Teachers' Experiences and Perceptions of Voluntary Committee Work as a Vehicle for Leadership Development

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Abstract

In response to a looming leadership shortage, leadership development for teachers has become an increasingly important area of interest around the world. A review of the literature identified the key components of educational leadership development programs as effective curriculum, leadership practice, relationship building, and reflection. A gap in the research was found regarding the use of voluntary committee work as a vehicle for leadership practice. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers’ perceptions of their experiences within board-level committees to determine the key factors that contributed, positively or negatively, to their leadership development. A qualitative research design was employed using semistructured interviews with 8 participants. The key findings included a list of factors perceived by teachers as either supporting or hindering their leadership development. The supporting factors were: (a) leadership practice, (b) mentors and role models, (c) relationships and networks, and (d) positive outcomes for students. The hindering factors were: (a) lack of follow through and support, (b) committee members with a careerist approach to the experience, (c) personal and political agendas, and (d) overcommitment leading to burnout. Recommendations for practice focused on strategies to enhance the committee experience as a tool for leadership development. Recommendations for theory and research suggested more research be done on each of the 8 key factors, perceptions associated with teachers choosing to follow a leadership path, and how school boards can structure the committee process as an effective leadership development tool. This study provides a starting point for educators to begin to intentionally design, develop, and deliver voluntary committee experiences as a tool for leadership development.
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Finally, I would like to thank each of the participants for taking the time to be a part of this study. Thank you for sharing your stories and experiences so openly and, most of all, for trusting me enough to be a small part of your leadership journey.
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my loving wife, Kathryn, who took away all of my toys, comic books, and the television remote control until it was finished.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As teachers gain experience and move through their careers, the idea of educational leadership, either in the classroom as a teacher leader or outside the classroom as an educational consultant or administrator, begins to shift into the foreground and gain significance. Most school boards have an established process to assist teachers who wish to embark on their leadership journey that are a mixture of formal and informal professional and leadership development opportunities. These opportunities can include professional qualifications courses such as Additional Qualifications or Masters programs, board-based learning and experience programs, and voluntary committee work at the school or board level. Whatever the process being followed, the question of the efficacy of the opportunities being offered to teachers also has to be considered. Are these programs as effective at developing leadership skills as they can be? Are they perceived as effective by the teachers involved in the process? Should education look to business for ideas and concepts to increase the effectiveness of leadership development? This study explored teachers’ experiences and perceptions of voluntary committee work as a vehicle for leadership development and determined what they identified as the key factors that contributed, positively or negatively, to their leadership development.

The debate continues between educators looking to business to provide ideas and solutions for addressing issues in educational leadership and those who see no value, but rather danger, in adapting business strategies to education. Many experts have used business structures and concepts to inform educational issues. Bush (2008a) considered the shift from management to leadership and provided discussion from both sides of this
complicated issue. Hallinger and Snidvongs (2008) brought both educational and business management experience to their discussion of leadership development, providing a well written summary of business management concepts with suggestions on how they can be adapted to an educational context.

Whether for or against the use of business concepts in developing educational leaders, many authors seemed to agree that the demands on leaders, both in business and education, are changing to match the changing environment, becoming more complex with new challenges and the need for a shifting skills set (Bush & Jackson, 2002; Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008; Klie, 2007; Normore, 2006; Slater, 2008; Young, 2008). Young focused on business-based leaders and the emerging requirements of conceptual/systemic thinking and becoming trust influencers, while developing resilience and emotional intelligence. Goleman (1998, 2000) described emotional intelligence in great detail within the context of leadership development in a business environment. Slater described successful future educational leaders as needing to become facilitators of decision making, network builders, and sharers of both information and authority. Both Gandz (2006), from a business background, and Normore, from an educational background, agreed that existing leaders need to shift their primary focus to include the development of future leaders from within their organizations by providing professional development, mentorship, and opportunities for both leadership practice and reflection.

Considering the increased complexity and demands on leaders within education, the aim of this qualitative study was to explore teachers’ experiences within voluntary board level committees and to address the question of how these committees can be made into vehicles for leadership development and to consider what factors either help or
hinder the process. Over the past 10 years, I have been involved with a number of board
level committees with a variety of foci including character development, student
leadership, social justice, continuing education, and community partnership development.
The reasons for getting involved with these activities included a desire to increase my
leadership experience, a dedication or passion for the purpose of each committee, an
experience to enhance my resume, and a desire to network with other educational leaders.
Many school boards, including my employer, encourage the use of voluntary committees
as a tool to identify future leaders and provide practical leadership experience in a variety
of different settings. Each committee had a different structure, a mixture of common and
unique outcomes/deliverables or goals, a wide variety of personalities, and varying levels
of commitment among members. One thing that all of the committees had in common,
however, was the opportunity for me to learn about and often practice being a leader.
Whether intentional or incidental, being part of a committee provided opportunities for
me to develop as a leader, although some committee experiences were more impactful
than others, in both positive and negative ways. In the past few years, I have held the
position of chair for several committees and have influenced the structure and policies of
each in a way to provide greater leadership development opportunities for the members.

A common theme within business and education is the importance of developing
leaders using a variety of tools. Gandz (2006) referred to the process as leader-breeding,
Slater (2008) described it as building leadership capacity through hero-making, and
Phelps (2008) presented a model for shaping teachers into leaders. Each of these authors
highlighted a range of key elements necessary for facilitating effective leadership
development and common to all is the concept of experiential learning. Experiential
Learning, as described by Kolb (1984), is the process of creating knowledge through the transformation of experience. The process involves deriving knowledge, forming thoughts, and testing ideas through our own subjective experience in a continuous cycle of forming, modification, and re-forming (Kolb). Structured applications of experiential learning can be seen in education and development programs around the world and include internships, field placements, work/study assignments, structured exercises, role plays, and gaming simulations (Kolb).

