Dierendonck (2011) held that servant leadership improves both job attitudes and performance while at the same time benefiting employee health. Therefore, school leaders using a servant leadership model will have teachers who are thriving in job performance while having a foundation of good health, thus leading to teachers who are better prepared for the emotional work needed in the classroom (Rivkin et al., 2014; Sisman, 2004; Van Dierendonck, 2011).

Cerit (2009) emphasized that servant leadership behaviours by principals have a significant effect on teachers’ job satisfaction. He added that to achieve improved quality of education and teacher job satisfaction, school principals are required to perform activities of servant leadership, such as supporting and developing employees; respecting employees; providing a trustable, moral, and respectful environment; and caring for employees (p. 615). This support will help create schools in which teachers are happy in their roles. Cerit also showed that due to the bureaucratic structure of school systems, teachers may not value undertaking leadership positions in their schools. This finding is of importance for districts throughout Canada, as they often fall under a similar system and should be concerned with recruiting the
best school leaders within their system. I believe teachers who are supported by school leaders using servant leadership will not only have higher esteem for their role but also for their school leader’s role. This could improve leadership recruitment for school leadership positions.

On a macro level, Black’s (2010) study on Catholic schools in Ontario is important to note, as Black highlighted a correlation between servant leadership and school climate (p. 460). Many Canadian school districts are driven by student achievement, and based on his findings, Black supported a correlation between servant leadership, a positive school climate, and improved student achievement. Black suggested “a principal wishing to optimize the school climate by improving culture in the school and the morale and commitment of the teachers could begin by developing relationships as a guide for effective servant leadership behaviour” (p. 461). A school culture with high morale is something most school leaders should strive for.

Parris and Peachey (2013) suggested servant leadership as a tenable theory that is “viable and valuable on an individual and an organizational level which can lead to increased overall effectiveness of individuals and teams” (p. 386). This satisfaction can come from a sense of belonging to the organization as a result of the organization fostering structures that help employees “gain a sense of ‘family’ with fellow employees” (Drury, 2004, p. 5). This would certainly present an environment where teachers are happy to come to work and have high esteem for their role in helping students learn. Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson, and Jinks (2007) linked school principals using servant leadership to empowering teachers and fostering autonomy and choice, which enables teachers to develop a sense of ownership in the decision-making process. Teachers who know how and why decisions are made will see these decisions as transparent and be much more likely to look at the decision through a positive lens. Thus, the school leader showing personal interest in teachers’ needs in schools will help improve
achievement results in the school and create a culture where teachers are committed to the improvement of school climate and student growth (Black, 2010; Cerit, 2009; Drury, 2004; Taylor et al., 2007).

**Appreciative leadership.** Feeling recognition for doing things well is a fundamental need for most individuals. As a teacher and school leader, I have seen this appreciative recognition come in many forms from notes, to opportunities to share success, to kudos given at a staff meeting. Appreciative leadership in education is unique among leadership theories, including its strength-based practice that involves searching for the positive in people (Orr & Cleveland-Innes, 2015). At its roots, this leadership theory is based upon an understanding of appreciation as valuing rather than judging, expanding strengths rather than eliminating problems, and searching for the best in people (Brookes, 2011). Appreciative leadership is a relational process that aims to bring out the best in people, organizations, and communities and is focused on possibilities centred around engaging people, creating energy, and sustaining momentum (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Appreciative education provides an intentional approach to improving education by focussing on the strengths and potential of individuals and organizations to accomplish co-created goals (Bloom, Hutson, He, & Konkle, 2013). The heart of this theory is appreciative inquiry, which Brookes (2011) suggested entails “initiating a thinking process within individuals and groups, by asking questions and communicating the stories revealed” (p. 16). Furthermore, Brookes explained organizations inquiring into what is best will discover good things that can create a foundation for positive change. Bloom et al. (2013) supported this, adding the appreciative mindset plays heavily in creating positive interactions with others, and they suggested that if people are looking for the worst in others, they will find the worst (p. 8). This appreciative lens will present opportunities for school leaders...
to harness opportunities such as staff meetings, one on one interactions or weekly emails to celebrate what is happening in the school. I have seen this type of appreciative culture move to various areas of school life where teachers and students model appreciation toward each other.

Based on their work on appreciative leadership through compassion, Dewar and Nolan (2013) suggested appreciative leadership as centred on caring conversations that develop knowledge of individuals, which are centred on who they are, what they care about, and how they feel about what is happening. If a school leader is concerned with celebrating individuals in a school it’s important that he or she know what each individual’s needs are. The process of these conversations can foster courage and safe collaborations with others. These “appreciative caring conversations” can inform leaders regarding what might work well (p. 1260). Leveraging an appreciative leadership program with nurses, Dewar and Cook (2014) recognized relationships being enhanced through giving positive feedback to others. They also concluded that the appreciative leadership model led to increased sensitivity to the perspectives of others and showed appreciative leadership strategies to enhance awareness in the leaders themselves. Many leaders in this study developed new approaches to building relationships that left staff teams working closer due to the “development of trust, more open dialogue, and being more sensitive to the needs of others” (p. 1263). Moreover, staff participating in this new program felt more confident in dealing with conflict and with giving rewards. A school, with its diverse social backgrounds of students and staff, provides a great environment to nurture this sensitivity of others’ perspectives. In summary, the appreciative leadership model applied in this study which focussed on relationship building centred on genuine relationship building increased areas of work that many nurses deal with. Similar situations are seen by teachers on a daily basis, such as conflict, the needs of others, trust, and open dialogue. These competencies can lead to increased
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trust, confidence, and collaboration, which can help an organization move forward (Brookes, 2011; Dewar & Cook, 2014; Dewar & Nolan, 2013).

Success in schools is often connected closely to innovative practices that help student improve. I believe this success is based on an openness to innovate and this innovation is dependent on school leaders who trust his or her teachers. Heifetz (2011) believed leaders must be able to hold people in a state of discomfort, where people do not panic but keep thinking creatively even though they are under stress. He contended creativity and innovation as a product of bringing together differences and orchestrating these differences towards new possibilities. Appreciative leaders help staff members become empowered to innovate and create what is needed to move the organization forward (Orr & Cleveland-Innes, 2015). These creative possibilities must be presented in ways that appreciate constituents, and only by being constituent oriented, can you become trustworthy (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). When leaders appreciate and pay attention to others, they demonstrate the importance of their constituents, celebrate their input and ideas, and show that they trust their constituents (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Hattie (2012) built on this importance of trust, explaining school leaders must create an atmosphere of trust and collegiality to allow debates to turn to the evidence of the effect of new initiatives on student learning. When this trust is present, teachers will use their talents to innovate in ways that can improve student success.

Leadership trust is closely connected to leadership credibility, and school principals are constantly dancing the line between what Currie, Lockett, and Suhmlinova (2009, p. 667) deemed the modern approach to school leadership or “results oriented leadership” and the traditional “professional value-based leadership” approach. The authors found school principals experiencing a considerable tension between the need to adhere to the modern approach for
government and jurisdiction credibility while also upholding with their colleague with adherence to the more traditional approach. I posit appreciative leadership falls within the normative traditional approach expected of school leaders and acknowledge school leaders are often pressured to adhere to a more modern form that their employers champion. Leaders using an appreciative leadership model will find ways of shifting the data-driven model to a data-informed model that helps to improve teacher professionalism rather than threatening it (Park & Datnow, 2009, p. 480). This balance is an important need for school leaders in today’s schools.

Chapter Summary

Through this literature review, I have established a context for this project’s main question: How can the Leadership and Learning Division of the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture prepare school leaders to support the mental health needs of teachers in Prince Edward Island’s schools? I explored two key topics: (a) teacher mental health and (b) leadership and trust.

The research methodology used to engage this inquiry, including the inquiry team, participants, and the project methods, which includes data collection methods, study conduct, and data analysis. I also address the relevant ethical issues.
Chapter Three: Inquiry Project Approach

Through the research pertaining to this thesis, I sought to answer the inquiry question: How can Prince Edward Island’s school leaders support the mental health needs of teachers in Prince Edward Island? It is further guided by the associated sub questions:

1. What competencies do effective school leaders need to support the mental health needs of classroom teachers?
2. What leadership models support teachers’ mental health needs?
3. How can school leaders support teacher autonomy and sense of control?
4. How can teachers’ mental health be included in conversations school leaders have around comprehensive school health?

In this chapter, I will define the methodology of action research and explain how this methodology was implemented. I will then present the project participants along with the methods used to collect and analyze the research data. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the ethical considerations within the research.

Inquiry Project Methodology

The methodology for this inquiry follows the Action Research Engagement Model (Rowe, Graf, Agger-Gupta, Piggot-Irving, & Harris, 2013). The process of action research is democratic and participatory, and it seeks to discover what happened, make sense of what happened, and reflect on potential action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Stringer, 2014). A key feature of action research is that it takes into account the impact of activities on the lives of people in or subject to the investigation (Stringer, 2014, p. 21).

Action research offered an approach to engage stakeholders and could be a solid model for the education sector. With the DEEC’s recent restructuring, action research allowed for a
growing understanding of the merging cultures and the emerging culture of the organization. Educators are passionate about their profession (J. Skyt, personal communication, January 29, 2016), and as Owen (2008) reminded, “without passion nobody cares” (p. 23). Action research leveraged the experience of the inquiry stakeholders to engage in a process of change that came from within. Relationships in action research must be built through trust, concern for others, and equality of influence (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014, p. 4). This inquiry intended to create desired improvements through collaboration and relationship building, resulting in changes that would lead to the organization’s functional improvement. I believed Rowe et al.’s, action research engagement (ARE) model would help to engage an organizational change process by involving stakeholders and organizational leaders to implement change action (2013, p. 20). Action research not only looks at what is happening, but how it is happening. There are nine steps in this model, with steps one through four led by the researcher (Rowe et al., 2013). Step five transitions the project to the organization, and steps six through nine in the non-linear cycle are owned by the organization (see Appendix B). I led the inquiry through steps one to four, then transitioned the project to the project sponsor, Tamara Hubley-Little, to formulate an action plan to implement the resulting recommendations.

I employed a multi-method approach for research, as reflected in phase two of Rowe et al.’s (2013) ARE model. This allowed data to be collected from teachers in a series of interviews, and these data provided awareness for the focus group of school administrators who are tasked with supporting classroom teachers. This ordering provided an opportunity for school administrators to become aware of their teachers’ needs and provided a platform for further action.
Schein (2010) posited, “Understanding culture gentles our judgment of things that happen and the things people do” (p. 15). Using action research as the inquiry methodology helped improve an understanding of school culture around teachers’ mental health and allowed teachers and school leaders to approach the mental health needs of teachers using a multi-method, scaffold approach. This helped deepen understandings around the teacher as the main catalyst in school mental health initiative needs. This process included an initial one-on-one interview method followed by a focus group, part of which built on the findings of the interviews.

**Project Participants**

The project sponsor helped identify two cohorts in the DEEC on which to focus this inquiry. The participants of the research included three front-line classroom teachers and six school administrators in the DEEC. The Public Schools Branch and the French Language School Board within the DEEC is comprised of approximately 1,700 teachers and 140 administrators. Stringer (2014) posited that action research provides a means for people to understand their situations and create solutions to problems (p. 8). In an effort to diversify perspectives, participants were chosen from various geographic locations on PEI and in different stages of their career. Teachers in their first year of teaching were excluded because they would not have had sufficient experience to understand their needs regarding mental health support as a teacher. Administrators in their first year were also excluded because they would not have sufficient enough experience in their role to understand their followers’ needs. Project participants came from schools from grades one to twelve. Although there were thousands of potential participants, I interviewed only three and conducted the focus group with five in order to follow’s Robinson’s (2014) premise that researchers conducting qualitative studies should follow a guideline of 3-16 participants for a single study as this provides a scope for the development of
cross case generalities while preventing the researcher being bogged down in data (p. 5).

Therefore the three participants and five focus group participants provided enough qualitative data for the scope of this inquiry. Although the data size was small the information produced from participants was rich. Teachers spoke freely throughout the interviews and their various experience backgrounds and grade levels presented information that was balanced and honest. The focus group conversation produced information from all areas of PEI and participants spoke freely from their variety of experience. There appeared to be a safe environment in the room and information flowed smoothly. One principal suggested that the conversation “was the best professional conversation they had all year” (FG-1).

