PERSPECTIVES ON FLOURISHING IN SCHOOLS

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Chapter 7

Learning is Our Moral Imperative

My Prairie Spirit Classroom

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My Prairie Spirit Classroom (MPSC) is an example of a flourishing initiative informed by promising practices and pedagogy for learning. Administration and leadership efforts have shifted from a business and managerial-focused model, to an intentional focus on learning in all interactions within the division: in the classroom, in leadership meetings, in professional learning opportunities, and in board and community meetings. As such, the vision, beliefs, and institutional goals all focus on learning, and this is seen as the school system's moral imperative. The purpose of the MPSC is to engage students and staff in side-by-side learning with a focus on assessment, innovation, relationships, relevance, and rigor. Learners—he students and the adults in the school—are presented with the big ideas, but have significant choice in their learning and in assessing their own learning process, including planning next steps.

In order to explore why the MPSC document and associated philosophy are successfully creating a culture of positive affect, engagement, achievement, and meaningful relationships, the authors provide, significant emphasis will be placed on the manner that MPSC was initiated, developed, and allowed to grow organically. MPSC gave teachers and administrators space to find themselves within the project, which we believe ultimately lead to its success. The chapter concludes with the current state of affairs regarding MPSC, namely asking: Where are we now? How do we know that the work that we are doing in actualizing MPSC is positively impacting student and adult learning?

Our division's approach and telling the story of the creation of MPSC adds to the scholarship on flourishing schools for teachers, school administrators, system leaders, and policymakers. It is a story of embedding learning in all divisional interactions and of shifting the culture in an unhurried and intrinsic manner. The intentional bottom-up approach has allowed staff members to

personalize their adult learning, which, in turn, has provided effective role-modeling for fellow staff members and students. The MPSC document has fostered opportunities within the school division to support lifelong learning and ultimately allow all learners to flourish.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS: CONTEXT AND PROCESS

In Prairie Spirit School Division (PSSD), our work, our business, and our moral imperative is *learning*. Richardson (2015) stated, "To best help our students become powerful learners in the modern world, they need teachers who are master learners as well" (p. 27). Our core belief is that supporting ongoing adult learning will positively impact student learning and this will result in the actualization of our vision statement: *Learners for Life.*

The story of what PSSD did to make it a flourishing school division started about five years ago (2013). The board of education, along with director and senior administration, set out its strategic plan for the year in a visual framework that included learning goals embedded within. This signaled a direct focus on learning for the division and provided a foundation for schools to align with and division work to support. The framework had the student as a learner for life in the middle of three concentric circles: learning culture, learning focus, and learning supports. The framework described how student and adult learning goals were to be achieved and supported in schools and classrooms.

During this time, a shift occurred within our monthly administrative meetings toward a greater focus on learning leadership. Administrators explored what optimal learning environments were and began to ask for clear descriptors of what to look for in a classroom. They were asking for something that would provide them with clarity around what Prairie Spirit believed about learning.

The senior administrative team went away with the task of developing some broad statements that reflected our learning philosophy. Much of the support for learning that had been occurring within the division was based around research and promising practices found in books, articles, and experts in the field. By reflecting on the experiences of the team, our formulation of ideas began. Our goals for the created document included: keeping it to one page, reflecting a connection to previous work and learning within the division, and capturing the big ideas foundational to student and adult learning.

Many drafts of the document were reviewed with a focus on gathering administrators' voices. The finished document was named MPSC. The word *My* signified that this document belonged to everyone in the division. The reference to *Classroom* held a deeper meaning, inclusive of multiple types of environments where learning flourishes.

The statements in MPSC describe the philosophical underpinnings of promising practices and pedagogy for learning. The big ideas of engagement, assessment, rigor, relevance, and relationships were threaded throughout the statements and provided the foundation for the instructional design of the document. MPSC was created to provide what to "look for" for administrators, and ultimately, teachers, as we all strived for improved student and adult learning.

The ideas held within MPSC are broad; although the statements appear to stand separately, they are intricately interwoven. One cannot really attempt to work within one area without touching aspects of each of the other statements. Because the document describes a lifetime pursuit, the statements do not act as a checklist. The division's commitment to lifelong learning is reflected in all of the statements, capturing our foundational belief about what learning and learners should look like in our schools.

We chose to spend a year digging into, or *chewing on,* our document with our administrators. During each of our monthly full-day meetings, we spent time on the big ideas. We read articles, we listened to leaders, we tried out tools for data collection, we practiced giving each other feedback, and we built capacity. Some administrators chose to take the document to their staff members and share the drafts at staff meetings through conversations. Others chose to build their own understanding before taking the big ideas to their staff members. We encouraged them to ask questions, to wrestle with pieces that did not make sense, to challenge ideas, and to explore opportunities. As the year progressed, the document moved from being words on paper to something more. We had administrators and schools who were beginning to make those words come alive in their schools.

At the end of that first year, we asked our administrators to share the document with their staff members. Some administrators shared what and how they had already facilitated their staff members' conversations. Some schools chose to focus on one statement at a time, recognizing that the document in its entirety was too much to digest or interact with all at once. Other schools looked at the document as a whole and talked about what they believed about optimal learning environments. They made connections between their practice and the document and found many already existing links. That was one of the many exciting ripples that the work with the document created—people talking about what learning should look like and sound like with one another.

LEARNING FACILITATORS

In tandem with the MPSC document, the school division introduced the role of learning facilitators (LFs) in each of our schools. LFs are teachers with a

portion of their time allocated to supporting other teachers to talk about learning, try new approaches in their classrooms based on a learning philosophy of inquiry, engagement, student choice, and side-by-side learning—the tenets of MPSC. We believed that the position of the LF would be a capacity-building position and would support our administrators in their schools. Fullan (2011) said, "The research has been clear and consistent for over 30 years—collaborative cultures in which teachers focus on improving their teaching practice, learn from each other, and are well led and supported by school principals result in better learning for students" (p. 2).

The senior leadership team and school administrators identified teacher leaders who could take on the responsibility of the LF role. Schools were given percentages of time based on student enrolment. The team developed a document that outlined the roles of in-school administrators, as well as the LF, and a profile of what the LF would look like and sound like. The team also developed a plan to support the LFs with a full day of learning time together every week for the month of September and then a full day per month for the rest of the year. The goals for this learning time focused on providing clarity of the role, connecting and building relationships with other LFs, and providing opportunities to build practical tools to use together with MPSC. Opportunities to learn together like this are supported by many researchers; "In order to learn more and improve our practice, we have to dig deeper into what we do, what our kids need, and what we already know. We need to learn from each other" (Breidenstein et al., as cited in Fahey & Ippolito, 2014, p. 34).

LFs continue to be active leaders in actualizing MPSC in our schools. They work together with administrators to facilitate the learning during staff meetings, meet side by side with teachers in their classrooms, hallways, and staffrooms, and connect adult learners in their buildings with other classrooms in the school division. The big ideas of MPSC have become common foundational pieces for all the learning opportunities. Professional Development (PD) offered within the division models the philosophy behind MPSC, including a focus on side-by-side chances to talk about learning with one another, asking questions, providing feedback, and big ideas.