In our increasingly complex world, there is an even greater need for strong linkages between educational programs, at all levels, and the "real world." Experiential learning theory can provide that link and is a key element for success in education and development programs (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2000). Specifically, providing teachers with a chance to practice their leadership skills and explore the application of theoretical models in a meaningful educational context has been recognized as a key component of many international educational leadership development programs (Bush & Jackson, 2002; Normore, 2006; Walker & Dimmock, 2006). Internship, service-learning, mentor-supported working relationships, and what Gandz called stretch assignments, are all examples of how experiential learning can be operationalized within the context of leadership development. Working within a voluntary committee can incorporate all of these concepts while providing a wide range of opportunities for educators to practice being leaders. Phelps also recognized committee work as a vehicle for leadership development, encouraging teachers to focus on their knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Depending on the structure and mandate, voluntary committees can provide practical experience in communication, collaborative planning and problem solving, decision
making, organization, time-management, and the ability to work within the power structure of the educational system at the school and board level (Chin, 2006; Eadie, 2008; Selinger, 2006).

**Background**

The significance of leadership and the important role it plays in education related to school effectiveness and student success has been noted by many authors, including Barth (2001), Bush and Jackson (2002), Hallinger and Snidvongs (2008), Muijs and Harris (2007), Normore (2006), and Slater (2008). These authors have tracked the progress of the field of educational leadership as it has grown from a subset of leadership dependent on business concepts to a recognized field with its own concepts, research, and theories (Bush, 2008a; Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008; Muijs & Harris, 2007). It is, therefore, significant and potentially alarming that researchers have discovered a growing leadership shortage (Klie, 2007; Normore, 2006; Young, 2008).

There are three main factors that contribute to the shrinking talent pool of potential administrative leaders: (a) the increasing complexity and workload of leadership roles (Normore, 2006; Slater, 2008; Young, 2008); (b) the lack of or need for increased incentives for potential leaders to take on leadership roles (Muijs & Harris, 2007; Normore, 2006; Phelps, 2008; Slater, 2008); and (c) fewer qualified candidates due to retirement, career-switching, or burnout (Klie, 2007; Normore, 2006; Patterson & Patterson, 2004). While this list is far from exhaustive, it provides a basis for discussion of potential responses to the growing leadership shortage including: (a) changes in the recruitment and selection process (Gandz, 2006; Normore, 2006), (b) shifting or sharing the practice of leadership within education (Barth, 2001; Bush, 2008a; Muijs & Harris,
2007; Pounder, 2006; Slater, 2008; Patterson & Patterson, 2004; Martin, 2007; Phelps, 2008), and (c) the need for an increased focus on innovative leadership development strategies to address the changing leadership environment in education (Australian Leadership Development Centre, 2007; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Slater, 2008; Walker & Dimmock, 2006; Young, 2008).

A key question facing school boards is how to strike a balance between external recruitment of qualified candidates and the internal development of teacher leaders (Normore, 2006). Whether grown internally or recruited externally, the educational leaders will either have gone or will be going through some form of process to develop their leadership potential. Many leadership development programs exist both within education and business and researchers agree that there is a combination of factors needed for leadership development to take place (Bush & Jackson, 2002; Walker & Dimmock, 2006). These factors can be combined into four main components; knowledge/curriculum (Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008; Normore, 2006; Walker & Dimmock, 2006), relationships/mentoring (Normore, 2006; Turk, Wolff, Waterbury, & Zumalt, 2002), practice/experiential learning (Barth, 2001; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Couse & Russo, 2006; Muijs & Harris, 2007), and reflection (Barth, 2001; Hemmingsen, Crisp, & Barnes, 2008; Kamler, 2006). All four components are essential for effective leadership development to take place and the second chapter in this thesis will provide a description of the literature as it relates to these four categories.

There is a strong and well documented connection between high quality school leadership, including both administrators and teacher leaders, and educational outcomes (Bush & Jackson, 2002; Martin, 2007; Patterson & Patterson, 2004; Phelps, 2008). As a
result, leadership development for teachers has become an increasingly important area of interest around the world with authors studying leadership development programs and providing analysis and discussion of key structures and components necessary for success (Bush & Jackson, 2002; Walker & Dimmock, 2006). With leadership practice and experiential learning being identified as one of the key components of effective leadership development (Barth, 2001; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Couse & Russo, 2006; Muijs & Harris, 2007), the use of voluntary committees as a tool to provide practical and realistic experiences for developing educational leaders becomes much more significant and worthy of study.

Even with the substantial emphasis on effective leadership development, many new administrators are arriving unprepared to their new positions (Fink & Brayman, 2006). According to Fink and Brayman, this situation is the result of accelerated recruitment programs pushing inexperienced individuals into leadership roles. The authors argued that policymakers within education are simply responding to the serious shortage of educational leaders caused by a lack of interest on the part of teachers to become administrators due to increased accountability and standardization within education, and the aging baby boomer teacher population. Normore (2006) supported this claim when describing the impact of inadequate training, preparation, and incentives for educational leaders and stressed the need to link recruitment and succession with training, practical experience, mentoring, and continued professional development to address the increasingly complex environment.
Statement of the Problem Situation

The focus of this thesis was the area of leadership practice as part of the process of experiential learning within the educational context. There are many ways for teachers to gain experience as leaders and to practice their leadership styles, decision making, and implementation skills. Examples include active classroom management, fulfilling in-school teacher leader roles, organizing school or community events, leading professional development sessions, acting as a mentor teacher, and chairing a committee (Phelps, 2008). The Australian Leadership Development Centre (2007) emphasized the importance of providing developing leaders with a mix of practical experiential learning opportunities in simulated situations and goal specific projects within the workplace.

There is one source of experience in particular that was considered in this thesis: the use of board level voluntary committees as a vehicle for providing opportunities for teachers to practice leadership. While committee work takes place on many levels within education, including classrooms or departments, school, community, and board level, this thesis focused only on the board level committee.

The concept of voluntary committee work as a vehicle for leadership development is an area that has been neglected in the research. Voluntary committee work has been mentioned in several articles as one of a list of possible opportunities to increase networking or leadership practice (Chin, 2006; Phelps, 2008; Selinger, 2006), but it has not been explored in a more detailed or focused study of how it can impact overall leadership development. Selinger noted the positive impact of properly run committees on the development of management and networking skills and described the valuable practical leadership experiences that can be a part of the process for committee leaders.
Some of the practical experiences gained through committee work described by Chin include problem solving and decision making, time management, delegation and organization of tasks, and the continuity of vision and implementation through succession planning.