Invitations were sent to all Public Schools Branch teachers for the interviews and all Public Schools Branch administrators for the focus group. Qualitative and action research requires purposeful sampling that selects people on the basis of a particular set of attributes (Stringer, 2014, p. 77). These individuals were chosen purposefully in order to meet the participation criteria. I targeted the invitations to three individuals in each methods group according to geographic location, participants with less than 10 years of experience, and participants with 10 or more years of experience. The potential participants were spread throughout the province, with the aim to include at least one participant with one to 10 years of experience and one with more than 10 years of experience respectively. All participants in the inquiry were made aware that their participation was voluntary. Both groups in the inquiry had the authority to implement the project’s intended changes—the administrators due to their school leadership roles, and the classroom teachers because of their central role in providing feedback to school leaders regarding their professional needs when new trends and school initiatives are implemented in schools.
Action research demands a collaborative approach steeped in democracy (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). The inquiry team for this project was carefully constructed to include members with a vested interest in the inquiry who were positioned to implement its recommendations. Included on the inquiry team were the School Health Specialist for PEI, who also is the Chair of the Pan Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health, and the DEEC’s Manager of Human Resources. The School Health Specialist role with the DEEC is directly aligned with comprehensive school health, and this inclusion added legitimacy to the inquiry (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Incorporating these inquiry team members created an opportunity for recommendations to be incorporated into further action as the comprehensive school health vision for PEI continues to develop. Involving the DEEC’s Manager of Human Resources provided further legitimacy to the inquiry, as her pillar within the education sector is grounded in concern for government employees. This person’s understanding of individual and department needs allowed for balance in the discussions around recommendations. All inquiry team members have authority within the education sector in PEI (see Appendix A). All members of this inquiry team had input into drafting questions, methods, and overall research design, and they assisted with revisions and the interpretation of findings, recommendations, and suggested steps for implementation. All inquiry team members were required to sign a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix C). After the data collection is complete a professional transcriptionist will be used.

I am new to my position with the DEEC and have not worked in PEI’s schools since working as an administrator in PEI in 2006. Due to this lack of working experience within schools, I did not anticipate any power-over issues that would affect the results of the inquiry.
Should one of the teachers chosen for an interview be a teacher for whom I acted as a vice principal, a member of the inquiry team would conduct the interview.

**Inquiry Project Methods**

The methods used in this inquiry are discussed in this section. I begin by exploring the data collection methods used then move to discuss the study conduct. From there, the data analysis is described.

**Data collection methods.** The data collection methods for this inquiry were arranged to use teachers’ experiences during interviews in the first phase of data collection to illuminate their needs with school leaders. The school leaders in the second phase or focus group explored the teachers’ experiences and built on their own understandings of the subject of teachers’ mental health. This approach aimed to engage both interest groups and led to a shared understanding of teachers’ mental health needs.

Although the taboo of mental health is being eroded, it remains a subject that can cause some conversational discomfort. For this reason, interviews present a safe and intimate venue to allow interviewees to present their views on the subject (Stringer, 2014). Roulston (2010) explained the importance of creating a genuine rapport and trust with participants in order to generate intimate and self-revealing conversations. As the interviewer, I needed to understand the implications of the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee to meet the goals of the research project (Gardner, 2010). As the interviewer, I needed to be aware of bias, as the interview method sometimes draws volunteers with a bias toward the subject (Gardner, 2010).

This inquiry was well positioned to begin organizational change, and as Marrelli (2008) explained, focus groups are often chosen as a method for organizational change because they generate feelings of involvement and buy-in among participants and generate enthusiasm for the
change. My training as a facilitator allowed me to ensure involvement of all participants during the focus group, being careful to keep from directing or dominating discussions (Alvesson, 2003). The focus group process also allowed me to navigate groupthink, while my use of a scribe during the focus group allowed the documentation of all ideas from participants (Alvesson, 2003; Marrelli, 2008).

**Study conduct.** This inquiry centred on a community of stakeholders at various levels, and the action research was organized to support a “community of inquiry” (Stringer, 2014, p. 23). Involvement from a variety of stakeholders in the DEEC allowed this essence of community to thrive. I involved my inquiry team community to gauge the interview and focus group questions (see Appendices D and E respectively) for appropriateness and timing. The triangulation of multiple data collection methods along with feedback from the inquiry team during a pilot and throughout the various stages was used to polish the formal methods procedure (Glesne, 2016). This triangulation also provided validity to the process by creating an authentic community within the research. To protect the anonymity of the responses, individual teachers have been assigned a letter to protect their identity.

Once approval was given from my sponsor and the Royal Roads University ethics review board, I informed potential participants of the inquiry using electronic information letters (see Appendix F for the interviews and Appendix G for the focus group) and invitation letters (see Appendix H for the interviews and Appendix I for the focus group). I made it clear that participation in the inquiry was voluntary and information and participation would be kept confidential. I also informed participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time. That said, it would not be possible to withdraw the information given by participants in the focus group due to the anonymity steps established to ensure confidentiality. The following details the
process for each method. A member of the inquiry team tasked as a note taker was also present during the focus group.

The initial method entailed one-on-one interviews with teachers conducted by myself to allow them to describe the mental health “situation in their own terms” (Stringer, 2014, p. 105). Interviews were conducted with three teachers and included the first volunteer from the following experience categories: one to 10 years and above 10 years, as long as they were from differing geographic locations on the island. One other volunteer was interviewed on a first-come, first-served basis.

The second method was a focus group. The focus group provided an opportunity to gather multiple perspectives on a similar experience (Glesne, 2016). The focus group consisted of five administrators, with participants coming from various geographic locations throughout PEI and with various degrees of experience. By including one participant with 1-10 years of experience and one participant with 10+ years of experience in each method and pulling a participant sample from throughout PEI, I aimed to get the whole internal system in the room (Weisbord, 2011, p. 211).

During the first phase of the data collection process, three interviews were conducted with classroom teachers from across PEI. Interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed upon time and location. The interview questions were linked to the four inquiry sub questions, and once these interview questions were adjusted and calendar invitations were confirmed as correct, participant invitations were sent three weeks prior to the expected interview dates.

Each interview participant signed a consent form (see Appendix J) prior to the 45-60 minute interviews. Interviews were audio recorded as described in the invitation letter and consent form, and the interviewer took hand-written notes during the interview. In order to
maintain a high level of authenticity and validity, interviewees were given transcription copies of the interviews and notes along with a final report. The findings from the interviews influenced the development of the focus group questions.

Focus groups allow participants to describe their experience in-depth and offer up perspective in their own terms (Stringer, 2014). A focus group method was the second phase of the data collection process to complement and extend the findings from the interviews. I sent the focus group information letter, invitation letter, and consent form (see Appendices G, I, and K) to potential focus group participants three weeks before the event. Confidentiality of information and participation was stressed during the focus group. A note taker from the inquiry team was present during the focus group, with me acting as the facilitator.

The focus group lasted 75 minutes and included five school administrators. The focus group began with two questions intended to have members begin to think about their mental models regarding both the mental health of teachers and leading in ways to support teachers’ mental health (see Appendix E). The remaining three questions were developed from the interview data, which were created with the help of the inquiry team. Participants gathered on chairs around a board table, and the note taker used a laptop projector to record and confirm the findings. To protect the anonymity of the responses, individual teachers were assigned a letter to protect their identity. A professional transcriptionist was employed for the interview data collection because interviews can be time consuming to transcribe and difficult to code (Glesne, 2016). The transcriptionist signed the Inquiry Team Letter of Confidentiality (see Appendix C).

Weisbord’s (2011) four practical guidelines, comprised of (a) assess the potential for action, (b) get the whole system in the room, (c) focus on the future, and (d) structure tasks that people can do for themselves, are designed to consider systems as a whole and to assess the
energy of situations and people. By involving the various stakeholders within the inquiry team and the variance of participants in the research, the project sponsor was able to create system change that would leverage the energy created by the inquiry. This required that the project sponsor review the findings with the DEEC administrative support team, the Prince Edward Island Teachers’ Federation, and the Comprehensive School Health leader, who all hold the power to coach school administrative leaders on ways of implementing the findings.

**Data analysis.** “Coding is an approach to discern themes, patterns, and processes; to make comparisons; and to build theoretical explanations” (Glesne, 2016, p. 195). Gibbs and Taylor (2010) explained codes can be based on themes and topics, ideas and concepts, terms and phrases, and keywords. To avoid personal bias and to ensure trustworthiness and reliability, I initially analyzed the transcribed data verbatim from the interviews and focus groups. This approach ensured that information was gained directly from the participants (Stringer, 2014). From there, I found keywords and coding families. Key themes were compiled and aligned under common themes. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) asked researchers to strive for authenticity in action research by being attentive, intelligent, and responsible in confronting preunderstanding (p. 178). To maintain validity, I created an audit trail by journaling notes that included thoughts and understanding throughout the process, including my own preunderstandings toward the subject and my reflections on the culture of DEEC (Cope, 2014).

When speaking of trustworthiness and authenticity, Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba (2007) contended that “these two ways of approaching the knotty problem of justifying interpretations as credible and truthful are not opposed; in fact, they are complementary” (p. 13). The sensitive subject of teachers’ mental health demands a high level of trust and authenticity. Maintaining a high degree of trustworthiness and authenticity allowed project participants to feel a part of this
Schein (2013) suggested trust builds within people when one shows an interest in and pays attention to what one is told by these people (p. 9). In openly sharing drafts of findings from the research with the inquiry team while adjusting subsequent drafts, I allowed my own biases to be checked while building trust within the inquiry. By sharing the final report with all participants in the study, I feel transparency, trust, and authenticity have been enhanced. This level of transparency was included in order to limit concerns of researcher bias within the study and to provide all participants a voice as the inquiry develops. Throughout the research process, ethical guidelines were followed.

**Ethical Issues**

In considering my humanistic and ethical obligations, I followed the *Tri Council Policy Statement* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada [Tri-Council], 2014). This inquiry process contained three core elements: “Respect for persons, Concern for welfare, [and] Justice” (Tri-Council, 2014, p. 8). All three of these elements formed the foundation of my research methodology to ensure an ethical exploration of the research question.

**Respect for persons.** Respect for persons, as cited in the (Tri-Counsel, 2014), recognizes the intrinsic value of human beings and the respect and considerations that are due, with each person free to choose without interference (p. 8). Within the information letters (see Appendices F and G), participants were informed of the “purpose of the research, what it entails, and its foreseeable risks and potential benefits, both to the participant and to others” (p. 9). The consent forms (see Appendices J and K) ensured transparency for all so that inquiry participants understood fully both the purpose and methods being used in the inquiry (Stringer, 2014, p. 89).
Both of these forms ensured participants fully comprehended that withdrawal from the study could happen at any time. Power-over issues were mitigated by committing to using an outside facilitator if a project participant was a former colleague. Power-over issues were further alleviated by separating teachers and administrators using two distinct methods.

**Concern for welfare.** Regarding concern for welfare, “researchers and REBs should aim to protect the welfare of participants, and, in some circumstances, to promote that welfare in view of any foreseeable risks associated with the research” (Tri-Counsel, 2014, p. 9). Further, factors such as participants’ physical, mental, and spiritual health and their economic and social circumstances also fell under participant welfare (Tri-Counsel, 2014). The very basis of this research lay in improving the mental health of teachers and, therefore, called on project participants to feel that their welfare was protected. The sensitivity of the subject demanded that both the researcher and project participants protect the anonymity of the participants and the information these participants brought to the research. By addressing the sensitive nature of the subject in the information letters (see Appendices F and G) and at the beginning and end of each method, I believe participants’ welfare was protected to the best of my ability. Confidentiality within the focus group could not be guaranteed, as cited in the consent form (see Appendices J and K), but was emphasized by vigilantly addressing it at the beginning and end of each method. Protecting the data by saving electronic data in a password-protected drive and locking the written data in a desk in my personal office further guarded the welfare of the project participants.

**Justice.** Justice involves the “obligation to treat people fairly and equitably” (Tri-Counsel, 2014, p. 10). As an internal employee and action researcher, it was my responsibility to conduct the inquiry ethically to ensure that recommendations led to suggestions to improve the
mental health of teachers. In addressing power-over issues and the sensitivity of the subject matter while protecting the anonymity of participants, I believe I supported an inquiry that treated participants fairly and with equity. I do not see any conflict of interest issues within the study at this time.