The adoption and actualization of MPSC is reflected in many of the Learning for Life presentations that schools make each year in May. During this time, schools are asked to capture their year in a 30 minute time frame for other schools, senior administration, and board members. We noticed that the focus on singular aspects of the document in the first year was replaced by statements like, "MPSC is simply good teaching practice put into words," "it's a lifelong process," and "We will always be able to get better. It's that freshness. Mastery is just working at becoming better." Some of the schools took the MPSC statements and made them their own. They tailored the

document to their school's learning community. After a couple of years, the comments in the Learning for Life presentations make it sound like MPSC is just what we have always done.

HOW DO WE KNOW?

Three key aspects emerged over time regarding our MPSC document. The first is that the initial focus of the document was on capturing the optimal learning environments for our students. What we found was that our focus on student learning evolved into a focus on adult learning, as supported by Barth (2004) who wrote, "Teachers and students go hand in hand as learners or they don't go at all" (p. 23). At a recent annual general meeting, we noticed that all of the stories that emerged (from our school communities who shared) focused on the learning of the adults. We took the opportunity to ensure those present that our overall focus is always our student learners; which we believe has been being strongly enhanced by the simultaneous adult learning. The third aspect is that our teachers began to take the seeds of the work that had begun, planting and nurturing them into their classrooms and our schools. They wrestled with the 80/20 statement around teacher talk time. They posted big ideas and then recognized that posting them was not merely for decoration. They did the messy work of actualizing the statements into their practice on a daily basis. Then a provocative question emerged: *How do we know the work we are doing in actualizing MPSC is impacting student learning?* This is our next step as a school division. This learning journey is in year four of a 7–10-year process. Change—deep, systemic change—takes time because we believe that high levels of adult learning, inspired by high expectations, collaboration, and engagement will positively impact our student learning. MPSC continues to shape and influence the learning culture in PSSD.

BIG IDEAS OF MY PRAIRIE SPIRIT CLASSROOM

MPSC (see full-page document) contains the foundational philosophy guiding learning across our school division, providing our staff and students with a common vocabulary and practice to support our moral imperative of placing learning at the center of all decision-making endeavors. The statements in MPSC are based on promising practices or pedagogy for learning. The big ideas of engagement, relationships, rigor, relevancy, and quality assessment are threaded throughout the document and are interrelated, making it nearly impossible to dive deep into one area without connecting to another key idea. We believe that planning, learning, and assessment, driven by these core

philosophies engage children and adults to create opportunities for high levels of flourishing for staff and students, resulting in high levels of engagement and deep learning. This section will attempt to tease out those areas (relationships, rigor, relevancy, and assessment), not in an attempt to disconnect their symbiotic relationships, but to provide a knowledge base of the key authors and concepts that impacted the design and implementation practices surrounding MPSC.

Relationships

A key tenet to MPSC is relationships: the relationships between staff and students, the relationships among students, the relationships between teachers and administration, and the relationships that extend beyond the classroom.
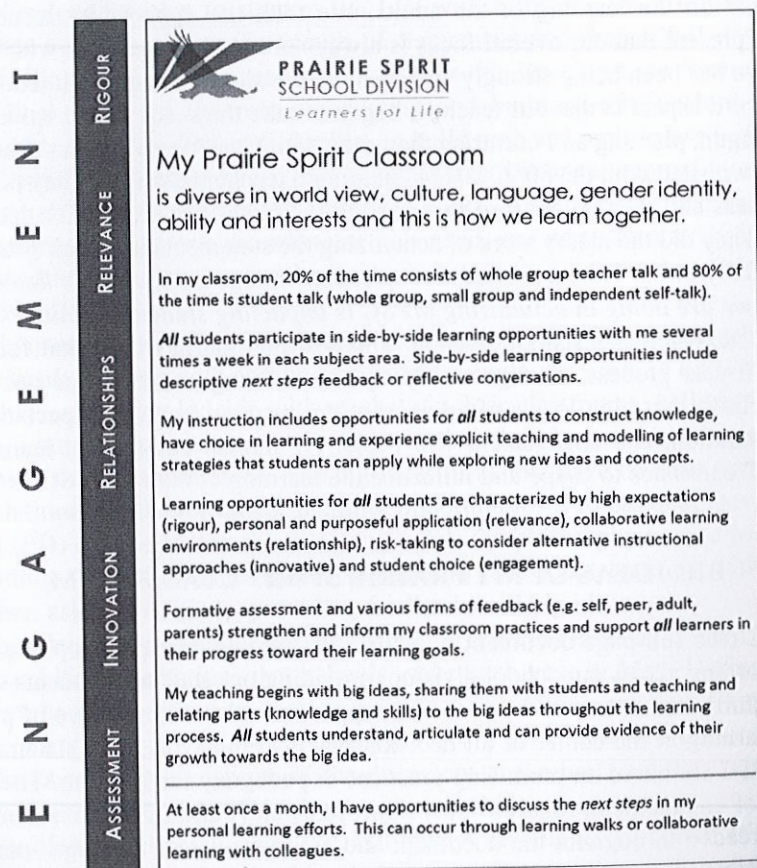

ENGAGEMENT — RIGOUR · RELEVANCE · RELATIONSHIPS · INNOVATION · ASSESSMENT

PRAIRIE SPIRIT
SCHOOL DIVISION
Learners for Life

My Prairie Spirit Classroom

is diverse in world view, culture, language, gender identity, ability and interests and this is how we learn together.

In my classroom, 20% of the time consists of whole group teacher talk and 80% of the time is student talk (whole group, small group and independent self-talk).

All students participate in side-by-side learning opportunities with me several times a week in each subject area. Side-by-side learning opportunities include descriptive *next steps* feedback or reflective conversations.

My instruction includes opportunities for *all* students to construct knowledge, have choice in learning and experience explicit teaching and modelling of learning strategies that students can apply while exploring new ideas and concepts.

Learning opportunities for *all* students are characterized by high expectations (rigour), personal and purposeful application (relevance), collaborative learning environments (relationship), risk-taking to consider alternative instructional approaches (innovative) and student choice (engagement).

Formative assessment and various forms of feedback (e.g. self, peer, adult, parents) strengthen and inform my classroom practices and support *all* learners in their progress toward their learning goals.

My teaching begins with big ideas, sharing them with students and teaching and relating parts (knowledge and skills) to the big ideas throughout the learning process. *All* students understand, articulate and can provide evidence of their growth towards the big idea.

At least once a month, I have opportunities to discuss the *next steps* in my personal learning efforts. This can occur through learning walks or collaborative learning with colleagues.

Figure 7.1   My Prairie Spirit Classroom

All of these relationships require a high level of trust and cooperation. In order to create an engaged community, students and staff need to feel comfortable taking risks, using their voice, and communicating their learning. The philosophy of MPSC includes student and adult learning. As such, learning is reciprocal; adults and students learn from one another. Learners with a growth mind-set believe that their basic abilities can be improved and developed via hard work, effective strategies, and positive coaching and/or mentoring (Dweck, 2015). Learners with a growth mind-set focus on learning; learners maintain effort and effective strategies to acquire knowledge and skills while they persevere to achieve their learning goals, learning from their mistakes and setbacks (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Dweck, 2015). In order to achieve their learning goals, students rely heavily on their relationships with their fellow learners and teachers.

In addition to seeing themselves as facilitators of learning, Hattie (2011) invited that teachers also need to see themselves as change agents. In order to enhance student learning, teachers need to engage students' learning by truly knowing their students, and understanding who they are as learners. How students and teachers relate with the learning experience itself is critical to the deep, transformative learning that MPSC targets. There is an art to teaching whereby teachers provide students with timely feedback to propel them to dig deeper into their learning, or perhaps to welcome students to return back to the problem at hand. As such, students must feel safe to participate in class by asking questions and seeking assistance.