**Purpose of the Study**

In this thesis, I examined teachers’ perceptions of their experiences within board-level committees. It used a lens of leadership development and experiential learning in order to understand the key factors and processes involved in the voluntary committee work. This study explored teachers’ experiences of committee work and determined what teachers involved in voluntary board-level committee work identified as the key factors that contributed, positively or negatively, to their leadership development. This study also gathered information on the reasons why teachers join voluntary committees, the organizational functions of these committees, and the benefits of this form of experiential learning in relation to teachers’ leadership development. Teachers who have been members of voluntary board-level committees were invited to participate in a semistructured interview process designed to explore their perceptions of leadership development.

This study has potential benefits for both research and practice in the field of education. In terms of educational theory, the findings of this study begin to fill a gap in the literature on educational leadership development in terms of providing information on using voluntary committee work as an authentic and context-based experiential learning opportunity. Most school boards have many voluntary committees covering a large variety of foci that are mainly outcome-based. This study provides information that
could assist school boards in using voluntary committees more intentionally for leadership development and lays the ground work for future research into voluntary committee design and integration into more formal leadership development programs. For the practitioner, this study potentially adds value to the voluntary committee work experience, transforming it from an outcome-based, networking group to an effective leadership and career development tool. The findings of the study may be used by committee chairs and planning teams to modify existing committees and integrate them into board leadership recruitment and development programs.

**Research Questions**

This study explored the following research question: How does being involved in a voluntary board-level committee contribute to the development of teachers' leadership skills? There are two sub questions that support and expand on the main question:

1. What do teachers identify as the key factors and processes that facilitate the development of their leadership skills?
2. What do teachers identify as the key factors and processes that hinder the development of their leadership skills?

**Importance, Scope, and Limitations of the Study**

Committee membership is widely recommended and encouraged by school board administrators as an avenue to career development and skills building for potential future educational leaders. There is a lack of research regarding teachers' perceptions of this experience and how their involvement contributes to the development of their leadership skills. It is possible that board level committees can play a major role in developing educational leaders. In a climate of leadership shortages, the findings of this study could
have an impact on how school boards provide future leaders with practical experiences. The study took place within a single school board with 8 participants from different board level committees with different mandates and goals. Although the sample is small, the data have illuminated trends that inform both theory and practice in the area of educational leadership development. It was not within the scope of this study to design a leadership-focused committee structure, nor to create a comprehensive list of factors impacting universal leadership development, but rather to begin the process of gathering information to increase the understanding of how board level committees can contribute to leadership development.

Summary and Outline of the Remainder of the Document

Chapter One of this thesis introduced the purpose of the study and provided an overview of the current state of educational leadership development and briefly explored the issues of using business concepts to address leadership development in education. The shortage of leaders within both education and business was described with several factors contributing to the situation being identified along with the importance of developing innovative strategies to address the shortage. The concept of voluntary committee work as a potentially valuable experiential learning tool was described with emphasis placed on the teachers' perceptions of factors identified from their committee work experience that contribute to their leadership development. Both education and business use committees on a regular basis to accomplish specific goals. This study explored the possibility of adding a new value layer to those committees by recognizing their potential as experiential learning opportunities focusing on leadership development. The importance of developing future leaders is stressed through a discussion of the
common elements of existing leadership development programs and my personal experiences as a future leader. The final sections of the chapter established the purpose of this study and the research questions to be addressed.

Chapter Two of this thesis provides a description of the literature on leadership development, focusing primarily on four categories of common factors linked to leadership development: knowledge/curriculum, relationships/mentoring, practice/experiential learning, and reflection. The use of volunteer committees as a vehicle for leadership development as presented in the literature was also highlighted.

Chapter Three provides a rationale for the use of qualitative research and an overview of the research methods employed in this study to make replication of the research design possible. The processes used for the selection of participants, the gathering and analyzing of data, and the establishing of trustworthiness were described and the methodological assumptions, study limitations, and ethical considerations for the protection of participants were discussed.

Chapter Four of this thesis describes the findings of the study. The data collected reflects the key questions of the study: How does being involved in a voluntary board-level committee contribute to the development of teachers' leadership skills? The participants' stories and experiences revealed a number of factors contributing to leadership development that were grouped into either positive or negative categories within four distinct themes: (a) the role of committee leadership, (b) interactions with committee members, (c) the committee structure, and (d) the experience gained through being a part of the committee. The chapter begins with an overview of the participants' descriptions of the definition of leadership development in order to provide a foundation
for the discussion of the themes and factors that follow. Each theme is described with a focus on identifying the factors that contributed either positively or negatively to the leadership development of the participants.

Chapter Five provides a description of the findings and recommendations for practice, theory and research. In the discussion section, the eight main factors identified by participants, four were described as supporting leadership development and four were described as hindering, will be described and linked to the leadership development literature. The recommendation for practice, theory, and research is organized around three main groups, practitioners, school boards, and scholars. The focus is on ways each group can use the information, suggestions for practice and theory, as well as recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of the existing literature on educational leadership development and explores how voluntary committee work fits into the process. The literature on leadership reviews the increasing leadership shortage in education and examines the possible causes and responses within the field. The structure of this chapter is based on a review of the literature, with a focus on defining leadership development, discussing the use of volunteer committees as a vehicle for leadership development, and identifying the key components of effective educational leadership development programs including current and effective curriculum, mentoring, relationship building and networking, experiential learning opportunities, and reflection.

The literature reviewed in this chapter was organized into three categories, empirical research, theory-based articles or book chapters, and argument or opinion pieces from the fields of education and business including editorials, reviews, and information articles. Approximately one third of the sources were empirical studies, just over one third were theory-based, and just under one third were argument or opinion pieces from education and business. No references could be found on the use of voluntary committees as a tool for leadership development within the literature on education, with the exception of Phelps (2008); therefore, it became necessary to search through the business literature to gather more information on the value and structure of committee work as it relates to leadership development.