**Chapter Summary**

The approach of action research has been explained in this chapter as well as how this approach was implemented, ending with presenting the methods used for research. The project participants have been explained as well as how ethical considerations within the research were mitigated. In the next chapter, I will explain the findings and conclusions from the inquiry.
Chapter Four: Inquiry Findings and Conclusions

I begin this chapter by revisiting the main inquiry and sub questions, followed by a summary and exploration of the study findings. After a review of the findings, I summarize the conclusions and give a review of the limitations and scope of the inquiry. The question I engaged with the LL Division of the DEEC to investigate was: How can the Leadership and Learning Division of the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture prepare school leaders to support the mental health needs of teachers in Prince Edward Island Schools? The sub questions I explored were:

1. What leadership models contribute to a school leader’s ability to support a culture that enhances teacher’s mental health?
2. What competencies/abilities do effective school leaders need to support the mental health needs of teachers?
3. How might school leaders support teacher autonomy and sense of control?
4. What conditions are necessary for teacher autonomy and sense of control to contribute to teacher’s mental health?

As explained in the methodology section in Chapter 3, I explored these questions through interviews with teachers and a focus group with school principals from across PEI. My interviews were conducted with classroom teachers who each met the following criteria: (a) they were currently classroom teachers, and (b) they came from various geographic regions in PEI, though varying in their experience levels. I invited teachers from throughout the province and received 24 accept responses. My final group of interview participants included three women, as all positive responses came from females, which is worth noting in itself. The teachers ranged from the Grade 1 level to the Grade 12 levels. Ages of the participants ranged from early 30s to
mid-50s, while the teaching experience of participants ranged from three years to 13 years. To maintain participants’ anonymity, participants are numbered I-1 to I-3.

A focus group was conducted with school leaders who each met the following criteria: (a) they were currently school principals, and (b) they came from various geographic regions in PEI, though varying in their experience levels. I invited principals from throughout the province and received seven accept responses and two regrets on the day of the focus group. My final focus group participants included five men. The school leaders ranged in age from early 40s to mid-50s, while the experience of participants ranged from five years to 23 years. During the focus group I asked questions prepared prior to the interviews. I also created questions from the emergent themes of the interviews. To maintain focus group participants’ anonymity, they have been numbered FG-1 through FG-5. The findings and conclusions are presented in this chapter, which ends with a brief overview of the scope and limitations of this study.

**Study Findings**

The findings are explored in detail in this section. The interviews and focus group produced four major findings:

1. Participants shared that positive teacher mental health is fostered when leaders use supportive models of leadership to improve school culture.

2. Participants believed school leaders require certain competencies and abilities in order to support positive teachers’ mental health.

3. Participants valued teacher autonomy and sense of control as a contributing factor for positive teachers’ mental health.

4. Participants presented constructive suggestions for developing school leaders who are supportive of addressing teachers’ mental health needs.
**Finding 1: Participants shared that teacher mental health is fostered when leaders use supportive models of leadership to improve school culture.** To explore my first subquestion, “What leadership models contribute to a school leader’s ability to support a culture that enhances teacher’s mental health,” I asked participants to talk about what happens in their school that helps them feel part of a supportive community, what their school leaders have done to create trusting relationships with them, and how leaders best open doors to address difficult situations.

The interview participants expressed the importance of a whole school that is supportive because teaching can create a lot of “guilt around falling short of being a miracle worker” (1-3). One participant expressed this importance when comparing her current school to her former:

> This is a real professional and innovative school, so those things [innovative changes] may be seen as stressful to the teacher but it’s collaborative. So the new things we take on, we take on together. And so there’s a grade level team to work with, to work things out, and the principal certainly supports that, and usually sits in on Professional Learning Community meetings to see what’s happening at the grade level. (I-2)

Another interviewee added,

> Something I think is really amazing for a principal to do is to support teachers in doing things that they’re passionate about [pause]. This year, I actually feel like I’m walking in my vision of myself as a teacher, and it’s wonderful. . . . I’ve spent a lot of my teaching career behaving and not taking the risks that I need to take to make learning valuable. . . . This year, I actually feel like I’m walking in my vision of myself as a teacher and it’s wonderful. (I-1)
A participant connected this positive response to innovative practice with building professional trust. When speaking about a new initiative, she started by stating, “They [the school leadership team] gave me permission to do it before they were even really on board with it, because it was something that I wanted to do. . . . There’s a lot of professional trust” (I-1). The connection of individual and collective mental health and school culture was expressed by one participant who explained, “If people aren’t happy coming in your building, it’s going to leak down to the kids, and it’s going to be a culture that is present in the building” (FG-4). The participant then connected this to the staff connections, stating, “Look at the inner workings of a school. If morale isn’t great among staff, there’s a pretty damn good chance it’s not going to be really good among the student population and with the community in general” (FG-4).

The theme of leaders supporting their staff’s passion was expressed by an interviewee, who noted that some principals “present opportunities in a way that’s very much inspirational. . . . They take note of your personality and your strengths and then offer you occasions, as they arise, to celebrate those strengths” (I-3). The importance of this type of trust was not lost on the focus group, where many participants spoke of the importance of knowing your people and giving permission to innovate (FG-1, FG-2).

Focus group participants connected the importance of modelling an innovative supportive culture as leaders who “say yes more than no” (FG-3), adding: “We have educated people that are working for us, and they’re working hard. We should be able to say yes more than no” (FG-3, FG-5). One participant spoke about a need to respond to an internal dialogue of “how do I make this work?” (FG-3) when a teacher comes with a request that might fall outside what schools usually do. This participant was aided by a fellow participant who eloquently explained, “It’s that figuring out how to make things happen. They come to you with that outside of the
ordinary request but it’s supporting them with that and saying, ‘We’ll find a way to make that happen’” (FG-2).

The importance of relationships within a staff was a resonating foundation when exploring difficult conversations staff members sometimes need to have. Participants spoke about the importance of leaders doing informal check-ins and “on the fly visits” (FG-1) as a key to creating a sense of trust between teachers and principals. The informal check-in might be as one interviewee shared: “Do you need anything? Do you need a hand? Do you need me to watch the kids while you. . . . That’s really helpful and it’s really appreciated. . . . [adding.] “It gives you a feeling that there’s somebody there who’s going to catch your back” (I-2). In speaking to the effectiveness of these relationship-building visits fostering trust, one interviewee shared, “He’s able to give criticism. I can take criticism from him (principal) quite easily. . . . It’s his demeanour, because he’s so pleasant, he’s so likeable, and also because he says positive things” (I-1).

Authentic, ethical leadership was an important theme in the data. One interviewee connected the importance of a principal being vulnerable and how the sharing of this vulnerability can be in the form of “anecdotes about things that were really, really stressful and how they deal with it sometimes successfully, maybe sometimes not, . . . [adding this sharing can show the leader is] just being real” (I-1). She continued, “It’s not a whole bunch of fakery. He’s very real, he’s very honest” (I-1). The “being real” (I-1) was not lost on the focus group, with one participant stating,

I think the best advice I would give to a new administrator, and the lesson I had learned, was to know yourself and be yourself. And if you try to act in a way that you think
somebody else would have done, then you’re going to get yourself in trouble and cause your staff stress. (FG-1)

Focus group participants associated positive leadership as lending itself to improving culture, with two theme areas in this project. By appreciating the work that teachers do and acknowledging the workload involved in the teaching profession, school leaders can impact the mental health of the teachers in their building. Leading ethically in an authentic style that serves individual teachers’ needs will help empower teachers toward innovation (I-1, I-2, I-3, FG-1).

The data contributed to participants valuing trusting relationships that support collaboration within professional learning communities, where school leaders act as part of the professional learning community itself. Data also presented the importance of leaders supporting the needs of the individuals within the professional learning communities. Participants also valued leaders who create trusting relationships with teachers and appreciate individual talents and interests while finding ways of celebrating these talents and interests.

**Finding 2: Participants believed school leaders require certain competencies and abilities in order to support teachers’ mental health.** To examine sub question two, What competencies/abilities do effective school leaders need to support the mental health needs of teachers, I called on participants’ knowledge of the teaching profession to describe the qualities of a school leader who supports teachers’ mental health. Participants shared a common vision of effective school leadership in this domain by expressing a need for the leader to be a realistic problem solver. The leader looks at working collaboratively to solve problems within schools, which participants identified as helping build relationships with staff that can help build trust (I-1, I-3, FG-1, FG-3, FG-4). As one participant expressed,
Leaders must have the attitude that the problems are solvable, that conflict is solvable, [and] that stress is something that we are all going to experience every day. So we’re not looking for a perfect teacher or perfect class or perfect student or perfect admin; we’re looking at people who are in the process and know how to process the stress. (I-1)

A school principal spoke to the importance of school leaders helping teachers with capacity building, expressing the need to help, not solve, all problems:

    I think it’s important to not let your office be a dumping ground where someone comes to you with their problem and then they go away expecting that it’s going to be fixed. It’s important to sit down with them and say, “What are we going to do about it or what can I do to help you with your problem?” (FG-4)

When speaking about this collective problem solving, focus group participants repeated the mantra of “knowing your people” as a key agility piece to a school leaders’ effectiveness in his or her role. (FG-1, FG-2, FG-5).

    The idea that participants require the ability to use empathy and other “people skills” (FG-5) to support teachers’ mental health came through participants with volume: “You have empathy for others, that validates what they’re doing” (FG-1). Adding messaging as an important leverage point for this empathy, a participant shared: “Honouring the frustrations that they have, but we continue to work in the spirit of cooperation, we’re in this together, those types of messages” (FG-1). This empathy can come through in practical, problem-solving support and can help teachers be more empathetic. An interviewee spoke of how her principal worked with her in solving difficult problem she was having and how it helped her feel appreciated and validated, “I went from feeling like an incompetent employee to being totally understood by this person and validated for my professional choice making” (I-3). This attribute of empathy
resonated with many participants, with one interviewee explaining that school leaders “have to be empathetic; they’d have to be kind and even loving, not just to students but a people person that loves other people and is willing to pitch in” (I-2).

These people skills were seen as an important piece of a school leader’s repertoire because “no one’s ever calling the school growling about a math lesson or a part of the curriculum. It’s always an issue that takes people skills” (FG-3, FG-4, FG-5). When describing skill sets required for working as a school principal, one participant stressed the importance of people skills: “There are people that are great instructional leaders that are way better than myself, but I think if you’re going to be a good principal in today’s society, that the humanistic side is way more valuable than any of that” (FG-1).

When it came to the taboo that surrounds the topic of mental health, many participants believed school leaders need to be courageous around the subject and present opportunities to speak about the subject. When speaking of anxiety, an interviewee shared, “There has to be some kind of an opening where people can talk about the feeling without feeling like their telling their deepest, darkest secret. So somehow that has to be normalized or gentled” (I-1). This interviewee added:

One thing you have to do is just talk about the elephant in the room. . . . We should be able to talk about it. Could you talk about it if I had cancer? I might cry, but I’d talk to you about it. Could I talk to you about it if I had to take a stress leave or if I was dealing with bipolar? (I-1)

The need for knowledge of mental health and professional development (PD) and resources in the area of mental health was a common need expressed by many participants. Participants suggested school leaders be trained in what information to provide their teachers:
“Like who to call for assistance such as the Employee Assistance Program, things you can call on for help” (I-2, FG-1). When asked about pieces needed for teachers to feel empowered with understanding mental health, one participant expressed the need for mental health to be an explicit subject for PD:

It starts with the basics. Like any new information that we’re going to be teaching, any new methods of teaching, we always get PD on it, and when you have the information backing you up, you’re not as stressed because somebody’s shown you how to do it. (I-2)

This need was not lost on the focus group, who recognized a gap in PD for leaders in the induction program many school leaders go through:

What a great opportunity that would have been for people to talk about the mental health of your staff, people skills, the points of collaboration, but no, we talked about evaluations, the progress model, curriculum development, which is all important, but we did not talk about that piece, . . . and we can’t do our job without this. (FG-1)

The need for people skills held a high leverage point for focus group participants, with statements like: “People skills are number one” (FG-5), “We can’t do our job without this” (FG-1), and “People skills are massive” (FG-4).

To summarize, participants felt school leaders need to understand how and when to support teachers to problem solve and the ways to employ people skills such as empathy. They must also have knowledge of mental health supports available for teachers coupled with the courage to foster an environment where conversations around mental health are safe.

**Finding 3: Participants valued teacher autonomy and sense of control as a contributing factor for teachers’ mental health.** To examine sub question number three, How
might school leaders support teacher autonomy and sense of control, participants were asked about the role autonomy and sense of control plays in their mental health at school.