In a classroom community of trust, students will help each other to learn and explore, feeling safe to make mistakes to enhance their learning. This community is characterized by opportunities to turn and talk, to share thinking and ideas between students and between student and teacher. The ratio of student voice to teacher voice is 80:20. In MPSC, 20% of the time consists of large group teacher talk and 80% of the time is student talk (whole group, small group, or independent self-talk). This expression of the Pareto Principle is evident in the workshop model which is composed of three parts: a short mini-lesson, student worktime, and a debrief (Bennett, 2007). Depending on the length of the lesson, approximately 10–15% of the time would be spent on the mini-lesson, whereby the teacher sets the purpose, provides concrete knowledge base(s), and may include modeling, think-aloud, or demonstration to communicate to students how to complete their task(s) during work time (consisting of 80% of the lesson). Finally, a debrief (5–10% of the lesson) provides opportunities for students to share their understanding, discoveries, or challenges.

Depending on how well students proceed during work time, the teacher may need to interject to clarify or provide further modeling. The workshop model provides "student choice, student voice and ownership, student

responsibility for learning, reading, writing, and thinking for big chunks of time, and building a community of learners" (Bennett, 2007, p. 4). The large chunk of student work time enables the teacher to confer with individual students and small groups to assess understanding and differentiate instruction. During the debrief, the teacher can begin to plan next steps for teaching and learning.

Flipping the classroom to one where students spend the majority of their time actively engaged with the learning outcomes shifts the responsibility and discovery onto the learner, providing multiple opportunities for students to increase their agency and perceptions of themselves as learners. "Where and I going? How am I going? And Where to next? and ideal learning environment or experience occurs when both teachers and students seek answers to each of these questions" (Hattie & Timperley, as cited in Andrade, 2010, p. 2). By focusing on feedback, we can increase student engagement, learning, and confidence. The self-efficacy and collective efficacy created by the 80/20 ratio engages students in a cooperative learning process. Bandura (1993) explained that students' beliefs in their efficacy help them to regulate their learning and to master academic processes, aiding them in determining their aspirations, motivation, and accomplishments. The collective efficacy created by the workshop model promotes collaborative inquiry, increases autonomy, and deeper mastery experiences (Donohoo, 2016). The combined increases of individual self-efficacy and beliefs by students and teachers contribute to an environment of trust, where risk-taking is encouraged, where everyone's voices are heard, where students are engaged in managing how to master course material require positive relationships.

Rigor and Relevancy

Positive relationships in the classroom enable students to feel safe tackling challenging learning opportunities. Inquiry-based, problem-based, and exploratory learning opportunities engage students with complex problems or situations. Teachers create opportunities for this type of learning by beginning with the end in mind (Covey, 1989). This type of backward design involves identifying the big ideas contained in curricula and clear communication with students about those essential concepts (Hattie, 2009). Once the learning targets (big ideas or key concepts) have been identified (this can be teacher driven or developed collaboratively with students), students can have choice on how to achieve those rigorous goals. This will often lead to have choice on how to achieve those rigorous goals. This will often lead to cross-curricular learning where a complex and relevant real-world problem transfers into multiple subject areas. By focusing on the essential questions (big ideas), students exhibit autonomy to apply a self-guided, strength-based approach to utilize their current skills and to improve areas of challenge.

Engaged deeply with their learning, students can exhibit flow (merging with the content). In order to engage in flow, learners must utilize their highest strengths and talents (Seligman, 2011). When in a flow state, time seems to stop, as you are completely immersed with the problem/topic at hand. Students may even choose to continue their learning beyond the classroom to continue their flow experiences (which further develops their self-efficacy). These flow experiences increase students' ability to wonder. People who wonder set their own goals and have their own purpose for how to achieve them (Tovani, 2015). In a workshop environment, students practice questioning that will extend beyond the classroom. As future citizens and leaders, we need to help students explore their "wonders" and apply their creativity to create innovative solutions to complex problems and contexts. MPSC will help students to learn and innovate inclusively, embracing diverse worldviews, cultures, languages, gender identities, and interests.

In conjunction with the rigor required to tackle rich and complex tasks, students have an expectation to share their work. This is done informally in side-by-side learning among students and between students and teachers, and more formally in the debrief at the end of the lesson. Students must be able to demonstrate their thinking and learning in a way that communicates the level of mastery of the learning target(s).

Quality Assessment

Flipping the classroom where students do the majority of the talking shifts away from the transition model where teachers were the owners of subject content (Hattie, 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). As a division, we believe that students may demonstrate their learning through triangulation of evidence, conversation, observation, or production (Herbst & Davies, 2015). Engaging in dialogue (rather than monologue) requires active listening, enabling the teacher to assess how students are learning. Students also have a responsibility to find, evaluate, and make decisions about how to tackle rigorous learning targets with appropriate learning resources and demonstrate their learning in ways that clearly communicate their successes and challenges. Because students have a clear understanding of the essential ideas (and may have even cocreated the success criteria) students are able to self-assess and develop their next steps (goal setting). The ability to self-assess will contribute to efficacious learners in and beyond the classroom, whereby students can ask for help when needed and push them to excel in ways that are individually appropriate. By placing the responsibility back on to the student (rather than the teacher), we develop learning communities that focus on the process of deep, engaged learning.

MPSC encourages ongoing reflection and self-assessment for both students and staff members. Not only do students discuss what they have learned, but they examine what they have been doing themselves, examining how they have learned, what worked for them, and what was not helpful. Ultimately, students develop metacognition understandings; in other words, students think about their own thinking and, therefore, are helped to develop higher-order thinking skills.

The workshop model of MPSC provides teachers with rich data demonstrating what students know and are able to do, resulting in effective planning of next steps (Bennett, 2007). Assessment drives instruction. While test scores can provide summative evaluation, teachers require frequent formative assessments in order to effectively lead students along their exploratory journeys. In an 80/20 classroom, teachers spend approximately 80% of their time gathering formative data that drives instruction, communication, and planning. Students receive regular feedback from their peers and teachers. Teachers can differentiate learning goals and assignments because they really know their students' individual learning strengths and needs and can make appropriate adjustments to maximize growth and success; teachers create a community of flourishing learners.

Adult Learning

It is challenging to separate the nature of the relationship between knowledge and practice in terms of teacher professional development (PD) and learning. While there are challenges attempting to offer large-scale divisional growth and development activities or speakers that target multiple grades and subject areas, we feel that expert knowledge and promising practices must guide our philosophy and pedagogy. Our division chose to address this in several ways. When we invited speakers to address our entire teaching staff, we sent out pre-reading and talking points for individuals to consider. Following the speaker, we provided graphic organizers to continue the conversation through links, articles, questions, and big ideas. The experts worked closely with some of our teachers over several years observing and then having opportunities to talk about their learning. The experts also worked with our administrators, senior administration teams, and parents to further build capacity. According to Hargreaves and Fink (2006), positive change results from self-motivated, current, flexibly created initiatives connected to teaching and learning.