Leadership has been recognized as one of the most often researched and written about topics of the past several decades with thousands of books, articles, and presentations exploring its many facets (Bush & Jackson, 2002; Hogan, Curphy &
Hogan, 1994; Vroom & Jago, 2007). During that process, educational leadership has grown from a subset of leadership dependent on business concepts to a recognized field with its own concepts, research, and theories (Bush, 2008a; Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008; Muijs & Harris, 2007). It has been established that leadership plays an important role in education and has an impact on school effectiveness and student success (Barth, 2001; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Normore, 2006; Slater, 2008).

Researchers have identified a growing leadership shortage (Klie, 2007; Normore, 2006; Young, 2008) and have highlighted a number of factors contributing to the situation and developed several potential responses. The main strategies include: (a) changing the recruitment and selection process (Gandz, 2006; Normore, 2006), (b) shifting or sharing the practice of leadership within education (Barth, 2001; Bush, 2008a; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Patterson & Patterson, 2004; Pounder, 2006; Slater, 2008; Martin, 2007; Phelps, 2008), and (c) the need for an increased focus on innovative leadership development strategies to address the changing leadership environment in education (Australian Leadership Development Centre, 2007; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Slater, 2008; Walker & Dimmock, 2006; Young, 2008). It is the third strategy that will be the main focus of this chapter.

Klie (2007) addressed the same issues within business when stating that many organizations are still hiring and promoting leaders based on old characteristics and skill sets that leave them unprepared for current and future situations, while Young (2008) focused on the ramifications of moving leaders too fast without the time, training, and experience they need to successfully make the transition. Phelps (2008), an educator
dedicated to the training and support of educational leaders, stressed the need for a structured process or plan to develop teacher leaders that included opportunities to build knowledge (change, servant leadership), develop skills (advocacy, collaboration), explore/refine dispositions (risk taking, resiliency) and to practice leading (chair committees, mentoring). Phelps emphasized the need for increased opportunities for experiential learning and provided a number of examples, including involvement in voluntary committee work.

Hallinger and Snidvongs (2008) stressed the importance of experiential learning as one of the key factors for effective leadership development, using the concept of project management as providing a learning environment for potential leaders not involved in a formal leadership role. The importance of experiential learning as it impacts leadership development is supported by Muijs and Harris (2007) in their description of factors and barriers that impact teacher leadership development. The authors identified the key factors as belief (common vision, no blame), structure (communication, boundaries, support from above), trust (collaboration, relationships, risk-taking), and rewards (recognition, support) and the major barriers as lack of teacher interest, lack of teacher confidence, lack of leadership experience or practice, and lack of respect/confidence in the strength of the formal leader. They further stressed that creating an effective environment or culture for teacher leadership development is a carefully planned and deliberate process driven by a strong and inspirational leader that involves collaboration, coaching and mentoring, opportunities for teachers to practice leadership, and continuous professional development. Couse and Russo (2006), in their description of service learning, stressed the importance of diverse experiences for
educators to practice leadership outside of the classroom to expand their current knowledge and skills. All of these types of activities can be reflected in voluntary committee work where individuals take on the challenge of running a project from vision to implementation, gaining valuable, and practical, leadership experience (Chin, 2006; Selinger, 2006).

**Volunteer Committees as a Vehicle for Leadership Development**

There is still much debate as to whether business leadership development materials and concepts can be effectively applied in an educational context (Bush, 2008b; Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008; Hemmingsen, et al., 2008). It is clear that the two fields share many operational and functional constructs (Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Mumford, Campion & Morgeson, 2007) including the use of committees to augment organizational effectiveness and success (Andrica, 2000; Chin, 2006; Eadie, 2008; Selinger, 2006), and to a much lesser degree as found in the literature, to provide experiential learning opportunities for leadership development (Chin, 2006; Phelps, 2008; Selinger, 2006).

Eadie (2008) described committees as governing engines that, if well designed, can provide crucial support in the governing of a school board’s operations. He identified three critical guidelines that must be followed to achieve success: (a) creating detailed guidelines to govern the committees’ operations; (b) providing representation from the board to provide authority to the committee; and (c) establishing formal liaisons between the committee, other necessary committees, and the board. If it can be accepted that a committee can be seen as a type of team, then Turk, et al. (2002) provided several of the same conditions for effectiveness in both business and education, including
training, release time, and a well established support system. They also stressed the value of structured meetings as team-building opportunities that can be even further enhanced through the reflective process. These conditions can be connected to environmental factors identified in the literature that impact the effectiveness of leadership development through the creation of particular climates: (a) trust (Burke, Sims, Lazzara, & Salas, 2007; Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Phelps, 2008; Schoo, 2008), (b) collaboration (Barth, 2001; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Slater, 2008; Turk, et al., 2002; Ward & Parr, 2006), (c) open communication (Andrica, 2000; Barth, 2001; Slater, 2008; Ward & Parr, 2006), and (d) risk-taking (Burke, et al., 2007; Phelps, 2008; Slater, 2008).

Chin (2006) noted the move within his organization to a shared leadership model with a wide range of working committees taking on many of the organization's functional responsibilities. He described the challenges and benefits of the change and contended that a working committee structure not only improves the functional outcomes for the organization, but also provides a vehicle for the development of future leaders. Both Chin and Selinger (2006) viewed committees as governing and learning communities that provide opportunities for individuals to practice leadership, develop both networking and mentoring relationships with colleagues, and gain valuable experience and contacts linked to career opportunities. Selinger maintained that committees that are properly structured and managed can do more than just successfully complete their assigned tasks, they can provide valuable networking and experiential learning opportunities for both skills and career development. According to Selinger, effective committees have a common vision, clear goals and objectives with accountability attached, recognition for
effort, a focus on the big picture, and recruitment and selection challenges that are remarkably similar to those described for leaders by Normore (2006).