An interesting theme was displayed in the data around autonomy and sense of control. Collaboration was shown to be a major contributor to participants feeling autonomous in their roles and leaning into new initiatives by leaning on their colleagues. One interviewee expressed this powerfully when speaking on a new provincial initiative that was creating anxiety at work:

My God, I can’t keep up with this. There is no way. But of course, you can cause everybody’s doing it together, and nobody expects you to get it perfect. . . . You do the best you can this year; maybe next year, you can do a little bit more. (I-2)

Participants spoke about the importance of leaders making collaboration opportunities around new initiatives and working alongside teachers as lead learners (I-2). Participants also shared the importance of school leaders providing time in the timetable for this collaboration (I-1, I-2). The involvement as a learner and collaborator keeps leaders as collegial counterparts in instructional growth, and this can lead to powerful conversations like the one an interviewee shared her about working at a PD session with her principal and questioning her own methods: “I must be doing it wrong,” the participant shared, with the principal replying, “Email her because you didn’t hear her right. . . . This is what we’re supposed to be doing” (I-3). This exchange and the resulting inquiry helped the participant with “clearing up understandings” (I-3) and led to another participant concluding:

When you’re not sure if what you’re doing is right, then you’re afraid to go ahead and do anything, and you sit and you kind of look at what everybody else is doing, and you don’t make your own decisions because you’re not sure that you have it right. (I-3)
As a group, participants shared autonomy and sense of control as largely linked to a feeling of professionalism (I-1, FG-3, FG-4). This increased sense of professionalism was echoed by one interviewee who explained,

I feel more autonomous all the time, and since I’ve started doing more about what made me become a teacher in the first place, I feel more autonomous. Before, I felt like I was always trying to line my stuff up and check to make sure it was the exact same as somebody else. (I-2)

The interviewee shared how professional confidence allowed the teacher to reach out to “a mentor teacher who’s teaching along the same lines that I want to teach, at another school” and that the process of working with that person has been really helpful and led to improved confidence (I-2).

The data showed a strong interest among participants in directing their own PD. When speaking of self-directed PD, an interviewee stated, “I find those days are really awesome, especially when you can meet up and collaborate with other same-subject teachers because you’re self directing your own needs for your own teaching . . . [adding] they feel so productive” (I-2). Data presented an opportunity to look critically at autonomy in schools as expressed by several participants. For example:

I think autonomy in the profession is missing. I think there is a lot of top down just do this, do this and we’re not doing it from the ground up. . . . There’s a frustration in our staff that they don’t have a say about PD. They don’t have input into it. (FG-1)

This has led to some principals from the focus group viewing themselves as a protector of the staff, sheltering them, because if they expected teachers to do every initiative, they would burn
themselves out (FG-2, FG-3, FG-5). One might ask, If administrators were expecting teachers to fulfill every initiative, would there be a similar burn out within their cohort?

An erosion of professional autonomy and sense of control resonated from participants in the focus group, who collectively expressed a sense of loss of professional autonomy in teachers, sharing comments like: “A lot of people are feeling they don’t have a say, or any empowerment (FG-1), and “I think our autonomy has been plucked away” (FG-5). One participant expressed it saying, “I hear comments that they’ve lost the ability to practice the art of teaching, the joy of teaching, run with things. There’s a pressure to make sure you’ve got outcome N15 [for example] done and SAS [Students Achieve Online Marking] updated and the computer work related to this” FG-1).

Focus group respondents, much like their teacher colleagues in the interviews, expressed a strong need for increased collaboration in order to improve their professional autonomy (FG-3, F-4, FG-5). Collaboration for leaders could present itself in other ways, as focus group participants expressed a former program that connected new school leaders with central office leaders who were held in high esteem (FG-1, FG-2). Participants shared this program had “a monthly meeting . . . and the topics like relational trust and its importance. . . [adding] there was a lot of modelling and a lot of guidance” (FG-2). The data showed an erosion of collaborative opportunities, with one participant explaining, “Being able to be together as a leadership group, we’ve really lost that” (FG-3). Participants expressed a need for networking opportunities that could connect participants with others who could act as a sounding board for emerging issues (FG-3, FG-4, I-2).

In summary, participants offered data suggesting that teachers’ collaborative, supportive relationships with others contribute to improved feelings of professionalism and contribute to
teachers feeling a sense of control. These relationships lead to increased confidence for participants and increased feelings of professional autonomy.

**Finding 4: Participants presented constructive suggestions for developing school leaders who are supportive of teachers’ mental health.** The fourth sub question, What conditions are necessary for teacher autonomy and sense of control to contribute to teachers’ mental health, was framed to shadow sub questions two and three, which asked project participants to look critically at the needs in today’s schools and the leadership within these schools that could support these needs. To investigate the fourth sub question, I called on participants to comment on what professional development opportunities could be presented to school leadership teams to allow them to support teachers’ mental health needs.

Participants presented ideas to help develop such initiatives. I have summarized those ideas under the topics of (a) appreciation and validation, (b) professional development on mental health, and (c) balance school leadership teams.

**Appreciation and validation.** Appreciation emerged as a major theme in the responses (I-1, I-2, I-3, FG-1, FG-2, FG-5) as a way to build relationships and support. It “gives them a little boost” as one participant commented, who then added, “It’s these things that you remember” (I-2).

This appreciation can come from fellow teachers, along with school leaders, and can be more than kind words. As one interviewee shared:

There’s been more than once where a staff member has had an issue, and the vice principal will arrange for us to do a sunshine box. . . . Everybody puts in a little home baked good or just something to perk the person up, . . . which is really nice at our school. . . . That really bonds the school together; it’s a really nice touch. (I-2)
Praise from leaders presented the most common form of appreciation that participants cited (I-1, I-2). It came in the form of simple comments like: “Oh I saw you did this, that was great” (I-2), or from a coaching perspective:

    Our principal is quick to praise us when we’re doing well. . . . They watch what you’re doing, tell you you’re doing good . . . ask you, “If you could go back and do that lesson again, what would you have done differently?”, which gives you that measure of independence. (I-2)

It can also come in the form of sharing for all to see:

    We have different examples in our staff room wall of different things teachers have done that have gone really well. Sometimes, it’ll go out in a newsletter or it’ll get mentioned in a staff meeting; that’s part of celebrating everybody’s success. (I-2)

This appreciative feedback was echoed by another interviewee, who shared:

    I personally love when my principal comes and can give me feedback on teaching because they generally have really good feedback. . . . [adding] My principal is a member of my Google Classrooms. . . . I find it’s really good. (I-3)

This appreciation also helps with relationship building, with one participant acknowledging leaders should be “giving positive feedback so that when you say something critical, you’ve already got some kind of a relationship there” (I-1).

    A discussion ensued in the focus group around appreciation as something that must be done “individually, and it also has to be done as a group” (FG-1). This participant further explained, “The individual would be those individual things you see people doing,. . . and you let them know individually, . . . and then as a staff, I think it’s important to celebrate good things we do as a group” (FG-1). Focus group participants expressed appreciation can be shown by finding
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ways of granting requests for individuals, “like LCD projectors in the classroom or books that they’re interested in” (FG-1). Another participant added these simple things “go a long way” (FG-5). Participants suggested ways to show appreciation can come in many forms:

For instance after a dance, they’ll be a group of us go out for a beer. I always buy. . . . We know they’re coming back to the next dance because they appreciate those little things.

So finding those little things that might cost 50 or 60 dollars, people go back to school feeling good. (FG-1)

A curious insight made by the focus group participants was a need for appreciative modeling from the school board and department level. The shift to the DEEC’s new model has presented a support gap for some participants who spoke of support given by a Principal Leader (note: the position is no longer) at the board level: “first year especially, he called or came up every single week” (FG-2). Another participant noted, “There was a time that the principal leader position here was so valuable in terms of trust, having a confidant, and giving direction” (FG-1), while others added: “We don’t have that now” (FG-5), “so we lost that” (FG-3), and “boy we lost that” (FG-2). This principal leader would “call on the phone and it would be: ‘What do you need? What can I do?’” (FG-2), with another participant adding:

Think of the trickle-down effect, though, that is what you do in your building, it’s modelling. They do it to you, you do it to your teachers, your teachers do it to their students, and we get the whole validation piece tied together. (FG-1)

Focus group participants recognized “the system has shifted, the expectations have shifted, the opportunities to do these things has shifted” (FG-4). The new leadership team at the department level is seen by participants differently:
The role has changed big time. . . . They’re in charge of school goals, but they’re not in charge of those when we’re stuck in the tank with situations they’re not helping us, or it’s not their mandate to help us. (FG-5)

The participants agreed that this issue presents an opportunity for change within the DEEC (FG-1, FG-2, FG-5).

**Professional development on mental health.** Several participants suggested leaders advocate for PD opportunities around mental health as an opportunity to foster openness and understanding (I-2, I-3, FG-1, FG-3). One participant cited a previous lack of understanding around the subject: “No one has ever sat down and talked to me about dealing with mental health issues in the building, and these things are out there” (FG-3). One participant explained how the participant navigates this lack of understanding: “I rely on my counsellor a lot; I go to her” (FG-5), adding having to go to individuals outside of the school on their own time. This participant asked, “What would you do in a situation like this?” (FG-5).

Participants explained a need for training on “sensitivity issues, . . . [with school leaders needing to know] here’s where you can go for sensitivity training, here’s what it offers, here’s how it helped me” (I-1). One interviewee expressed a need for teachers to really understand how mental health presents itself in teachers, asserting, “People really need to understand how to take care of themselves” (I-2). One might conclude if an individual who is dealing with high levels of stress cannot recognize it, that person may not be in a position to take care of him or herself.

A need was identified in the data for leaders to be trained in ethical areas of leadership. An interviewee explained that school leaders are “humans too, and so they have families and hard times in their families, but some of them might have career aspirations that being a principal is just building toward, and that’s fair” (I-2). This interviewee went on to speak about the need
for teachers and administrators, who make numerous decisions daily, to base their decisions on ethical grounds, adding, “But where we’re in our jobs we need to keep it ethical” (I-2).

**Balance school leadership teams.** Individual school leaders hold various strengths, and several participants recognized a need to have a balance of talents within school leadership teams so that teachers feel supported in multiple ways (FG-1, FG-2, FG-5). For example, one participant expressed: “I have my counselling degree, so I find that helps me immensely, I am a way better principal because of that piece than I am because of curriculum, and there are way better instructional leaders” (FG-1). When discussing the self-reflective nature of leadership, another participant explained: “It would be important training for a new principal to sit and reflect on just what it is that they bring to the table” (FG-4). This participant went on to say, “You can’t have someone with the same skillset as you as your vice principal because if you do, there are going to be things left behind. . . . If I have someone who’s the same as me, we’re going to be in trouble. (FG-4)

Focus group participants spoke of a lack of autonomy in regard to the hiring of vice principals, with one participant explaining, “When I hired my vice principal, there were eight principals around the table, and she was applying for them all, and they were trying to give me somebody. . . . I had to dig my heels in” (FG-1).

Focus group participants connected collaborative opportunities regarding school leadership talent. One example centred on a discussion of the role timetabling plays in school initiatives. Certain schools have leadership talent in the building that cannot create collaboration time for teachers within the school day because the leader in the building is gifted in time-table creation. One participant explained how the participant’s vice principal has the skillset to create this type of timetable: “She looked at it and said, ‘I can make this work’” (FG-5), with another
sharing how “we’re struggling to do that just because we have double lunches” (FG-3). Another participant explained how the participant’s school has collaborative time scheduled into its schedule and acknowledged: “It’s very difficult. It gets more difficult every year, and collaboration time for teachers [has] been looked upon by the board as not necessarily something they support at times, but teachers very much value it” (FG-5). All focus group participants shared the belief that sharing these internal skillsets with other schools would be a valuable opportunity. The focus data helped to inform the inquiry conclusions.

**Study Conclusions**

Interviews and a focus group were conducted to answer the inquiry question and sub questions. The data findings explored in this chapter connect to major themes explored in the literature review conducted in Chapter Two. The findings led to the study conclusions as follows:

1. A supportive leadership model is foundational for school leaders to support teachers’ mental health.
2. Schools leaders require certain competencies and abilities to support teachers’ mental health.
3. Teacher autonomy and sense of control contribute to teachers’ mental health.
4. School leaders must take tangible actions to support the mental health needs of teachers.

**Conclusion 1: A supportive leadership model is foundational for school leaders to support teachers’ mental health.** Participants at all levels held the vision that a culture within their school, ripe with support and trust, would help them feel supported, empowered, and more professionally autonomous. Innovation is strengthened with supportive leadership (I-1, I-3, FG-
1), and there is a trickle-down effect regarding healthy school relationships and culture, ranging from the department level through to the school leadership teams, the teachers, and ultimately, to the students (FG-5, FG-4).