Learning is a reciprocal process: adults and students learn from one another, adults learn with their peers, LFs/coaches, school administration, and division administration. Embedded across the division, the philosophy of MPSC was used to engage in professional conversations between and among staff and

administration to support, encourage, and increase learning. Fullan (2011) argued the need to de-privatize teaching with interactive professionalism; teachers learn best from other teachers. Rather than isolated opportunities for individual growth, teachers need personalized, precise, and continuous professional learning opportunities (Waring, 2014). Fahey and Ippolito (2014) corroborate the collective wisdom of a learning practice where adults work and learn together to build upon and improve their teaching practice by consistently targeting student learning. Shifting focus from an individual, instrumental practice toward a collective, socializing emphasis on teaching and learning provides rich opportunities for deep growth and improvement.

Because teachers are learners first, they require ongoing learning support. Rather than one-time PD workshops, the division chose to embed classroom PD to build upon existing instructional approaches of the classroom teachers. According to Cornett and Knight (2009), teachers only implement strategies learned at PD workshops 15% of the time; whereas if the PD results from coaching for a specific context, the implementation reaches 85%. Since many teachers learn best via modeling, the division has used John Hattie's research to design the role of LFs. LFs are teachers in each of our schools who have a portion of their time designated to support other teachers to try new initiatives in their classrooms, based on the learning philosophy of MPSC. While there are costs associated with this PD approach (release time and travel costs, as well as professional resources), the benefits are considered to be "priceless."

MPSC permeates all levels of learning and communication in our school division. Inquiry, engagement, and collective learning (tenets of MPSC) inform how we communicate to one another and run meetings, drive our human resource (HR) philosophy and practices, and guide all levels of our strategic planning framework. All members of the division are seen as learners: students, teachers, principals, and vice-principals, senior administration, and support staff. Learning is the work.

OUTCOMES AND FEEDBACK

The intentional bottom-up implementation approach allowed staff to personalize their adult learning, which provided useful role-modeling for fellow staff and students. MPSC has created multiple opportunities within the school division to continue to support lifelong learning. Recent questions have emerged as we continue this significant change initiative. What outcomes do we have and what feedback have we received? How do we know? What evidence is there? Outcomes, evidence, and feedback will be highlighted at schools, across the division, provincially and federally.

Schools

Many schools within PSSD could be described as flourishing as the uptake and results of the MPSC has been well received and, in ways, this uptake has been unique to each school's culture and readiness. The learning implementation, scaffolding on and with other flourishing practices, has been transformational for many. Three schools in our division have deeply embraced MPSC within their learning approach and have gone through a rigorous review process including opening their schools to researchers who interviewed and received feedback from students, teachers, in-school administrators, school community councils, and parents as well as publishing the results and findings (Roset, Walker & Cherkowski, 2016a,b,c). Additionally, each school has presented their learning journeys in a formal way referenced earlier as "Learning for Life" presentations that were accessible to other schools, superintendents, board members, and the director annually as per division practices. In these presentations, various aspects of MPSC where highlighted with the success and process areas for reconsideration were shared.

An exemplary school administrator creatively reversed the MPSC statements. Promoting the efficacy of MPSC, the principal modeled "making his thinking visible" with elegance and humor as follows:

- If there is any doubt in your mind about the WHY of MPSC, take a moment to consider the spirit of the opposite. I know that you will find it absurdly amusing.
- "NOT" MPSC—is a narrow worldview that sees all learners as the same, and that we learn best in isolation.
- In my classroom, the teacher does the majority of the talking. Students are meant to be seen and not heard. No value comes from having students talk about their learning.
- My instruction is a one-size-fits-all approach and I teach from the book. Students are empty vessels that need to be filled up with the facts.
- Learning opportunities focus on some of the students only. These opportunities are characterized by low expectations (fluff), lack of purpose or application (irrelevance), disconnected learning environments (isolated), playing it safe and maintaining the status quo (stagnation), and teacher-mandated environment (compliance).
- My teaching begins with planning activities, keeping my plans a secret from students so as to keep them guessing about is really important. Students generally cannot talk about or show evidence of their learning. (G. Tebay, personal communication, September 25, 2016)

Adding to the body of knowledge, WCMS' creation of "Not" MPSC demonstrates the support, implementation, and how to actualize, not only at their

school, but across the division and with any group of teachers implementing similar initiatives.

School Division

In addition to outcomes at the school level, there are quantitative and qualitative measures across the division. These include quantitative provincial comparisons and qualitative feedback from our administrators in the spring of 2017 and the following school year in the fall. HR practices have aligned around MPSC including the internship program, new teacher hires, administrator and superintendent interviews and hires, a quiet revolution # MPSCPSSD on twitter, a recent undertaking on YouTube, and our board working toward a My Prairie Spirit Board document.

The school division has collected quantitative data for the Ministry of Education to demonstrate alignment with the Education Sector Strategic Plan in the areas of Early Years—EYE Reading data grades 1–3, and Our School Data. After four years of organic implementation of MPSC, early data positions this work in a positive light when comparisons are drawn to the province. Grade three reading scores are close to the provincial average. Early years evaluation measures are above the provincial average and approaching the ministry goal. Three-year graduation rates are above the provincial average and above the provincial goal. The extended graduation rates are significantly above the provincial average.

Qualitative feedback from our administrators in the spring of 2017 demonstrated the learning journey and recent outcomes of implementing MPSC as follows:

> This past year, I have learned that we as leaders need to celebrate our failures as much as our successes. The process to make every classroom in our schools a MPSC is messy, and us sharing each of our journeys through the triumphs and chaos is the essence of MPSC.
>
> The significance of a positive culture built on trust and collaboration feels imperative to positive change. A major shift, like My Prairie Spirit Classroom, was a broad enough challenge to change that. Without a group of leaders who worked together to facilitate that change, it wouldn't be possible; or, if possible, then lasting. This group has the potential to create the "lasting" requirement for real change to take place.

Perhaps even more telling are instances when our administrators are asked what their vision of student learning is for PSSD—forecast seven years from present. The following quotations represent a few administrative reflections:

> MPSC will still be a major component in the school/school division. The document will evolve as new ideas and learning environments evolve.

All classrooms will be using MPSC as a way to educate. MPSC will not be a focused implementation as it will be part of education—just like taking attendance.

Another noteworthy outcome and significant shift is that division HR practices aligned with MPSC. The document is being used extensively in our internship program in PSSD. All new teachers are continually exposed to the approach and rationale behind MPSC and various ways in which teaching practice could be influenced. New teacher, administrator, and superintendent interviews are all being influenced by the work. PSSD is looking to hire teachers and administrators that live by the foundational beliefs in MPSC, capturing promising teacher practices. Given the volume of contract changes in PSSD (over 500 last year) this further insured a common understanding of efficacious teaching and learning practices. The feedback from principals and superintendents has been very positive. The caliber and alignment of teachers to promising teaching practices has been very strong with notable improvements quantified by supervising superintendents. Across the division a further change being called a quiet revolution was underway. Twitter was an additional way to further the understanding of effective teaching practices. # MPSCPSSD is an organic or grass roots way teachers can inform other teachers on what they found as useful proactively. This has expanded to teachers wearing # MPSC wristbands and T-shirts. Recently, a YouTube video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_uE58HYfGI&feature= youtu.be) was made to demonstrate the various ways teachers can accomplish some of the big ideas with MPSC. The PSSD Board of Education has created a first draft of a My Prairie Spirit Boardroom document to help guide their work. This year's advent of the # quiet revolution, the YouTube channel and potential board work is too early to quantify the perceived success of the initiatives, although the fact that there continues to be areas of accompanying growth are indications in of themselves.