Ward and Parr (2006) highlighted the structures needed to create learning communities and, by extension, how leadership can be developed within these communities. The key concepts of a learning community can also be applied to a committee, including the impacts on leadership development, with only minor modifications. Community is described as a group of individuals with a shared vision, norms, values, and collective responsibility in a safe environment where everyone is able to take risks, share ideas, and be a part of the discussion. The authors provided a list of key elements of group collaboration that impact community effectiveness: (a) strategic leadership (vision); (b) the right people (knowledge and interpersonal skills, commitment); and (c) the organizational environment (communication and organizational support, organizational culture around informal leaders, social capital, and degree of trust within the community). This list can also be compared to the six key factors developed by Goleman (2000):

- Its flexibility—that is, how free employees feel to innovate unencumbered by red tape; their sense of responsibility to the organization; the level of standards that people set; the sense of accuracy about performance feedback and aptness of rewards; the clarity people have about mission and values; and finally, the level of commitment to a common purpose. (p. 81)

These factors, from both lists, can also be compared to Selinger’s (2006) description of effective committee structure and applied to not only the overall effectiveness of reaching
the committee’s stated outcomes, but also of the opportunities for leadership development.

One of the key assertions put forth by Ward and Parr (2006), also shared by Muijs and Harris (2007), was that teachers need opportunities to develop their self-confidence as leaders. The concept of a committee as a learning community or an alternative mentoring framework, as described by Kamler (2006), provides the venue for teachers to practice their leadership in a safe, collaborative environment where risk-taking and sharing is encouraged. Working within a committee structure also combines the concepts of shared vision and purpose with the reality-based leadership experiences that Couse and Russo (2006) referred to as active learning: learning that takes place outside the classroom in real life situations providing practical and realistic experiences. The practical outcome-based focus of the committee structure can also provide teachers with realistic experiences that expand their knowledge and skills beyond the classroom (Couse & Russo, 2006, p. 46) and support leadership development.

**Leadership Development**

Hallinger and Snidvongs (2008) noted the recent increase in attention given to leadership preparation programs in education and linked school leadership to school and student success. The authors contended that to develop these effective leaders requires well planned and executed curriculum, learning methods, and experiential learning opportunities that incorporate concepts and knowledge from both education and business. Walker and Dimmock (2006) in their study of best practices found that an effective leadership preparation program emphasizes the importance of realistic school contexts, the incorporation of experienced mentors, and built-in structures for ongoing reflection.
and networking. There is a great deal of overlap between the findings suggesting that a list of key components can be developed.

**Current and Effective Curriculum**

Leadership development in an educational context can be roughly divided into two main areas, teachers preparing to become administrators and teachers becoming teacher leaders within the classroom and school community. The curriculum that can be used to assist in developing these leaders changes depending on which path is examined.

Normore (2006) clearly stated that the most effective approach to developing leadership skills for aspiring administrators is the use of structured preparation programs. Bush and Jackson (2002) agreed and lamented the fact that many educators still believe that good teachers can become good administrators without any structured preparation programs or experiences. The authors highlighted a number of international programs specifically designed to provide leadership development at all levels. Bush and Jackson (2002) found that many of the programs linked theory, research, and practice with a strong focus on current and context-based curriculum tied to vision, mission, and transformational leadership concepts. They also noted that most of the leadership programs they studied had considerable overlap in content, regardless of the country running the program, leading them to hypothesize the existence of an international curriculum for educational leadership development (Bush & Jackson, 2002).

Walker and Dimmock (2006) also conducted a review of effective leadership development programs on an international level and determined a number of key components, including the importance of a carefully designed curriculum that included a variety of teaching methods and content that provides a strong link between successful
school outcomes and effective leadership development. They described the value of leaders’ self-directed learning and emphasized the importance of linking learning directly to realistic and practical educational contexts, often through the use of experiential learning opportunities.

Hallinger and Snidvongs (2008) examined trends in leadership development curriculum from the field of business to support their suggestion that educational leaders should draw upon business management knowledge and skills to become more effective in their schools. The authors described the value of curriculum being grounded in reality and the need for increased information and decision-making content within leadership development courses. Bradley (2000) also emphasized reality or context-based curriculum as he provided an overview of the Royal Military College leadership development program and stressed the importance of curriculum development for the program’s future success. The author described a multi-year curriculum program designed to prepare leaders for the complex environments they will be entering upon completion. The program is described as being based on scientific knowledge and recorded experience, but practical in its focus.

Phelps (2008) focused on current school-based issues as she described a model for developing teacher leadership consisting of essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions. She emphasized the importance of actively planning leadership development and suggested that principals and leaders use this model to increase the number of teacher leaders within schools. Bradley, Nicol, Charbonneau, and Meyer (2002) also stressed the importance of curriculum that balances classroom instruction, role modeling, role playing, and practical assessments in all stages of leadership development. Couse and
Russo (2006) argued that formal training should be a part of leadership development within education and stressed that practical knowledge, experience, and skills are essential for any individual in a leadership position. Patterson and Patterson (2004) approached the concept from a different angle, as they described the curriculum of teacher leader development as a fluid process of practical experience that grows from a collaborative, mentor-rich, nurturing environment based on trust and respect.

Mentoring

Mentoring, as a tool for leadership development, has been recognized and incorporated into leadership development programs all around the world (Bush & Jackson, 2002; Walker & Dimmock, 2006). Stott and Walker (1992) described mentoring as a developmental relationship between individuals, often with a more senior person, as the mentor, guiding or assisting the junior person, as the mentee. In the context of committee work, the role of mentor could be filled by the committee chair, the more experienced or long sitting members of the committee, or members with specific knowledge, experience or expertise relating to the varied functions or outcomes of the committee. The mentee role would be filled by newer, less experienced members. In a collaborative environment, it is possible that committee members would fit into both roles in different situations that might arise within the scope of the committee’s work.

Stott and Walker (1992) also described mentoring as a powerful tool for developing school leaders that relies on the relationships between mentor, mentee, and the people who support them. They stated that mentoring is good for both the mentor and the mentee and that the pairing of individuals to work together in these roles should be done collaboratively, considering the needs and strengths of the individuals and the
system surrounding them. Walker and Dimmock (2006) highlighted the impact of mentoring in a number of different leadership development programs on an international scale and contended that the use of experienced practitioners as mentors is instrumental for effective leadership development. Normore (2006) highlighted the powerful impact of mentors and leadership role models on aspiring leaders as part of a continuing leadership development system. He stressed that within schools, existing leaders need to act as mentors and recruiters that look for strong leadership qualities in teachers and encourage them to develop their potential and consider pursuing administrative roles. Within school boards, he identified the need to change internal recruitment and selection methods to increase the role of mentoring.