Relationships are at the core of schools, and the topic of mental health remains a taboo topic for many teachers and school leaders. Schein (2013) presented that in a relationship-building process, the most difficult issue is how far to go in revealing something one might normally conceal, even though unless one opens up more, one cannot build the relationship (p. 86). Kouzes and Posner (2007) affirmed that “leadership is not about organizational power or authority, it’s not about being CEO. . . . It’s about relationships, credibility and what you do” (p. 338). In order to erode the taboo of teacher mental health, school leaders and teachers must work together to find ways of building trusting relationships that are supportive.

The findings showed school culture are closely related to teachers’ mental health and job satisfaction, and school leaders are an important aspect of this culture. Cerit (2009) advocated for school principals to perform activities of servant leadership, such as supporting and developing employees, respecting employees, providing a trustable, moral and respectful environment, and caring for employees (p. 615). Brown and Treviño (2006) advocated for ethical leadership because of its positive relationship to job satisfaction, motivation, and commitment of followers.

Participants across the study presented a keen interest in supporting colleagues. It follows that creating professional growth opportunities to support growth for all staff in leadership mastery should be at the heart of the LL Division’s mandate.

**Conclusion 2: Schools leaders require certain competencies and abilities to support teachers’ mental health.** For all participants, it was clear school leaders need to be adept at knowing the people in their building, fostering trusting relationships with these people, and
working collaboratively with them while recognizing the culture of the building. A strong sense of empathy for others was also evident as a competency that leaders and followers must use to guide their daily activities (I-2, FG-3, FG-2). Participants expressed the importance of leaders recognizing and protecting the unique culture of their school (FG-2, FG-4, FG-5). This was shared by one participant who spoke to this need, stating, “There is a culture in this school, and it’s your job to keep that culture there” (FG-3). Another participant added advice given to him: “One of the things that was passed to me is that this school has a really different culture than some places. You protect that” (FG-2).

When discussing their work on appreciative leadership, Dewar and Cook (2014) spoke about the importance of trust and collaboration in leadership, explaining the importance of leaders building relationships that leave staff teams working closer by using the “development of trust, more open dialogue, and being more sensitive to the needs of others” (p. 1263). This appreciative leadership model centres on genuine relationship building on a daily basis and includes competencies such as conflict management, considering the needs of others, and trust and open dialogue that can lead to increased trust, confidence, and collaboration, which can help an organization move forward (Brookes, 2011; Dewar & Cook, 2014; Dewar & Nolan, 2013). The conviction that school leadership requires specific competencies like those discussed was shared by Currie et al. (2009) and Hattie (2012).

Currie et al. (2009) advocated for the appreciative model due to a very specific need within modern school leadership. The authors explained that school leaders using an appreciative leadership model will find ways of shifting the data-driven model to a data-informed model that helps to improve teacher professionalism rather than threatening it (p. 480). This need to manage different models was expressed within the data, with one participant explaining how provincial
assessments have taken away teacher autonomy (FG-2). Another participant explained a data-driven shift in the system: “The system has shifted, and because the system has shifted, the expectations have shifted” (FG-1). It is important for leaders to balance this, in order to honour the importance of trust and relationships within staff, the new accountability model within schools of today, and the need to continue to innovate within these schools (Currie et al., 2009; Hattie, 2012; Heifetz, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2011).

**Conclusion 3: Teacher autonomy and sense of control contribute to teachers’ mental health.** Participants held a clear view of the importance of teacher autonomy and sense of control and linked these to a feeling of professionalism and confidence (I-1, I-2, I-3, FG-3, FG-4). It was apparent that teacher autonomy and sense of control was closely connected to participants’ ability to collaborate with colleagues, and this collaboration helps bolster confidence, relationships, and a sense of worth within the profession (I-1, I-2, I-3, FG-2, FG-3, FG-5). This means teachers and schools that are working regularly with colleagues will increase teachers’ sense of worth and keep teachers mentally healthy.

Based on her work on teacher stress, Hartney (2008) showed the importance of teachers maintaining a sense of ownership of their work and that self-efficacy related to this ownership is paramount to an “avoidance of negative stress” (p. 54). Teacher autonomy is directly related to job satisfaction and self-efficacy, and this teacher autonomy can greatly affect student learning in the classroom (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009).

Of concern for education stakeholders like the DEEC’s LL Division is Roth et al.’s (2007) study, which showed that teachers who feel more controlled in their own practice use a more controlling stance with their students and, therefore, engage in classroom practices that do
not help develop autonomy in their students. Leroy et al. (2007) supported these finding, explaining,

> When teachers’ self efficacy is lowered, this causes a reduction in the use of practices favourable to satisfying students’ autonomy needs, explaining that the stronger the self efficacy within a teacher the more that teacher’s use of a humanistic approach related to task mastery for students. (p. 538)

**Conclusion 4: School leaders must take tangible actions to support the mental health needs of teachers.** Participants proposed a number of feasible suggestions that could be initiated to support school leadership development. These suggestions could be advocated for by the LL Division and the Public Schools Branch or driven by specific school leadership teams.

Firstly, participants urged school leaders to use appreciation as a way of celebrating staff accomplishments and a way to increase confidence in their staff (I-1, I-2, FG-3, FG-5) and to celebrate best practice for new initiatives (I-2). This appreciation was suggested as a means to model best practice in leadership (I-1, FG-3, FG-5) and should flow through the hierarchy of the entire division to create a “trickle-down effect” (FG-1) that would flow directly to students in the classroom (I-2, I-3, I-5, FG1, FG-3, FG-5). Secondly, with regard to PD on mental health, participants suggested training opportunities be provided for school leaders and teachers on various subjects related to school mental health (I-2, I-3, FG-2, FG-4, FG-5). Specific needs suggested by participants lie in the areas of recognizing mental health issues in students (FG-3, FG-5), sensitivity training (I-1), and teacher mental health (I-2). Thirdly, participants encouraged a measure of being mindful, in the hiring of school leadership teams, of the skillsets that each leader brings to the school (FG-1, FG-2, FG-5), and to be open to sharing these individuals with their specific skillsets with other schools in order to improve capacity across the system (FG-2,
FG-3, FG-5). This suggestion also referenced a need to have a staff member on the hiring committee who understands and can speak to the culture of the school when hiring school leaders (FG-1, FG-4); the DEEC has re-established the practice this spring (T. Hubley Little, personal communication, May 23, 2017). The next section will speak to the scope and limitations of the inquiry.

**Scope and Limitations of the Inquiry**

This study was a qualitative study designed to begin a discussion for professionals in PEI schools around the mental health needs of teachers and the needs of school leaders who work to support these teachers. The small sample size speaks to the snapshot nature of this study and presents a limitation to the study. Given there are 1,700 teachers and administrators across PEI, the intention of this study was not to present a comprehensive evaluation of school leadership related to mental health in PEI schools. Instead, the data from this study present a snapshot of the experience of school leaders and teachers to provide a platform for further discussion.

Given the criteria for participation in the study limited participants to those with two or more years of experience as either a teacher or school administrator, the interviews and focus group did not capture the needs of teachers and administrators in their first year of experience. It should also be noted that the teachers included in this study were all women, and their age ranged from early 30s to mid-50s, with their experience ranging from 3 to 13 years. This limits the perspectives of teachers outside of these parameters and presents an opportunity for further investigation. Also of note is the lack of perspectives of those involved in senior management and governance, additional staff within schools, parents, students and the public. However, these groups may be discussed in the future inquiry in Chapter Five.
Chapter Summary

Presented in this chapter were the study findings and conclusions connecting the findings to Chapter 2. The interviews and focus group involved in this study identified four major findings:

1. Participants shared that teacher mental health is fostered when leaders use supportive models of leadership to improve school culture.
2. Participants believed school leaders require certain competencies and abilities in order to support teachers’ mental health.
3. Participants valued teacher autonomy and sense of control as a contributing factor for teachers feeling mentally healthy.
4. Participants presented constructive suggestions for developing school leaders who are supportive of teachers’ mental health needs.

The findings led to the study conclusions as followed:

1. A supportive leadership model is foundational for school leaders to support teachers’ mental health.
2. Schools leaders require certain competencies and abilities to support teachers’ mental health.
3. Teacher autonomy and sense of control contribute to teachers’ mental health.
4. School leaders must take tangible actions to support the mental health needs of teachers.

A summary of the scope and limitations of the study was also presented in this chapter. In Chapter 5, I outline the recommendations of the study, the implications of these recommendations for the DEEC, and present future research possibilities.
Chapter 5: Inquiry Recommendations and Implications

I begin this chapter with four recommendations based on the findings and conclusions outlined in Chapter 4. I then move into an overview of the organizational implications of these recommendations for the DEEC and make recommendations for future research. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the inquiry project and a vision for leaders supporting teachers’ mental health needs in PEI schools.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations for the DEEC based on the findings and conclusions reviewed in Chapter 4 are presented in this chapter. The main question of my investigation was: How can the Leadership and Learning Division of the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture prepare school leaders to support the mental health needs of teachers in Prince Edward Island Schools? The sub questions I explored were:

1. What leadership models contribute to a school leader’s ability to support a culture that enhances teacher’s mental health?
2. What competencies/abilities do effective school leaders need to support the mental health needs of teachers?
3. How might school leaders support teacher autonomy and sense of control?
4. What conditions are necessary for teacher autonomy and sense of control to contribute to teacher’s mental health?

Four recommendations resulted from this research and are presented in this chapter for future consideration by the DEEC. These recommendations include:

1. Implement professional development on mental health.
2. Implement yearly leadership professional growth plans.
3. Develop collaboration opportunities.

4. Create a leadership support network.

**Recommendation 1: Implement professional development on mental health.** Mental health is a challenging topic. My first recommendation is mental health training for teachers and school leaders to allow increased comfort on this challenging topic. Organizations brave enough to take on topics like mental health can decrease employee dissatisfaction, powerlessness, and frustration and retain employees (Andrews & Wan, 2009). In conducting this inquiry, it was apparent that the DEEC has wonderfully committed leaders and teachers who are the key to its future. Both teachers and school leaders identified a gap in knowledge and a true need to learn about mental health. Research and practice-based perspectives have asserted that today’s schoolteachers are more involved as tier-one mental health professionals in today’s society, and school leaders and teachers must have the knowledge to act in this capacity (Rothi et al., 2008). Tier-one interventions to mental health are universal interventions addressed in classrooms that would include or address issues of emotion regulation that can enhance academic performance and often address conduct in students (Macklem, 2010). These are interventions and learning competencies that teachers embed in their practice daily. This recommendation is divided into areas of change for teachers and for leaders.

Firstly, I suggest a two-phase approach for teachers. Phase one would explore ways teachers can ensure that they have concrete methods of looking after their own mental health, with phase two exploring various types of mental disorders, their prevalence, and how they present themselves in students. This first phase would be informational for both teachers and school leaders and focus on how both groups can be models of mental health in their schools. It could begin by exploring how to protect and enhance teachers’ own mental health as a
foundational measure for overall health. Foundational measures would include things that individuals do to look after themselves, such as nutrition, sleep, exercise, socialization, and spiritual development (Macklem, 2010). Phase two would be a professional development (PD) course developed or sourced to help teachers and leaders recognize how specific mental health disorders and illnesses present themselves in students and staff members. Within this PD, an important message for teachers and leaders would be to clearly define their roles as advocacy rather than counselling. This boundary is of utmost importance, as teachers and school leaders are not counsellors. Leaders and teachers would also require a solid understanding of agencies available to those requiring intervention. I would suggest this PD course include an explanation of these agencies, their interventions, and how teachers and leaders can access these resources.

For school leaders, it is important to acknowledge the vital role they play in supporting teachers’ mental health (Peters & Pearce, 2012). It is suggested that the LL Division create or source PD in this area. This PD should define the professional obligations around confidentiality and address the sensitive nature of the topic of mental health in society. It would include how leaders can support struggling teachers dealing with mental health issues as well as how to support teachers in maintaining good mental health. Literature and data have suggested the key to this lies in fostering trusting relationships through the lens of ethical, servant, and appreciative leadership. I suggest this would be a welcomed opportunity for school leaders in the DEEC.

In relation to her work around teacher resilience, Hartney (2016) stressed a “competent and caring leadership team” (p. 134), adding that schools often neglect to develop cultures that promote and enable collegial support. By empowering teachers and leaders with increased understandings of how to support mental health, coupled with ways of improving and protecting teachers’ own mental health, the DEEC would address a need shown in the data and improve
culture in PEI schools. By supporting caring leadership development in its school leaders, the DEEC could develop school cultures that foster this collegial support. This collegial support builds relationships that lead to improved culture and mental health for teachers and leaders.