So, how do we know that the work that we are doing in actualizing MPSC is positively impacting student and adult learning? Several points of data have been collected and the desire from both teachers and administrators in the division has grown to provide evidence of impact. Furthermore, experts in education, who have been working with PSSD and those who are hearing about the approach and results, are looking for additional evidence and sources to validate the correlation and positive outcomes from the MPSC at the school and division levels. When asked, "How do we know?" superintendents responded:

MPSC is the glue that sticks us together. PSSD staff see themselves as leaders in the province in pedagogy. This identity has lit a fire in them. Last summer we had over SIXTY teachers attend a summer literacy institute for three days (one was a Saturday!). They did this because the two facilitators were master teachers aligned with MPSC and they are committed to improvement. Since then about 1/3 of them continue to meet on their own time after school and in the evenings to help each other improve. This is evidence of how we know that MPSC is having an impact. (T. Young, personal communication, December 10, 2017)

Twitter forces its contributors to consider the essence of the messages they are sharing. Applying this reductionist thinking to MPSC has allowed us to see its (easily hashtagged) essential elements . . . [e]ncouraging the teachers, learning facilitators, and administrators to "see" or "recognize" classroom learning such as #sidebyside, #relevant, and #engaging has provided a new lens. When the adult learners take the time to capture MPSC learning in the form of a photo, video, observation, and / or summary of a conversation, they are actually gathering evidence and artifacts. When they consider sharing these artifacts around the corresponding #hashtags on Twitter, they are not only celebrating and connecting with their colleagues across the school division, they are also contributing to a rich body of evidence of the MPSC "movement." Recognizing, capturing, and sharing. It is really exciting." (B. Nichol, personal communication, December 10, 2017)

Perhaps most unexpectedly to the division, and certainly an indicator of broader acceptance, is the uptake and reception to MPSC throughout the province, interest from across Canada, and beyond. The division has been getting requests from teachers in other school divisions to come and observe exemplar MPSCs. The word is getting out about some of the incredible things happening and teachers in other divisions want to take part and adopt similar practices. The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education has made a significant connection to the title MPSC in their recent role out of My Student First Classroom that models similar beliefs. Over the last several years, presentations across Canada have received significant attendance and requests for further information. We have had national and international interest in the MPSC document, and we anticipate further discussions and sharing of resources and practices with those parties who have already expressed interest and desire to use MPSC as a model.

REFLECTING ON OUR JOURNEY

A lot might be learned from the bliss and blisters of any transformative change initiative. Fullan (2002) reminded us that change is "never a checklist, always complexity, there is no step by step short cut to transformation" (p. 17). Our goal has always been about a transformative change in how we learn and provide opportunities to learn, and so we knew that this would not be a

one- or two-year process. We recognize that we are in year four of a seven to ten year process. The blisters from our journey remind us that as we strive to be learners for life, we will make mistakes. We will get back up and keep trying and we will wrestle with practices that challenge our thinking and beliefs. We will do it together. Our MPSC document provides us with our foundational beliefs about learning, our "compelling why." Our message is that this is a lifetime of work. Our bliss in the journey is getting to recognize, capture, and share evidence of how MPSC is being actualized daily throughout our school division. The following quote captures the essence of our journey: "At first they said it couldn't be done, but some were doing it. Then they said it could only be done by a special few, but more were doing it. And then they said, why would you do it any other way?" (Anonymous).

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Chapter 22

Purposeful Hiring Practices and Leadership Development

The Prairie Spirit Way

Bob Bayles, Roberta Campbell-Chudoba, and Noel Roche

What makes my job so exciting are the opportunities I have to be innovative in my teaching, to grow as an educator, to collaborate and connect with other educational professionals . . . I work in an environment where I am professionally flourishing.

(T. Eaglesham, 2nd year teacher)

Prairie Spirit School Division (PSSD; Prairie Spirit) is a central Saskatchewan school division which covers 15,000 square kilometers, an area roughly half the size of Vancouver Island. Its substantial geographical spread is the result of a 2006 amalgamation of three school divisions and includes nine Hutterite colonies and three First Nations communities. Today the division serves almost 12,000 students in 47 schools across 28 communities, employs 650 teachers, and continues to see considerable enrolment growth each year. Prairie Spirit's vision of "learners for life" guides our mission "to learn without limits in a world of possibilities," supporting student learning and employee growth based on system-wide pedagogical learning beliefs and educational practices. Each school community, although distinctive, shares a common in-school administrator governance approach and each teacher is guided by the principles of the optimum learning environment of the My Prairie Spirit Classroom (MPSC) model. Rigor, relationship development, relevance, assessment for learning, and creativity undergird instructional design and influence teacher planning, instructional practices, student and adult learning opportunities in a MPSC. With the classroom as the heart of our organization,

we need to provide the most positive, capable, and passionate teachers as student enrolment grows and teachers retire.

About seven years ago, we realized a need to change the way we recruited, screened, hired, and inducted new teachers and administrators. Not only did we want to improve our HR practices, we also understood the link between targeted hiring, sustained professional development, and employee well-being. According to positive psychology theorist, Seligman (2011), well-being is a key construct of flourishing. To flourish, one must have positive emotions, engagement, interest, meaning, and purpose in life (Seligman, 2011). As Cherkowski and Walker (2014) have suggested, student learning is facilitated in positive learning communities where teachers feel they belong, they are working from their strengths, and are an important part of that community. Supporting new teachers and administrators is an investment in their well-being and a way to encourage flourishing of our students, classrooms, schools, and school division.

This chapter chronicles the transformation of Prairie Spirit's hiring and induction of new teachers, and senior leadership development in Prairie Spirit School Division. First, we look at our procedures for hiring teachers before 2009—what was working and what was not—followed by the story of how we built a new recruitment plan detailing the new practices undertaken, their theoretical underpinnings, and beginning teacher professional development. We include the voices of these teachers sharing their impressions of the induction methods. We describe the changes made to our approach to succession planning and training for school administrators that unfolded parallel to our new teacher hiring redesign. Along the way, we consider the association between our emphasis on continuous improvement, learning, and flourishing schools; these are connections that we continue to refine.

IMPETUS FOR CHANGE

What needed honing? Rewind to 2009. We did external advertising for every teacher and administrator position, primarily in the newspaper, transitioning to online applications in 2010, aiming to hire the best fit for each position. Job postings were also aggressively promoted internally. After the advertising stage, we reviewed applications, short-listed, reference checked, and interviewed. The person with the best interview performance was offered a specific position, with consideration given to information garnered from their paper application and references. On the surface, it seemed to be a strategic approach.

Although the hiring metrics were standard—application, interview, and reference checks—we had little or no experience with the candidates before

meeting them at the interview table. Recruiting for each posting was a one-off response to the need for filling a particular position; it was extremely labor intensive, with principals pulled from their schools regularly to sit in on lengthy interviews. The entire process took a great deal of time to coordinate, but still put too much stock into a 45-minute interview that potentially chose a 30-year employee, arguably what would become a two-to-three-million-dollar investment. This approach also put us in competition with other provincial school divisions. Despite the assumed strengths of extensive advertising and open competition to find the top person for the job, we needed a strategic focus that supported the division's learning goals. We decided to step back, reflect, do some research, reflect further, and design a new recruitment strategy.