Turk, et al. (2002) asserted that the new role for principals in the changing leadership landscape will be supporting teacher leaders as a coach, mentor, and role model. Pounder (2006) noted the importance of mentoring in leadership development and described a teacher-leader as someone who mentors and coaches other teachers. Gandz (2006) argued that mentors are people who provide advice and guidance for unsure or inexperienced co-workers and stated that mentoring and coaching are both ongoing processes that extend beyond formal performance-management sessions.

Couse and Russo (2006) identified mentoring opportunities within service-learning in advanced field experiences and asserted that mentoring for leadership development can take many forms including formal and informal communication and online mentoring through electronic forums and communities. Kamler (2006) noted the success of a mentoring network, a form of alternative mentoring, in developing leadership potential. She described the important role that alternative mentoring plays in
fostering relationships that can lead to leadership development as well as career advancement. Lyttle (2007) shared her experience in a leadership development program and highlighted the important role of the assigned mentors. The mentors assisted in goal setting and developing plans, and provided essential role modeling. The author also noted the value of mentoring specifically to assist aspiring leaders within minority groups to reach their potential and achieve their career goals, a sentiment shared by Normore (2006), Couse and Russo (2006), and Kamler (2006).

**Relationship Building and Networking**

One of my personal motivations for joining a voluntary committee early in my teaching career was to meet and work with other new and experienced teachers and begin the process of building relationship networks that would increase my knowledge, help me to be more effective at achieving goals, and advance my career. Hemmingsen, et al. (2008) highlighted the importance of people within any organization, linking collaborative networks to organizational success and leadership development. Lyttle (2007) took it a step further and described the central role of relationships in leadership development, and Schoo (2008) emphasized the need to establish positive and supportive relationships through honest feedback to facilitate learning and foster leadership development. Slater (2008) highlighted networking in terms of collaboration between administrators, teachers, and parents focusing on school improvement and the creation of leadership development opportunities. As Martin (2007) stated, networking is essential to sharing ideas and best practices, to creating opportunities for analyzing expertise and experiences, and as a tool for mutual support in career advancement.
Walker and Dimmock (2006), in their review of effective leadership development programs, highlighted the value of leadership networks. They shared feedback from program participants and summarized the positive impact of networking and relationship building with both peers and experienced leaders. The main areas identified were: (a) interacting with experienced leaders to focus on raising questions and discussing solutions; (b) observing, discussing, sharing, and reflecting on best practices; (c) building a network for professional interaction, interpersonal relationships, and mutual support; and (d) actively accessing relationships with experienced leaders for practical solutions to real challenges. The authors stressed the importance of interaction, both formal and informal, between peers and more experienced leaders as a venue for: (a) open communication and sharing, (b) emotional and practical support, (c) problem solving and idea generation, (d) role modeling and sharing of best practices, and (e) bonding and relationship development.

Bush and Jackson (2002) described the growing trend towards developing programs specifically for collaborative leadership teams using experienced leaders as facilitators and network creators, something that happens regularly within a committee system. More experienced leaders would take on the role of committee chair or committee mentor and integrate the concepts of networking and collaborative leadership with the specific purposes of the individual committee mandates. Turk, et al. (2002) supported the use of teams within education for leadership development and capacity building with team members supporting each other throughout the process. The concept of supportive teams also fits within the committee model, with members working
together for the common goals the committee was created to achieve, while simultaneously providing a support team for leadership development.

**Experiential Learning Opportunities**

Hemmingsen, et al. (2008) highlighted the impact of experience, both positive and negative, on leadership development as a teaching tool. They emphasized the importance of direct leadership practice on developing overall leadership potential. Hallinger and Snidvong (2008) described experiential learning as tacit knowledge, knowledge that is gained informally through experience, and noted the power of this type of learning on leadership development. Barth (2001) and Normore (2006) emphasized the value of practical experience in realistic settings and Bush and Jackson (2002) joined them in stressing the importance and impact of experiential learning as part of leadership preparation programs to support theoretical classroom teaching.

Couse and Russo (2006) expanded the discussion to include service-learning field experiences, a more structured example of experiential learning that incorporates collaboration, reflection, and practical learning experiences in the field. Their argument was that teachers need to go beyond what they have already learned as classroom teachers and experience new leadership situations within the broader field of education. They contended that only through experience can teachers move beyond the theoretical or superficial leadership skills to gain a deeper understanding of the leadership development process.

**Reflection**

According to Barth (2001), becoming a reflective practitioner is a goal that all teachers and aspiring leaders should be working towards as a practical approach to
developing genuine self-confidence and values in an overly complex environment.

Kamler (2006) described reflection as a tool for self-analysis and assessment to identify and explore strengths, weaknesses, and values throughout the leadership development process. Lyttle (2007) used reflection as a tool to explore the impact of her experiences in a leadership development program on her life, her practice, and her leadership potential. Hemmingsen, et al. (2008) went so far as to include reflection in their definition of leadership, stating that it includes life experience, wisdom, critical thinking, and personal reflection.

Couse and Russo (2006) viewed reflection as a crucial component for self-evaluation and self-knowledge, leading to improved instruction and leadership skills. Normore (2006) also stressed the importance of reflection when he focused on the creation of leadership portfolios as a chance for aspiring leaders to use reflection as an active part of the recruitment and selection process. Bradley (2000) described the core of the Royal Military College’s leadership development program’s guiding principles as being closely aligned with personal reflection: “Students learn about themselves so that they are able to manage themselves before they face the challenge of learning how to lead others” (p. 324), a statement that was supported by Walker and Dimmock (2006) who consider individual and collaborative reflection to be a key element of any successful leadership development program.