**Recommendation 2: Implement yearly leadership professional growth plans.** The second recommendation calls on the DEEC to implement yearly professional growth plans for its school leaders based on a set of agreed upon leadership standards. The DEEC currently asks school leaders to complete a personal leadership plan every three years (T. Hubley-Little, personal communication, May 23, 2017). Leaders within schools are evolving constantly in their leadership growth. The tracking of this growth would be better served if leaders were supported to develop a yearly personal leadership plan that could allow them to, as one study participant stated, “Spend some time reflecting on where they have strengths and where they may need to improve” (FG-2). It is suggested that this yearly goal be aligned with a clear set of leadership standards, yet to be developed in PEI, that could focus all school leaders toward leadership growth key areas.

Senge (2006) strongly maintained that of the five core attributes of learning organizations, personal mastery is the most important: “Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning, but without it, no organizational learning occurs” (p. 129). The participants in this study suggested a number of areas connected to supporting the mental health of teachers that were closely connected to personal leadership. In order for organizations to move toward fostering collective creativity, Senge, Hamilton, and Kania (2015) suggested leaders must spend time “holding up the mirror to see the taken-for-granted assumptions we carry into any conversation and appreciating how our mental models may limit us” (p. 28). Yearly professional
growth plans aligned with a set of leadership standards would allow personal leadership development to be a focus for the DEEC.

To support these professional growth plans, the LL Division of the DEEC could create opportunities for school leaders to work with a mentor at the department or collegial level who could act as a sounding board for their goals and to help create a working collaboration for leadership growth. This would create opportunities for school leaders to act with agility towards the changing needs within PEI schools through a self-evaluative process. Furthermore, the DEEC could bring the school leadership group together and identify collective needs within the group that could lead to PD opportunities, such as the mental health of teachers as identified within this study. Collective needs, as suggested by this study, would be found in the areas of relationship building, teacher appreciation, and increasing collaboration opportunities for teachers and school leaders.

Ideally, once a leader has identified a need within his or her leadership growth, a member of the administrator support team within the LL Division could suggest a leader who may be competent in this area whom the leader could connect with for support. This information could also help the DEEC identify talents within the school leadership pool in the DEEC. This knowledge would enable both leadership teams in schools and the LL Division to create a needs assessment that would inform new hiring needs within each school. Furthermore, it would promote the need for balanced teams within schools and open opportunities for leaders interested in moving to schools where their respective talents are required.

**Recommendation 3: Develop collaboration opportunities.** The literature and participant data related to teacher autonomy and sense of control informed the third conclusion of this study: Teacher autonomy and sense of control contribute to teachers’ mental health
Collaboration presents a logical venue that the DEEC could harness to increase this autonomy, sense of control, and ultimately, the mental health of its teachers and school leaders. By championing collaborative opportunities, the LL Division of the DEEC would help address the importance of autonomy in its teachers and school leaders.

It is important for the DEEC to use a critical lens when presenting collaborative opportunities and recognize what Murawski and Hughes (2009) explained as not “simply putting two educators in the same room” (p. 269). The true collaboration the DEEC needs to foster refers to a collegial interaction that allows interdependence and instructional problem solving and planning, which fosters a key role in teacher learning (Meirink et al., 2010). I suggest two collaborative pieces for the DEEC to employ: one for teachers within the system and the other involving the leaders.

Where possible, teacher collaborative time needs to be provided within the timetable of the school day. Teacher and school leader participants shared the value of this model and the importance of school leaders as active participants in the process (I-1, I-2, FG-1, FG-4). This collaborative time could present opportunities for relationships to be built between teachers and leaders and could lead to an increase in trust within the respective buildings. It would be important for the DEEC to recognize the link between collaboration, increased autonomy, and sense of control for teachers and to be aware of it as a leverage point that could enhance teachers’ mental health.

In regard to the collaboration of school leaders, this study has suggested an increase in collaborative support opportunities for school leaders. This could begin at the LL Division, as will be discussed in Recommendation 4, and would enable a “trickle down effect” (FG-4) from
the division office to the schools. Within the cohort of school leaders, collaboration in the form of a yearly professional growth plan, as described in Recommendation 2, is one example. One result of collaborative opportunities between school leaders would be increased relationship building, which was a gap identified in the focus group, which was explained as “a lack of networking opportunities” (FG-4, FG-3). School leader collaboration will also provide an opportunity to celebrate and share talents within the school leadership cohort. This recognition and celebration of talents within the leadership group would identify knowledge keepers who display talents in specific areas like timetabling, hiring practices, and leveraging technology. Knowing these individuals and their strengths would allow others to know where to look when seeking advice on certain subjects. To be specific, the collaborative approach could, for example, allow a school leader who was able to embed collaborative time into the timetable to share how he or she was able to do this.

Increased collaboration could allow the DEEC to address the need for teachers and leaders to be more autonomous and increase their sense of control. Doing so, the DEEC can further address this need recognized in the data as a factor for teachers’ mental health.

**Recommendation 4: Create a leadership support network.** The final recommendation of this study is for the DEEC to create a leadership support network modelling appreciation for its school leaders. Data suggested needs related to school leadership in the area of appreciation and support (I-2, I-2, I-3, FG-1, FG-3, FG-5). As discussed in Recommendation 3, support can be presented through increased collaborative opportunities for school leaders.

To further increase appreciation towards school leaders by the LL Division, I suggest the administration support team housed within the LL Division work to clearly define appreciation within the LL Division and among the school leadership cohort in PEI. Also, I would suggest the
DEEC work to coordinate joint ventures with other leadership support groups that are currently active within the school leadership community in PEI.

The current structure of the LL Division includes a school administration support team (see Appendix A) that is tasked with supporting school leadership teams in the area of school leadership and school effectiveness (T. Hubley-Little, personal communication, May 23, 2017). This team contains three very talented and experienced school leaders who work with school leaders throughout the various schools in the province. Participants in this study shared an understanding that this team’s focus is largely on school effectiveness and particularly the creation of school goals (FG-1, FG-4). It is suggested that this team refocus its efforts to providing a balanced approach to its role and that the LL Division communicate this refocus to school leadership teams. Furthermore, in an effort to support this effort to re-establish itself as a leadership support team, it is suggested that members of the team perform regular leadership support check-ins with schools they are attached to. This support could model and celebrate an ethical, appreciative, and servant leadership style. Ideally, this team could help with PD around these models for school leaders in PEI as discussed in Recommendation 1. The team would need to follow a measured approach in balancing their work on school effectiveness and leadership support. Without throwing off the balance of their role, the team would need to increase the efforts centred on things outside the area of school goals. For example, check-ins to follow an appreciative model that values rather than judges, expands strengths rather than eliminates problems, and searches for the best in people (Brookes, 2011). The goal is to foster a culture of appreciation that models the type of leadership that can support the mental health needs of teachers and school leaders in the DEEC. I would also advise the LL Division to identify its new school leaders, those in their first three years of experience, and provide more frequent check-ins
with these individuals. This would create a support network that data suggested is a need for school leaders new to their roles (FG-1, FG-2, FG-5).

Currently in PEI, there are a number of groups that support school leaders, including a School Principals’ Association and a High School Principals’ Association (T. Hubley-Little, May 26, 2017). It is suggested that the DEEC’s LL Division work in conjunction with these two groups to address the needs of school leaders in PEI schools. Fostering collaboration with these groups, who have similar interests, would allow joint initiatives toward the common goal of supporting school leadership. An increased effort on mentorship opportunities for school leaders could provide a means to address the collaboration needs identified by participants within this study. These groups may provide a venue for safe, honest dialogue for school leaders that would occur outside of their employer’s sphere. This can produce authentic needs being voiced through a safe channel where implied power-over issues are absent. This collaborative approach could provide further opportunities for leadership development and allow the pooling of resources to address the professional needs of school leaders on PEI.

Research presented in Chapter 2 showed that school leaders interested in improving learning for students should create schools where teachers are autonomous (Leroy et al., 2007; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). This research, coupled with data cited in Chapter 4 of this study suggested collaboration increases autonomy for teachers (I-1, I-2). The results of this current study present a clear opportunity for change for the DEEC’s LL Division and its school leaders. By improving collaboration, autonomy, and in turn, the mental health of leaders and teachers, the DEEC would provide an environment for self-improvement for its school leadership pool. The next section will discuss the implications of this study for the DEEC.
Organizational Implications

The organizational implications of this study for the DEEC are described in this section. With the main project question being: “How can the Leadership and Learning Division of the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture prepare school leaders to support the mental health needs of teachers in Prince Edward Island Schools, the study’s findings, conclusions, and recommendations offer tangible ways for the DEEC to help develop school leaders’ support of teachers’ mental health. Addressing the inquiry question presents several implications for the DEEC.

As explained in the study conduct, I engaged with the DEEC while conducting this inquiry. I began by acquiring the support of the Director or the LL Division. The DEEC was kept well-informed during the process, and I engaged with the DEEC in developing the questions for both methods and the participant recruitment, and I included DEEC staff in the focus group. Many members of the DEEC asked regularly how the study was going and when it would be completed. This ranged from DEEC staff members to teachers and focus group members. Prior to the creation of the recommendations, I met with the project sponsor to review the literature review and the initial findings from the data. This conversation was framed around practical ways to continue to work towards improving the mental health needs of teachers, leaders and students. I explained that the next step was to compose recommendations for furthering this initiative.

How the LL Division of the DEEC and the DEEC itself decide to move forward with any recommendations from the study will determine the next stages. That said, two schools have taken the initial steps identified in Recommendation 1 and have held presentations on mental health in their schools, and the DEEC has also offered an initial PD opportunity for senior
directors on mental health in schools. It is clear that the DEEC recognizes an opportunity in this area. Also of note is the recent commitment of the Council for Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training, which includes ministers committed to the sharing of best practices and creating network opportunities between and among various government departments and key stakeholders (Doherty, 2016). Ministers also discussed “the importance of evidence-based research and data in the area of mental health to assist the provinces and stakeholders to make informed decisions pertaining to intervention strategies to support students” (Doherty, 2016, para. 4), asking senior officials to work closely with mental health field experts to determine the current level of need to inform evidence-based decisions. The Minister of Education for PEI, Doug Currie, has proven this commitment in PEI by recently announcing significant new funding for a Student Well Being Supports Program beginning with two school wellness centers, each with seven professionals whose role is to support student mental health in schools with plans to include eight similar teams in schools in by 2020 (Doherty, 2017). I am honoured to have been hired in the lead of the Student Well Being Supports Program role and I will begin this position in July. Recognizing the bureaucratic structure of the DEEC and knowing how initiatives flow through this structure, it follows that the avenues for change are well underway. This project’s alignment with the work of the Atlantic Ministers, the provincial Ministry, the senior leadership team and of course the LL Division adheres to my understanding that new initiatives wishing to gain strength in a bureaucratic structure, often align and support the overall system’s needs.

The priority that mental health has within the DEEC became evident when I was asked to present the study to the Senior Leadership Team at the DEEC. This included Directors, Senior Managers within the DEEC and the Deputy Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture,
Susan Willis. This presentation gave an opportunity for senior members of the leadership team to hear about the research and suggest ways for the LL Division to implement its findings. As a result of this meeting I have been asked to present this study to the DEEC’s Principals Council in the upcoming year and to the Prince Edward Island Administrators’ Leadership Program, a comprehensive preparatory program designed to provide participants with the knowledge of how successful school leaders think and what school leaders can do to improve student learning and success. Both of these presentations will allow this study’s recommendations to give school leaders and future school leaders an understanding of how to support teachers’ mental health in schools.

I was also invited by the Manager of Achievement and Accountability to meet and discuss a recent survey report conducted by the DEEC that connects closely to mental health in schools. She believes the recommendations connect closely with areas within the survey that will inform initiatives within the department related to school culture. Deputy Minister Willis showed a high degree of interest in this study (T. Hubley-Little, December 12, 2016) and my new position as the Student Well Being Support Program Lead will work directly with the Deputy Minister. This will create another great opportunity to engage with key stakeholders in PEI.

The recommendations put forth and listed in this report were created to support and build upon the work happening within the DEEC and to fit within its new structure. PD is a regular occurrence within the DEEC’s structure and presents a pathway to engage members at various levels that could have a significant impact for teachers and school leaders. Committing to supporting teachers’ mental health by building PD opportunities on the subject of mental health could be a cost-effective initiative. It calls on the DEEC to refocus an area of its current PD commitment and would present an efficient means through which to support this important need.
for its employees. Within Recommendations 3 and 4, dealing with collaboration and support for leadership development, an alignment of teachers’ and leaders’ needs was asked for that fit well within the current PD structures used by the DEEC. PD opportunities would call for an initial economic investment in the form of training courses to be developed or sourced. This would be a regular and cost-effective need and fall within the current budgetary commitments of the DEEC. However, there are individuals housed within the DEEC who could be tasked with developing these courses and who have backgrounds in the area of mental health and teaching, thereby reducing the economic investment dramatically.