RECRUITMENT REDESIGN

In rethinking recruitment, we considered how to recruit and staff positions differently to support student learning. We wanted to make the process more efficient while aligning HR practices with our division goals, specifically in the planning, recruitment, hiring, and retention staff cycle, rather than starting by hiring for individual positions. How would we ensure the very best teachers and administrators were in place to support the division and the school learning plan? We wanted to find teachers who were pedagogically aligned with current teaching practices as identified in the MPSC model. We knew we needed to look more closely at how many teachers we were hiring every year, as well as our attrition rate. How could we hire and retain the finest teachers who fit well with division philosophy from the start? Should the new hires be balanced between experienced and new-to-the-profession teachers?

In retrospect, our answer to these queries seems to be quite obvious—interview and hire people with whom we were already familiar and who had thrived in our division's classrooms and schools, those teachers who had, in many ways, proven themselves to be exceptional beginning teachers—our top interns! We came to this conclusion through careful examination of our practices and approaches to hiring. We wanted to align our practice with the philosophy and goals of MPSC, and so further explored how to best recruit, engage, and keep people most aligned with our organization's vision and goals. We decided to focus on hiring new-to-the profession teachers as one strategy to improve student learning and well-being. The change required a number of new arrangements, the first of which was strengthening our relationship with the College of Education at the closest university to ensure they understood our needs, and that we understood their needs. We now take double the number of fourth-year education degree interns compared to other

school divisions in the province for their four-month practicum experiences. Of course, this decision impacts budget, planning, and management, at a minimum, not to mention the challenges associated with finding placements with cooperating teachers for a large number of interns. The College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan began seconding a Prairie Spirit teacher each year, who teaches and does research at the university, supervises second and third-year program teacher candidates and interns, and promotes the MPSC approach with the university students and in the college. Each intern has an opportunity to go through a practice interview with a superintendent and do a debriefing to help prepare for future interviews, a process described by teachers as "pivotal" and "so beneficial" and "great preparation" for the real thing. Additionally, workshops for current teaching staff to explore and emphasize concepts of MPSC are ongoing. Based on this research and practice, Prairie Spirit has formulated a new approach to teacher hiring.

THE NEW PRACTICE

The strategic approach of considering new-to-the-profession teachers is based on the Timms' (2016) work on succession planning and leadership development. We had reviewed what we believed to be best practice based on our decades of experience in education and deliberated on what was working in our division, in our province, and beyond. We then reviewed the literature and considered what closely aligned with evidence of flourishing outcomes. After studying several models, we choose Timm's work for its connections to what we believe in and its structured methods for leadership development that also provided evidence of improved outcomes. Timms (2016) advised establishing criteria for performance and then accessing individual performance information through firsthand accounts. Using Timms' guidelines, we use performance data gathered during a four-month in-school internship of prospective teachers, and additional information from internship facilitators, superintendents, and principals. The nitty-gritty of data gathering is headed up by a superintendent who meets with college internship facilitators to get input on the interns' employability. The superintendent speaks with in-school administrators to gain further understanding of the candidates, then completes confidential reference-checking with the three provided referees, which are commonly the College of Education internship facilitator, cooperating teacher, in-school administrators, and other teachers. Based on this data, we determine who we will interview, we hold 20-minute interviews, and we follow up with a job offer, where appropriate. We have found the evidence gathered from interns' teaching in the MPSC philosophy during

their four-month placement is more reliable than information garnered in an interview to predict their fit with Prairie Spirit.

In the 2016–2017 school year, we hosted over 75 interns and interviewed approximately 40 excellent prospects, with the intention to retain the top candidates as soon as possible after that. Our new teacher orientation the following September saw 48 teachers attend with 48%, or 23, of the new teachers, having been part of the intern interview process. More interns were interviewed as time permitted. A significant percentage—over 60% of beginning teachers who interned with Prairie Spirit have been hired over a four-year period. As we are not able to hire all the interns, we put them on our substitute teacher list which accomplishes two things: the beginning teacher has additional opportunity to practice the art of teaching while substituting and, the division is given additional time to see the teacher in the classroom. Often this arrangement will lead to a contract in the future. Our approach to hiring internally as opposed to externally when we can is assisted by the identification of excellent prospects in both the intern and substitute teacher pools.

NEW TEACHER INDUCTION

New teacher induction is important to us in Prairie Spirit, as is adult learning across the division. One of our core beliefs is that adult learning embedded in the classroom with teachers and their students provides the greatest support for strengthening classroom practices which in turn, should lead to improved student learning and well-being. Employment engagement experience tells us that new employees are flexible and most open to change at this stage in their career, as well as more engaged in their first three years of employment. Well-being research names genuine engagement as one of the five contributing elements to personal well-being (Seligman, 2011). Our *New Teacher Program* provides a layered system for enhanced engagement, learning, and guidance of beginning career teachers. Superintendents work with new teachers during the first two years. Learning facilitators, who are teachers appointed in each school to improve adult learning for the classroom, work alongside the beginning teacher. Principals make themselves available to consult with new teachers and are committed to fostering effective working relationships, modeling a positive strength-based approach, and facilitating growth and capacity building for the new professionals in the school community. The professional development program offered by the division, *Inspired Learning Opportunities* (ILO), is taken by the new teachers. The ILO program is district developed and includes many different categories of workshops, from innovative math teaching strategies to outcome-based assessment to inquiry learning. In the workshops, new teachers learn from Prairie Spirit's exemplary teachers

who lead sessions or, are the primary content developers. The division aims for a tight connection between theory and practice with tested, successful strategies presented to new staff in a timely manner. A formal career development conversation which happens in the new teacher's first year explains the induction supports that can be anticipated during a time when most teachers need help the most, a time of heavy workload, high stress, and pressure to establish themselves professionally. Two beginning teachers shared these thoughts about their Prairie Spirit induction:

> As a new teacher, I have been supported since the beginning. The New Teacher Program helps us with information about supports, resources, and opportunities to be acquainted with other new teachers and superintendents. . . . In-school administration, professional development and learning facilitators in our school support us. Fellow teachers are open and willing to have us observe their classrooms, share ideas and provide us feedback. (Krauss, 2nd year teacher)
>
>   Our leaders show us they are learners too. They build relationships with us and make us feel like valued members of the school division. (Bergen, 2nd year teacher)

The offerings of the *New Teacher Program* assist beginning Prairie Spirit teachers to connect to their new communities, feel a sense of belonging, feel valued, and build relationships with colleagues and students. Dollansky (2014) pointed to the criticality of supporting the success and flourishing of beginning rural teachers, to encourage their lifelong development as human beings. In turn, healthy, confident, and optimistic beginning teachers have the capacity to create positive classrooms that give students the best opportunities for learning.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

Prairie Spirit School Division leaders believe that teachers have the biggest impact on student learning; and, therefore, hiring thriving new teachers and facilitating their growth is a significant organizational objective. We search out teacher candidates who have demonstrated strength and positivity; they are people who show potential to provide the best learning opportunities and create the most positive environments for students in our classrooms. Building on a strong relationship with the university and being strategic in the recruitment process allows our division to build its capacity and thrive as an organization. We are meeting our goals to recruit, hire, and retain engaged, committed employees and this has resulted in our ability to offer excellent learning opportunities to our students.