This chapter explored the literature on leadership development, focusing primarily on the use of volunteer committees as a vehicle for leadership development, with views being drawn from the fields of education and business, as well as four categories of common factors linked to leadership development: knowledge/curriculum,
relationships/mentoring, practice/experiential learning, and reflection. All four areas have received attention from researchers to varying degrees. A gap exists, however, in the area of leadership practice or experiential learning for teachers, in the space between using existing committees for recruitment of new leaders, and purposefully constructing the committee process to provide leadership practice and experiential learning opportunities.

Chapter Three focuses on the research methods used in this study. The benefits for using a qualitative research approach are reviewed along with a description of the participant selection process, the gathering and analyzing of data, the establishment of trustworthiness, methodological assumptions, study limitations, and ethical considerations for the protection of participants.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this study was to explore the question of how teachers perceive being involved in a voluntary district board-level committee as contributing to the development of their leadership skills. A qualitative research approach was chosen for this study in order to describe and understand teachers' perceptions of the factors involved in the leadership development process. This study used semistructured interviews to allow participants to express their thoughts, feelings, and stories in a comfortable and safe environment. The 8 participants were all teachers within a single school board who have volunteered their time to work in board level committees. A variety of committees were represented with distinct foci and representation from both elementary and secondary panels. This chapter describes the methodology selected for the study and provides an overview of the procedures used to collect and analyze the data. It also provides a description of the measures used to ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the limitations of the study, and the ethical procedures that were followed.

Description of Research Methodology or Approach

The design of this study was qualitative in nature using a single round of semistructured interviews with 8 participants. A qualitative research design was chosen for this thesis to gain a deeper understanding of the teachers’ perceptions of their leadership development experiences, specifically, to describe and understand teachers’ perceptions of the factors involved in the leadership development process through their experiences in voluntary board level committees. Qualitative research, in contrast to quantitative research, is generally used to study human behaviour, perceptions, and
decision making, as well as the reasons behind each (Creswell, 2005). As such, it provides rich descriptions, a contextual framework, and a chance to dig deeper into the data to go beyond surface ideas (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Depending on the qualitative research tradition, the purpose of an interview can range from gathering information that can be used to further the researcher’s understanding of a particular subject area or situation to forming the basis of a new theory (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Using a qualitative approach allowed me to ask open-ended questions with enough flexibility for participants to articulate their responses through descriptions of personal experiences within their voluntary committee work. Creswell (1998) listed eight reasons for conducting qualitative research: (a) the nature of the question being a how or why rather than a what; (b) the need for the topic to be explored; (c) the need to present a detailed view of the topic; (d) the desire to study individuals in their natural setting; (e) the interest in writing in a literary style to incorporate the researcher in the writing; (f) the existence of sufficient time and resources for extensive textual data collection and analysis; (g) the audiences’ receptivity to qualitative research; and (h) the emphasis on the researcher’s role as an active learner. All 8 of the reasons apply to this study. It is the nature of the topic and the need for exploration combined with my personal role as an active learner in the area of leadership development, specifically with my experience with voluntary committee work, that were the key factors for choosing a qualitative approach. My goal was to get to the core factors that impact leadership development in committee work as perceived by the participants.
Selection of Participants

I selected participants for this study using criterion sampling as described by Miles and Huberman (1994); participants were chosen based on their having met distinct criteria. Using this selection process, each individual included in the study represents the broader range of people outside of the study who meet the same criteria. This approach was useful for providing quality assurance (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The selection criteria that I developed were that all participants were currently employed as teachers within the same school board and had volunteered on a board-level committee within the 3 years previous to the study. I was able to create a list of all teachers within the school board who had volunteered on board level committees within the previous 3 years, approximately 60 teachers, through discussions with the appropriate human resources and administrative staff at the board office.

After permission had been obtained from the school board and the university ethics committee (see appendix A), I contacted and invited all of the individuals on the list to participate in the study. I sent a letter of invitation via email to all of the individuals on the list and asked each of them to send me a reply clearly indicating his or her interest in being a part of the study. The letter of invitation contained a brief explanation of the purpose of the study and an overview of the process that was being followed, including a brief description of the interview and feedback procedures. Information on the time commitment required, assurances of confidentiality, and the opportunity to review responses and provide feedback were also included.

Approximately 60 invitations were sent out and only 12 individuals responded via email with an interest in being a part of the study. I sent an informed consent package to
each of the 12 individuals who responded, also via email, requesting that they read, sign, and return the form, following the process outlined in the consent package, within a 2-week period. Eight individuals returned the consent form in total, and all were received before the deadline. Since there were only 8 forms returned and the target sample size was 8 participants, there was no need to implement the process for choosing between potential participants.

There was one round of interviews, with each interview taking place at a different site that was mutually agreeable and met the basic requirements of privacy and security. I had anticipated that the interviews would last approximately 60 minutes and all of them fell between 35 to 85 minutes in length. All of the interviews were conducted between April 6 and April 20, 2010. Follow-up and member checking took place through a secure online conference system. All study participants were provided with a pseudonym login and password that granted them access to an online conference created specifically for this research study. Each participant was able to access a copy of the study overview, personal interview transcripts, synopsis and summaries, and evolving data analysis summaries highlighting key themes and concepts. Each participant was also able to provide feedback directly to me through the conference email.

Dialogues with each participant were created, monitored, and stored confidentially within the system. All of the participants accessed the on-line conference through the early stages of the study to provide confirmation of the transcription process and early data analysis, but fewer participants used the conferences as the study continued. Only 2 of the participants used the conference to provide feedback beyond the coding stage, a single instance each, relating to the development of patterns and themes
as they emerged from the data. In both cases, the feedback was a brief affirmation of the content of the analysis and, in one instance, encouragement that I was on the right track. Throughout the study I continued to review the conferences on a daily basis and updated them as necessary. As the use of the conferences by the participants decreased, I began to use the pseudonym-based email system more frequently to keep the participants involved in the ongoing analysis of the data as a tool for member checking. All of the participants were more responsive to direct email messages than to the use of the conferences, even though both systems used the same pseudonym-based account. In my opinion, the conferences were a valuable resource that was not utilized by the participants in this study and, as a result, had a much smaller impact on the results than I had initially anticipated. I would still recommend using them in the future as more people become comfortable with the concept of online information sharing.