The DEEC’s effort to address mental health falls within its student well-being pillar and aligns with its school goals framework that all schools follow (Doherty, 2017). Recent commitments by both the DEEC and Council for Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training to support student mental health are also very commendable and worth noting. However, focusing the discussion and attempting to address only student mental health without including the teacher’s mental health needs may create what Krantz (2006) called a “virtuous betrayal” (p. 222). The virtuous promotion of student mental health without including teachers’ mental health would produce a notable gap in the pursuit. This gap may very well lead to the failure of the DEEC’s school health goals related to mental health and lead to a betrayal of the teacher in the equation. By including teachers as healthy highways on which to engage in the process, while developing leaders steeped with an understanding of mental health and leadership styles to support mental health, the DEEC can support overall school health. By supporting teachers’ mental health as a functional and primary measure to these important initiatives, the DEEC would find itself on a solid foundation from which to support comprehensive school health.
Systems thinking (Senge, 2006) is important for members of any organization. Action research rests on the construction of a problem by a group of people who are affected by it and who jointly explore it with the hope of learning from the problem, reformulating the problem to inform further learning for the group. (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Stringer, 2014). The DEEC contains many academics with leadership backgrounds who have a strong understanding of systems thinking, and the model of action research would present an exceptional model for further inquiries related to the subject of teacher mental health and leadership development in the DEEC. Encouraging its members to engage in further action research related to mental health would benefit the DEEC. This benefit would come not only from the data provided through this further research, but also because it would serve as a commitment to learning about the organization’s human needs, which are central to delivering high-quality education for students.

Reflexive practice and self-examination, including continued learning and contemplation, are areas of first-person research intended to guide purposeful further action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Second-person research begins with interpersonal inquiry and includes developing communities of inquiry (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Third-person inquiry, described by Torbert and Taylor (2008), creates conditions where people can engage in first- and second-person research. Third-person inquiry takes these perspectives, creates an inquiry community and generates evidence that can be shared beyond this immediate community of inquiry that informs other groups (Torbert & Taylor, 2008). This inquiry conducted first- and second-person research by asking participants to reflect (i.e., first person) on questions and to then communicate their reflections in a dialogue with me as the inquiry leader (i.e., second person). The process has led to third-person research that is represented through this report, and
this representation of the process through a publicly available thesis shares the process with those outside of the organization and inquiry (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014).

The study findings and conclusions have shown participants have linked to Torbert and Taylor’s (2008) elements of first-person research. Improving overall society calls on an understanding of one’s role within it. This inquiry harnessed the important role teachers, school leaders, and school jurisdictions play in helping to improve social capitalization, which is a measure of how well individuals reach their potential in a society (Gladwell, 2016). The DEEC’s new school wellness teams consisting of key stakeholders from the department of health, justice and education create an innovative opportunity to share ideas, talent and budgets to improve social capitalization within PEI. As the program lead for this work, I look forward to working collectively with this new collaboration as we work to invest our collective ideas to furthering a collective wellness in PEI. The public value of helping individuals in society reach their full potential is an important measure of a society’s overall success (Gladwell, 2016). The recommendations in this thesis will aid the DEEC and other departments in playing an important role in this valuable measure. The organizational implications for the DEEC posed within this thesis could allow an opportunity to continue to build upon the fine work happening within its structure. The next section of this report will speak to the opportunities to further build upon the findings, conclusions and recommendations of this inquiry

**Implications for Future Inquiry**

The process of the inquiry and its scope are both explored in this section. Suggestions for further research that emerged during the inquiry are also offered.

First, the selection of participants for both the interviews and the focus group limited participation to teachers and school leaders in at least their second year in their respective role
and the teachers who did participate in the interviews were all female and the participants in the overall study ranged from their mid thirties to their mid fifties. It would be interesting to look closely at the difference in the willingness of males and females to discuss mental health. It would be interesting to conduct the same inquiry with new teachers and new school leaders and compare the results with those housed in this study. The scope of the inquiry was limited to three interviews and one focus group limited to one jurisdiction. That said, the data were rich and deep, with participants showing a high degree of vulnerability in their responses. Conducting a subsequent inquiry into how school leaders in a number of jurisdictions could protect the mental health of teachers would generate a larger pool of data. Also, the inclusion of senior DEEC department staff, most of whom have experience as teachers and school leaders and who would also have advanced understandings of the overall educational system in PEI, may prove meaningful.

Second, as one inquiry team member suggested, the topic of mental health in schools is becoming more prevalent, and schools and jurisdictions are beginning to put measures in place to support mental health in schools. It could prove useful to measure the amount of training for teachers and school leaders, if any, that is provided prior to and during the implementation of these measures in various jurisdictions.

Third, given the identified lack of literature on school leaders supporting teachers’ mental health and the lack of practical PD for teachers and leaders in this area, it may prove useful to explore this gap, in addition to this study’s recommendations, and explore what could be done to bridge this gap. This inquiry confirmed a demand for continued leadership learning and mental health training for teachers and school leaders. This means that teachers and school leaders (i.e., the catalysts for almost all mental health initiatives conducted in schools) and the research
community, dedicated to learning about mental health in society, must work to grow the research in this important area for schools.

Finally, Stringer (2014) explained that pressures in professional practice reflect tensions in contemporary society, and action research provides a means to investigate and design more effective solutions to these complex issues. By reflecting on leadership practice and through ongoing inquiry, school leaders inside and outside the DEEC would learn to adapt with the populations they serve. This collaborative sense of inquiry, agility, and learning would allow school leaders to provide cultures conducive to improvement. Teaching is in itself an emotional pursuit “grounded on the teachers’ emotional balance and capacity to analyse situations and recognise emotions” (Bahia, Freire, Amaral, & Estrela, 2013, p. 289). School organizations must protect the resource that is the teacher. Their emotional balance and capacity must be protected so they can do their best work with society’s future—their students.

**Thesis Summary**

By engaging with the DEEC, the research conducted through this thesis has worked to address the question: How can the Leadership and Learning Division of the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture prepare school leaders to support the mental health needs of teachers in Prince Edward Island Schools?

To produce a setting for the findings, I provided a literature review covering the topics of teachers’ mental health and school leadership supporting trust. The first topic looked at the mental health of teachers and focussed on teacher workload, how it presents itself in teachers, its relation to teacher strain, and its connection to teachers’ sense of control. From there, I explored how positive relationships with leaders and colleagues can help improve teacher resilience, I then
went on to explore the topics of teacher autonomy and collaboration and their connection to these positive relationships that establish cultures of trust in schools.

Under the second topic, leadership models supporting trust, I explored opportunities housed within the ethical, servant, and appreciative leadership models. Literature connected to these models offered connections to how these models help to build strong, trusting relationships between leaders and teachers and among teachers themselves and improve the mental health of teachers.

The literature review supported my effort to speak to the specified research questions through interviews with classroom teachers and a focus group with PEI school leaders, which led to the following four findings:

1. Participants shared that teacher mental health is fostered when leaders use supportive models of leadership to improve school culture.
2. Participants believed school leaders require certain competencies and abilities in order to support teachers’ mental health.
3. Participants valued teacher autonomy and sense of control as a contributing factor for teachers’ mental health.
4. Participants presented constructive suggestions for developing school leaders who are supportive of teachers’ mental health needs.

These findings informed the following study conclusions:

1. A supportive leadership model is foundational for school leaders to support the teachers’ mental health.
2. Schools leaders require certain competencies and abilities to support teachers’ mental health.

3. Teacher autonomy and sense of control contribute to teachers’ mental health.

4. School leaders must take tangible actions to support the mental health needs of teachers.

Through the literature review, the data described in the findings, and the conclusions, I have established the following recommendations through dialogue with participants, the Director of Leadership and Learning, and the Inquiry Team. As reviewed earlier in this chapter, this inquiry project generated the following four recommendations:

1. The DEEC could implement professional development on mental health for teachers and school leaders. Teachers and leaders could benefit by learning how to enhance their own mental health and how to recognize signs of mental health issues in students and staff members, while defining their role as advocates not counsellors. Leaders should also be provided with further training in leadership models that support teachers’ overall mental health, such as the ethical, servant, and appreciative leadership models.

2. Yearly professional growth plans could be implemented for all school leaders in the DEEC based on a set of agreed upon leadership standards. This would provide an avenue for ongoing reflective practice and inform possible mentorship matching for school leaders. Shared understandings would be a basis for informing strategic collaboration and talent sharing between school leaders.

3. The DEEC could champion collaborative opportunities for both teachers and school leaders in PEI. Teachers can benefit from collaboration with increased autonomy that
leads to increased mental health. School leaders could benefit from shared understandings on topics related to fulfilling their complex roles in schools, including helping teachers and students.

4. A leadership support network could be created to support school leadership development in the DEEC. This network should be modeled by the LL Division and based on an appreciative lens with a foundation built on the ethical, servant, and appreciative leadership models. This will create a culture of appreciation for LL Division leaders, school leaders, teachers, and ultimately students.

After presenting these recommendations in this chapter, I reviewed the implications for the DEEC taking steps toward developing leaders who support teachers’ mental health and the opportunity this shift could provide. I closed this chapter with a consideration of future inquiry topics that might also provide the DEEC and other educational jurisdictions with relevant and interesting data on the topic.

In summary, this thesis connects the mental health needs of teachers, the main catalysts of almost all mental health initiatives in schools, to the school leaders who support them. I have suggested areas that these school leaders can develop in themselves to support these catalysts. I acknowledged that these teachers must be knowledgeable and healthy participants in school mental health initiatives and that they must bring their voices and needs to school mental health conversations. I believe schools are venues of change for all of society, and I believe the teacher to be its main change agent.
References


Brookes, J. (2011). Engaging staff in the change process: Jane Brookes rejected orthodox management theories in favour of appreciative leadership. She explains how involving the entire ward team in a development day gave every member ownership of the ideas and vision that emerged. *Nursing Management, 18*(5), 16–19.


LEADERSHIP SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH


Appendix A: DEEC Leadership and Learning Structure and Organization

Note: Leadership and Learning Organizational Chart, by E. Gauthier, Copyright 2017. Reproduced with permission.
Appendix B: Action Research Engagement Model (ARE)

Appendix C: Inquiry Team Letter of Agreement

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership Degree at Royal Roads University, Geoff MacDonald will be conducting an inquiry research study at the Prince Edward Island Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture (DEEC) exploring how school leaders can support the mental health needs of teachers. The Student’s credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Committee Chair, School of Leadership, at [phone #].

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, transcribing, or reviewing analysis of data, to assist the Student and the Royal Roads University organizational 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.

Sharing results

In addition to submitting my final report to the School of Leadership Studies Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master of Arts, Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with The DEEC Leadership and Learning Division. In addition, all participants will be given a link to access the final report. The data collected from this research may also be used in conference presentations or professional journal articles.

Bridging Student’s Potential or Actual Ethical Conflict

Personal information will be collected, recorded, corrected, accessed, altered, used, disclosed, retained, secured and destroyed in accordance with the requirements of Royal Roads University. 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 Geoff MacDonald, the Student.
**Statement of Informed Consent:**

I have read and understand this agreement.

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Appendix D: Interview Questions (Method A)

Preamble to commencing the interview with school teachers:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of the interview is to explore how we might address mental health issues in the school environment particularly from the point of view of the teacher. It is my intention that no individual participating in this inquiry will be identifiable.

While you may have direct knowledge or direct experience of mental health issues occurring in you personally or in the environment in which you work, I ask that you speak only in general terms. I do not need to know the names, dates, locations, outcomes or anything concerning any occurrence that might identify that issue. In addition, in the event of knowledge or experience of any occurrence regarding a third party, I request that you identify it as third party information and describe it only in general terms.

Third party information is that information that you have heard about from others but which you have no direct observation or experience.

If at any time, and as a result of you participating in this interview you have any concerns related to your own experience or the experience of others, I encourage you to take advantage of the PEI Schools Employee Assistance Program. This is a confidential program available to all employees at PEI. (Brochures will be available in the meeting room).