SUCCESSION PLANNING FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Prairie Spirit School Division leadership believes that in-school administration has a significant impact on what is happening in their home schools, including teacher practice and teacher learning. After teacher practice in the classroom, these two factors have the most significant impact on student learning (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1994; Hattie, 2012). Administrators manage people, money, and resources at the school to work toward school and division goals (Rebore, 2001). Having the right, and the very best, in-school administration must be a significant organizational focus to improve student learning. We wanted to craft an administrative succession strategy that supports our mission, vision, and strategic plan for staffing the principalship. This strategy creation was part of an overarching goal to align all our Human Resource (HR) practices of recruitment, hiring, and retention of staff, and supporting long-term division objectives. The maturation of an integrated strategic recruitment approach was forged over time and continues to evolve. This section highlights the perceived need for change, explains the alignment of contemporary HR practices with division goals, and illustrates the efficacy of those changes leading toward flourishing schools in a flourishing division.

Perceived Need for Change

In 2010 our demographic data indicated that in five years, half of our leadership positions would be filled by people new to those administrative roles. We realized that if we believed, as Rebore (2001) does, that in-school administrators actualize division targets and outcomes, a strategic opportunity was present. Research from the Corporate Executive Board (CEB) stated that 66% of organizations have programs which look for and assist high-potential employees, but only 24% of senior leaders consider those programs to be successful (Fernandez-Araoz, Roscoe, & Aramaki, 2017). If division targets and student outcomes are essential, then administrators play a critical role in reaching those goals. A well-thought-out approach was needed to take this strategic opportunity and align our leadership hiring more closely with division objectives. It became clear, a significant focus was needed for a successful outcome. In 2010 and previously we had advertised every in-school administrator position in the newspaper, as they became available and later transitioned to an online application procedure. We used a position-specific hiring approach and followed standard recruitment stages of reviewing applications, short-listing, reference-checking, and interviewing; but we often had limited to no firsthand experience with the candidates as it pertained to taking on a leadership role. The interview panels were composed of a school's superintendent, their trustee, the HR superintendent, and the

division's director. For vice-principal (VP) interviews, the principal was also included on the panel. The hiring decision was based primarily on a particular school's needs. Often, we had principals and VPs interviewing multiple times for different administrative positions. The entire process responded to each situation in isolation. If there was a change needed, we advertised for the single position and teachers were regularly inundated with emails about job postings. No overarching strategic HR focus supported the learning goals of the division.

The drawbacks of a site-based approach for our division were a lack of long-term strategic focus, no gathering of recruitment metrics, and sometimes limited firsthand experience with the candidate, with less of a learning-focus. Interviewing the same people three or four times for the same role in a different location was overly labor intensive and inefficient; not to mention it was perceived at times as disrespectful and discouraging for the unsuccessful applicant. It also took time to bring the entire process together, relying primarily on a 60-minute interview to make a strategic leadership decision.

We have transitioned to a division-based perspective. The division initiates an annual conversation with in-school administrators and provides opportunities for change through a lateral process based on evidence of the current work. There is an interview process for teachers to move into an approved VP pool as well as interviews with external candidates. The new in-school administration panel consists of two superintendents and up to three board members who represent the board, and they approve candidates for a VP pool and a principal pool. Annually, or as needs arise, preapproved candidates are in the queue, waiting for the most appropriate placements. With any method, there are pros and cons. We assert that taking a multiyear planning perspective has allowed for the greater good of all Prairie Spirit students. The site-based approach is transparent; everyone knows about all available positions. Open competitions created an assumption that the best person for the role would obtain the job. Not everyone in our approved hiring pool would have applied for each separate position in the past.

During our transition, we began to see the necessity of aligning our hiring practices more directly with division goals. We modeled our new approach on Rothwell's (2005) *Seven-Pointed Star Model for Systematic Succession Planning and Management*, consisting of the following stages which can be somewhat fluid in practice:

- Step 1 Make a Commitment
- Step 2 Assess Present Work/People Requirements
- Step 3 Assess individual Performance
- Step 4 Assess Future Work/People requirements
- Step 5 Assess Future Individual Potential

- Step 6 Close the Developmental Gap
- Step 7 Evaluate the Succession Planning Program

A commitment made in our annual report to the board of education via our Strategic Human Resource Multi-Year Plan launched Step 1 of the seven-pointed star model. We focused on the strategic imperative of supporting the recruitment and preparation of aspiring leaders, then placing them in the best possible locations for them, teachers, and students to flourish. After further mining demographic data, searching for evidence and reviewing the literature to explore Step 2, assessing present requirements, a direction began to emerge. Finding, encouraging, and developing leaders is a practice many organizations have not developed (Fernandez-Araoz et al., 2017) and we knew this would be a growth area for us. Thinking and competency domains of engagement, curiosity, determination, and insight as identified by Fernandez-Araoz, Roscoe, and Aramaki, (2017) are aligned with our hiring philosophy. In considering staffing of leadership positions—superintendents, coordinators, principals, and VPs (Step 4), we predicted a 50% change in the following five-year period. Learning superintendents were engaged to work with administrators to identify and encourage those with a high level of leadership potential, to support information gathering for assessing individual leadership potential. Assessing performance, Step 3, required a revisitation of our division's Leadership Framework and Competencies.

Aligning HR Practices with Division Goals

Leadership Competencies identified in our Leadership Framework document (See Figure 22.1) include: Facilitating vision, building relationships and capacity, developing the education community, leading the instructional program, and commitment to continuous improvement. Each competency is well defined with short descriptors and 8–12 examples of practices and required skills, knowledge, and attitudes. This framework and the MPSC philosophy became the main attributes to align, support, and encourage efforts in meeting division goals. Our hiring focus for leaders transitioned to finding in-school administrators who were exemplary learning leaders, lifelong learners who obtained master of education degrees, were pedagogically aligned with MPSC, and supported teachers toward this end. The new hiring process for leaders included diminishing the importance put on the interview and transferring it to activities and leadership in schools. MPSC has also become a major organic change initiative, nudging teachers toward contemporary teaching practices. We more clearly defined what was needed by leaders and so our division goal of improving student learning could be realized, feeding
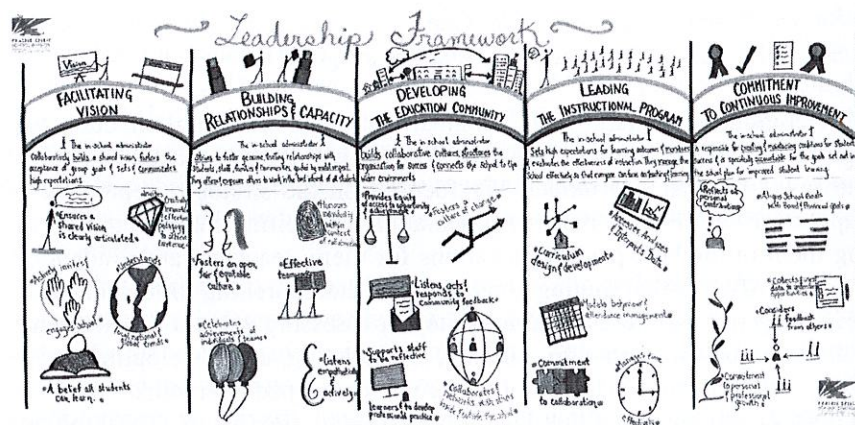
Figure 22.1 The Leadership Framework, Graphic Credit: Tara Shanks of Pondering Turtles.

back into Steps 4, 5, and 6 of the Rothwell (2005) model for succession planning.

Aspiring Leadership Program

At about the same time, we were creating an in-house *Aspiring Leadership Program* for those identified as potential administrators, which was also part of Step 6, closing the developmental gap. We stressed that administrators be learning leaders first, pedagogically tied to MPSC with stable school management attributes. We designed the program using content from the Leadership Framework and used the MPSC philosophy for grounding. A current administrator had this feedback:

> This program connected graduate level studies to the work we are doing in our school division, creating a natural transition for new administrators to move theory into practice, supported by research and division partners. It is my belief that this program connects what Fullan describes as "peers with purpose." It provided a platform to highlight leadership that is modeled after our division mission and vision and the principles found within My Prairie Spirit Classroom. (D. Olson, Vice-Principal)

Key topics included leadership competencies and commitment to student success. Rich, deep conversations happened around three key texts: Fullan's (2014) *The Principal – Three Keys to Maximizing Impact,* Fullan's (2010) *Motion Leadership: The Skinny on Becoming a Change Agent,* and Whitaker's (2012) *What Great Principals Do Differently.* Casual and formal

feedback included the importance of strong relationships forged with colleagues and superintendents. While this program was under development and piloting, conversations occurred between two other school divisions and the University of Saskatchewan. We then developed our internal program into a robust graduate course which was provided through the Department of Education Administration, College of Education, the following year. Early feedback on the internal program and the graduate course was very encouraging:

> The main thrust impressed on me was . . . how can I influence the learning of those around me, now and in the future to improve the learning context . . . [also] several opportunities existed to explore the managerial side of the profession. (D Cameron, Vice-Principal)
>
> I was learning with colleagues who were at a similar stage in their career. The intimate setting, which included smaller numbers, and conversations based on our learning lent to this safe environment.(B. Mellesmoen, Principal)
>
> I feel strongly that this program has provided me with philosophical and practical lens that has been invaluable in my work thus far. . . the program is centered on the values and beliefs of our school division which made my learning thoroughly applicable . . . as I can see the concepts embedded in what is expected of me as a PSSD administrator. (B. Kirk, Vice-Principal)

The Leadership Framework was used in two ways during the *Aspiring Leadership Program,* to frame the program and as main session topics. Additionally, the framework was reviewed in more detail as participants reflected on their exemplary learning experiences, information useful for behavioral competency-based questions during an interview. Participants' thinking was expanded using the framework, and consistently, participants have found connections to their current work and in future experiences appreciated the relevance and consistency. What PSSD is looking for in administrators is made clear:

> When I was first introduced to the Leadership Framework document created by PSSD I was overwhelmed, to say the least; however, participating in the Aspiring Leadership Program helped to give me more confidence as I started my journey into administration . . . Going through the program gave me a clearer direction in what PSSD is looking for in leaders for their schools. (J. Reis, Vice-Principal)

Our Interview Process

The interview process also changed in approach and the questions asked. Interviews are conducted as a gateway to approved pools of candidates, for VP and principal roles, in contrast to the previous practice of interviewing for a specific position. Interview questions center on learning leadership, as

we ask administrators to be learning leaders first. Interviews have become part of the way that we assess future leaders' potential (Step 5). Additionally, changes were made to increase the value of the reference checks by adding direct observation of candidate activities in schools. A written component to mirror actual administrator duties was also added:

> My interview was a time where I was encouraged to show my own adult learning and the growth I have experienced . . . . I appreciate our division uses a variety of evidence to make their decisions during administrative interviews such as the presentation, question and answer time as well as a written portion. (A. Foster, Vice-Principal)
>
>   At the time of my interview I was employed as an interim principal in another province of Canada . . . The interview process caught me somewhat off guard. In Prairie Spirit many of the questions in the interview process centered around learning, in stark contrast to my interview in a different province which focused largely on managerial elements and facilitating vision for the school. While questions arose about vision and managerial qualities in PSSD, they were clearly not the primary mandate of Prairie Spirit . . . the process left me with a desire to belong to the learning community that is Prairie Spirit. (D. Cameron, Vice-Principal)

An increased level of feedback is now provided to candidates. We believe all adults are learners who want feedback, so they can reflect on the interview process and apply the learning in other professional areas:

> I took advantage . . . of feedback, and the constructive criticism I received during the session was both productive and motivating for me in the years ahead. The interview process has improved presentations . . . to staff members and community members, and has [benefited me in working] with colleagues, teacher candidates, and students. (B. Guenther, Vice-Principal)

Beyond the interview process, we increased focus on placing administrators in schools that were the best fit for them and for the students, prioritizing the long-term success of all administrators from a divisional perspective. Once approved, the candidate waits in the pool until an appropriate placement becomes available. The overarching concept of best scenario placement is still being used, however, it has various levels of uptake among administration.

FLOURISHING SCHOOLS AND A FLOURISHING DIVISION

Underpinning all we do in Prairie Spirit is student learning, so all children can learn to their highest levels and leave our divisions with the desire for

lifelong learning. The effectiveness of our approach in succession planning for administrators is, therefore, something we consider critically and reflect upon for continuous improvement. We seek feedback and constructive criticism from participants in training programs and professional development activities. Additionally, qualitative feedback from board members, superintendents on the interview committees, and applicants continue to highlight the efficacy of the changes and helps us to fine-tune the process. We compile and use the data to evaluate the succession planning program, Step 7 in the Rothwell (2005) model.

Over the last four years of running the *Aspiring Leadership Program*, the following participant comments and feedback from surveys have also reassured us we are heading in the right direction and encourage us to make regular improvements:

> I believe it is the consistency in expectations created by the Leadership Framework and the guidance provided by the Aspiring Leadership program that have prepared me for these first couple months as an administrator. (J. Reis, Vice-Principal)
>
> I find as a new administrator, I am often conversing with the same people who were in this group and who are administrators now. I value those relationships. (Foster, Vice-Principal)
>
> I feel even if I had chosen to not pursue an administrative leadership position, the program allowed me to constantly make connections to my previous role as a teacher. It provided me with great insight about building relationships with students and parents, affecting positive change in a school and educational system, and developing my teaching practice and philosophy. Not only has this experience made me a stronger leader, it has also made me a better teacher. (B. Kirk, Vice-Principal)

CONCLUSION

The meta-objective to align all of our HR practices with division goals was the impetus to begin investigating where the most significant impacts could occur, which led to a focus on purposeful hiring practices and leadership development. The growth of an integrated strategic recruitment practice evolved and continues to grow. In this chapter we highlighted the perceived and actual need for change, uncovered where alignment of contemporary HR practices to division goals was attempted, and examined the efficacy of those changes leading toward flourishing schools and a flourishing division. Upon reflection through writing and discussing the chapter, we have considered where additional data collection may be helpful in improving the program as well as further identifying what exemplary practices may look like

depending on the environments in other divisions. Evaluation of our succession planning program is ongoing. Customer satisfaction, program progress, effective placements, and organizational results need to be further analyzed to identify strengths and weaknesses (Rothwell, 2005). We hope that with ongoing research, data collection, analysis, conversations, and sharing of information, the HR practices that support, enable, and have transformed our division will continue to support flourishing in our schools, and ultimately, create learners for life.

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