QUESTIONS

1. What has been your experience with school leaders supporting teacher’s mental health?
2. What might school leaders do to address the mental health of teachers?
3. What initiatives support mental health in the work environment?
4. How might school leaders support mental health in the work environment?
5. What knowledge do school leaders need to manage the mental health in the school environment?

6. If you were a school leader what measures would you put in place to support your teachers’ mental health?

7. What common attributes do you associate with leaders who support teachers’ mental health?

8. What subject matter within school leaders’ professional development could help leaders support their teachers’ mental health?
Appendix E: Focus Group Questions (Method B)

Preamble to commencing the interview with school leaders:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. The purpose of the focus group is to explore how we might address mental health issues in the school environment particularly from the point of view of the teacher. It is my intention that no individual participating in this inquiry will be identifiable.

While you may have direct knowledge or direct experience of mental health issues occurring in you personally or in the environment in which you work, I ask that you speak only in general terms. I do not need to know the names, dates, locations, outcomes or anything concerning any occurrence that might identify that issue. In addition, in the event of knowledge or experience of any occurrence regarding a third party, I request that you identify it as third party information and describe it only in general terms.

Third party information is that information that you have heard about from others but which you have no direct observation or experience.

If at any time, and as a result of you participating in this focus group you have any concerns related to your own experience or the experience of others, I encourage you to take advantage of the PEI Schools Employee Assistance Program (EAP). This is a confidential program available to all employees at PEI. (Brochures will be available in the meeting room).

1. How would you describe the qualities of school leaders who support teachers’ mental health?

2. What knowledge is required to recognize mental health issues in the work environment?

3. *What strengths are required by school leaders wanting to support a healthy working environment?*

4. *How could the DEEC better support collaboration among school leaders in supporting teachers’ mental health?*

* These questions are examples of questions that may flow from the interviews in Method A.
Appendix F: Interview Information Letter (Method One)

School Leaders Supporting Teachers’ Mental Health

My name is Geoff MacDonald and this research is a partial requirement for a Master of Leadership (MAL) degree from Royal Roads University. My credentials can be established by calling Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Committee Chair, School of Leadership, at [phone #].

Study purpose and sponsoring organization

This research study aims to look at how school leaders best support teachers’ mental health in Prince Edward Island schools. The methodology is action research and I hope to work with both classroom teachers and school administrators to create model behaviors that support teachers’ mental health. The project is sponsored by Tamara Hubley-Little (Ed.D.), Director of Leadership and Learning, Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture, Prince Edward Island.

Participation and Information Collection

This phase of the research will consist of in-person, one-on-one interviews which will last 45-60 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded, with permission, and transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. The interviewer may take additional notes during the interview. The questions asked during the interview are intended to gain an appreciation of the type of leadership that best supports teachers’ mental health in schools.

Benefits and risks of participation

Interviewees have the opportunity to share their views potentially adding to a shared understanding of teacher mental health conditions in schools. Additionally, the sponsor and the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture may create shared understandings of how teachers are main catalysts for most overall school mental health initiatives. Complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed due to the nature of the interview process and the small sample size. The interviewer will do everything possible to protect the confidentiality of the interviewee.

Research team

I will be conducting all of the interviews. All responses will be recorded by the interviewer and then coded to create an anonymous data set that will be analyzed by me. This analysis will be reviewed by the inquiry team which consists of The DEEC School Health Specialist and the DEEC Manager of Human Resources.

Real or Perceived Conflict of Interest

As you do not report to me, I have no direct power over you as a participant. I do however hold a leadership position with your employer and it may be perceived that I stand to gain from this research. This potential conflict of interest will be addressed by engaging the inquiry team in a review of the
analyzed data collection through the interview process and member checking. I disclose this information here so you can make an informed decision regarding your participation.

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

The subject of the study can be very personal. Your privacy will be a paramount concern for me throughout this study. All information collected will be maintained in confidence. Hard copies (e.g. consent forms) will be stored in a locked cupboard in my office. Electronic files, including audio files, will be stored on a password protected external drive in a locked cupboard in my office. Interview information will be recorded in hand-written and audio format and appropriately summarized in anonymous format in the body of the final report. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. Transcripts of the interviews, audio recording and all other documents will be stored and managed according to the Government of Prince Edward Island’s Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Any participant withdrawing at any time will have their data/information destroyed after one year.

**Sharing results**

In addition to submitting my final report to the School of Leadership Studies Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master of Arts, Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with The DEEC Leadership and Learning Division. In addition, all participants will be given a link to access the final report. The data collected from this research may also be used in conference presentations or professional journal articles.

**Withdrawing from the study**

Should you wish to withdraw from the study, you must contact me directly. You will be able to withdraw your data at any time during the study up to the date of February 15, 2017. It will be difficult to withdraw your information completely from the study as much of the information will be kept confidential by using codes for the participants and this information will be integrated into the study. The inquiry team will ensure that no recourse happens because of the withdrawal.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. By signing the consent form you indicate that you have read and understand the information and give your free and informed consent to participate in the inquiry.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.

Geoff MacDonald

[non-disclosed email address]

[non-disclosed phone #]
Appendix G: Focus Group Information Letter (Method B)

School Leaders’ Supporting Teachers’ Mental Health

My name is Geoff MacDonald and this research is a partial requirement for a Master of Leadership (MAL) degree from Royal Roads University. My credentials can be established by contacting Dr. Catherine Etmaniski, Committee Chair, School of Leadership, at [phone #].

Study purpose and sponsoring organization

This research study aims to look at how school leaders can best support teachers’ mental health in Prince Edward Island schools. The methodology is participatory action research and I hope to work with both classroom teachers and school administrators to create model behaviors that support teachers’ mental health. The project is sponsored by Tamara Hubley-Little (EdD), Director of Leadership and Learning, Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture, Prince Edward Island.

Participation and Information Collection

This phase of the research will consist of focus groups with fellow administrators and will last 60-75 minutes. The focus group will be audio recorded and transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. The facilitator of the focus group may take additional notes during the focus group. The questions asked during the focus group are intended to gain an appreciation of the type of leadership that best supports teachers’ mental health in schools.

Benefits and risks of participation

Focus group participants have the opportunity to share their views, potentially adding to a shared understanding of how to better support teacher mental health in schools. Additionally, the sponsor and Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture may create shared understandings of how teachers as the main catalysts for most overall school mental health initiatives, can be supported in their own mental health.

Complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed due to the nature of the focus group process and the small sample size. The focus group facilitator will do everything possible to protect the confidentiality of the interviewee.

Research team

I will be conducting all of the focus group. All responses will be recorded by a note taker and then coded to create an anonymous data set that will be analyzed by me. This analysis will be reviewed by the inquiry team which consists of: the School Health Specialist, Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture, and the Human Resources Manager, Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Real of Perceived Conflict of Interest

Recognizing that you do not report to me I recognize that I have no power over you as a participant. I do however hold a leadership position with your employer and it may be perceived that I stand to gain from
this research. This potential conflict of interest will be addressed by engaging the inquiry team in a review of the analyzed data collection through the focus group and member checking. I disclose this information here so you can make an informed decision regarding your participation.

Confidentiality, security of data, and retention period

The subject of this inquiry can be very sensitive. Your privacy will be a paramount concern for me throughout this study. All information collected will be maintained in confidence. Hard copies (e.g. consent forms) will be stored in a locked cupboard in my office. Electronic files including audio files will be stored on a password protected external drive and stored in a locked cupboard in my office. Focus group information will be recorded in hand-written and audio format and appropriately summarized in anonymous format in the body of the final report. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. Transcripts of the focus group, audio recording and all over documents will be stored and managed according to the Government of Prince Edward Island’s Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Participants will have their data/information destroyed one year after the final report is submitted.

Sharing results

In addition to submitting my final report to the School of Leadership Studies Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master of Arts, Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with The DEEC Leadership and Learning Division, In addition, all participants will be given a link to access the final report. The data collected from this research may also be used in conference presentations or professional journal articles.

Withdrawing from the study

Should you wish to withdraw from the study, you must contact me directly. You will be able to withdraw your data at any time during the study. This process will include deleting and disposal of all electronic and physical copies of collected data and records of your involvement. The inquiry team will ensure that no recourse happens because of the withdrawal.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. By signing the consent form you indicate that you have read and understand the information and give your free and informed consent to participate in the inquiry.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Geoff MacDonald

[email address]

[phone #]
Appendix H: Interview Invitation Letter (Method A)

Interview E-mail Invitation

Dear [Prospective Participant],

My name is Geoff MacDonald and this research is a partial requirement for a Master of Leadership (MAL) degree from Royal Roads University. My credentials can be established by calling Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Committee Chair, School of Leadership, at [phone #]. The objective of my research project is to help school leaders support classroom teachers’ mental health in schools throughout Prince Edward Island.

Your name was chosen as a prospective participant because you are a teacher working with the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture. This phase of my research project will consist of in-person, one-on-one interviews that are expected to last 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews will be conducted between (dates to be determined) and the location, time and date of the interviews will be dependent upon what’s convenient for you, the prospective interviewee. Interviews will be conducted with the first volunteer from the following categories: teachers with 1-10 years of experience and teachers with 10+ years of experience and geographic location. One other volunteer will be interviewed on a first come first served basis.

The attached document contains further information about the study 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 our collegial relationship may make you feel compelled to participate. Please be clear 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 information gathered from your interview without prejudice up until the distribution of the final report, which is scheduled for February 14 2017. If wish not to participate, simply do not reply to this request and understand that your decision will be kept in confidence. Be assured that your choice will not affect our relationship or your employment status in any way.

Should you have questions about the project or its outcomes, feel free to contact me at any time. If you would like to participate in my research project, please contact me at: [email address] or [phone #].

Sincerely,

Geoff MacDonald

Attachments: Interview Information Letter Interview Consent Form
Appendix I: Focus Group Invitation Letter (Method B)

Dear [Prospective Participant],

Please accept this letter as an invitation to be part of a research project that I am conducting as part of the requirement for my Master’s Degree in Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University. My credentials can be established by contacting Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Committee Chair, School of Leadership, at [phone #]. The objective of my research project is to help school leaders in supporting classroom teachers’ mental health in schools throughout Prince Edward Island.

Your name was chosen as a prospective participant because you are an administrator working with the Department of Education, Culture and Early Learning. This phase of my research project will consist of a focus group between fellow school administrators and will last 60 to 75 minutes. The focus group will be conducted between (dates to be determined) and will take place at a location and time agreed upon based on the convenience of the participants. Participants in the focus group will be conducted with the first volunteer from the following categories: administrators with 1-10 years of experience, administrators with 10 or more years of experience and geographic location. Three other participants will be included also.

The attached document contains further information about the study 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 our collegial relationship may make you feel compelled to participate. Please be clear 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 information gathered from your interview without prejudice at any time. If you wish not to participate, simply do not reply to this request and understand that your decision will be kept in confidence. Be assured that your choice will not affect our relationship or your employment status in any way.

Should you have questions about the project or its outcomes, feel free to contact me at any time. If you would like to participate in my research project, please contact me at: [email address] or [phone #].

Sincerely,

Geoff MacDonald

Attachments: Focus Group Information Letter, Focus Group Consent Form
Appendix J: Interview Consent Form (Method A)

School Leaders Supporting Teachers’ Mental Health

Interview Consent Form

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 18 and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this inquiry project.

__ I consent to the audio recording of the one-on-one interview –

-OR-

__ I do NOT consent to the audio recording of the one-on-one interview.

Name: (Please Print): __________________________________________________

Signed: _____________________________________________________________

Date: _______________________________________________________________

Please note: The topic of mental health is a sensitive one. The government of Prince Edward Island offers a comprehensive and confidential Employee Assistance Program. Should you find yourself in need of some assistance after the interview I am including the contact information of the EAP.

[phone #] or [email address]

(brochure) <<URL>>
Appendix K: Focus Group Consent Form (Method B)

School Leaders Supporting Teachers’ Mental Health

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 18 and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project.

__ I consent to the audio recording of the focus group.

__ I consent to respect the confidential nature of the focus group method by not sharing identifying information about the other participants.

__ I consent to audio recording being captured for documenting purposes only. I understand that these recordings will not be used for marketing or publication purposes. I understand that I will be contacted again in the future should the Research Team wish to use any audio recording of me for a secondary purpose.

Name: (Please Print): __________________________________________________

Signed: _____________________________________________________________

Date: _______________________________________________________________

Please note: The topic of mental health is a sensitive one. The government of Prince Edward Island offers a comprehensive and confidential Employee Assistance Program. Should you find yourself in need of some assistance after the interview I am including the contact information of the EAP.

[phone #] or [email address]

(brochure) <<URL>>