**Instrumentation**

It is essential in qualitative research to ensure that data are gathered in a way that provides a “rich, thick description” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 203). A single method of data collection is often not enough to reach that goal (Charmaz, 2006). While there are many forms of data collection, with new techniques continually being developed, Creswell (1998) described four basic categories of information collection: (a) observations, (b) interviews, (c) documents, and (d) audio-visual materials, and stressed the importance of matching the data collection methods with the purpose of the study. Since I was exploring participants’ perceptions of their committee experiences, interviews were chosen as the main method of data collection. Additional data were generated through my research journal, a review of existing school board documentation on leadership
development and committee membership, interview field notes, and a secure online conference that allowed participants to interact with me and provide feedback on the data as they were gathered and analyzed.

The purpose of the interview was to provide an opportunity to explore participants’ perceptions of their leadership development experiences within a voluntary committee setting. The interview process was used to create an environment that encouraged participants to freely express themselves in their own ways, to share their stories. Krefting (1991) described how the interviewing process can be used to increase credibility through properly preparing and explaining questions, repeating or expanding questions through probing, and maintaining internal consistency (Krefting, 1991). In this study, I designed the interview questions to create a flow from general concepts to specific experiences. Both the interview and probing questions were carefully prepared in advance with the interview questions being provided to the participants prior to the interview to allow for reflection.

For this study, I used a semistructured interview (Appendix B) to allow participants to explore their experiences and perceptions of leadership development within their voluntary committee work. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained the differences between structured and unstructured interviews and when it is appropriate to use each, suggesting that unstructured interviews are more effective when the interviewer “does not know what he or she doesn’t know” (p. 269) and must use the participant to guide the inquiry. Roulston, deMarrais, and Lewis (2003) introduced the semistructured interview which allows the researcher to guide the interview without restricting it to prepared questions only. This type of interview combines the focus of the structured
interview and the richness and depth of the unstructured interview to allow for participants to explore their experiences, tell their stories, and still remain focused on the specific topics assigned by the researcher (Roulston et al., 2003).

The participants received a copy of the questions in advance to provide them with the opportunity to think about their experiences and reflect on the overall leadership development process before entering the interview. The interviews took place at a site that was mutually agreeable and met the basic requirements of privacy and security. Before the start of each interview, I reviewed the consent form and re-affirmed consent. All of the interviews were audiotaped to provide an accurate record of everything that was said during the interview, with brief notes being taken directly after the interview to capture any nonverbal information or observations (Creswell, 2005). I used a digital recording device that was small, silent, and unobtrusive so as not to inadvertently create stress within the interview. I felt it was essential to create as safe and comfortable an atmosphere as possible.

The purpose of the interview was to gather information from the participants’ point of view that addressed the question of how being involved in a voluntary district board-level committee has contributed to the development of their leadership skills. Two subquestions were included to help narrow the focus: What do participants identify as the key factors and processes that facilitate the development of their leadership skills; and, What do participants identify as the key factors and processes that hinder the development of their leadership skills. Participants were also asked to provide any suggestions or examples from their own experience that might increase the opportunities for leadership development within voluntary committee work.
The interview questions were designed to create a flow within the interview, starting with participants exploring their thoughts, ideas, and understanding of leadership development in general then leading them to consider actual experiences within their voluntary committee work to identify key contributing factors. The questions are provided in Appendix C. During the interview, the participants were encouraged to share stories of their voluntary committee experiences and respond to the interview questions in their own way. I had prepared a number of probing questions to use if necessary to assist the participants and encourage conversation that can be found in Appendix D.

After the interview, I took field notes to document my impressions (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001) of the participants’ reactions, facial features, and nonverbal cues as necessary and appropriate to enhance later transcription (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). The use of field notes allowed me to explore and reflect on how my own similar experiences impacted and intertwined with the observations of the participants to reduce my personal bias (Reid, Kamler, Simpson, & Maclean, 1996). The field notes were transcribed and included in the data analysis as part of the triangulation process.

I was able to transcribe verbatim the audio record and field notes within approximately 2 weeks of each interview, and labeled the files with the appropriate participant’s pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. The use of the digital recorder made the process more efficient and I was able to use Windows Media Player at half-speed as a playback tool for transcription. I felt it was important for me to complete the transcription process myself, since so much analysis takes place while transcribing (Tilley, 2003). By completing the initial transcription myself, I was able to capture the intensity and nuances of the responses within the transcription codes. A copy of the transcription was provided
to the participants for review and approval as soon as they were completed and coding continued and was adjusted as necessary based on the participant responses.

As part of the member checking process, I created an online conference to allow participants to read, reflect, and respond to the analysis of the data as it was being generated. Participants had individual conferences that allowed them to access the study information and correspond with me directly without being able to view the identities or responses of the other participants. This process was designed to be used as the vehicle for transcription review and response, analysis review and response, and ongoing correspondence and feedback. The online conferences were labeled using the participant pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality and anonymity from other participants. Participants were provided with alphanumeric login identities that corresponded to their data and served as a second layer of protection for confidentiality and anonymity from other participants. Each participant was only able to access and upload to the particular conference containing his or her data while I had full access to all of the conferences. As discussed earlier, the conferences were not used as often as I had anticipated and it became necessary for me to use direct email messaging to the pseudonym accounts to obtain feedback from all of the participants.

**Ethical Considerations**

The three main ethical considerations related to this study were the use of human participants, the confidentiality of the participants, and the possibility of preexisting relationships between me and the participants. All of the research activities were planned and conducted according to the guidelines outlined in the Brock University Handbook. Information regarding the study and the process was provided to potential participants.
prior to their choosing to join the study. Each participant received a letter of invitation and consent form that required a signature, both explaining the processes to be followed throughout the study and emphasizing that participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any point or to decline to respond to any of the questions.

As signed consent forms were received, I assigned a pseudonym to each participant that was used throughout the study to ensure confidentiality. All original documents, including signed consent forms, were stored in a locked filing cabinet and any electronic forms, documents, or data were stored on a password protected USB key throughout the study. The secure online conference designed for information verification and feedback used a second set of pseudonyms (alphanumeric) that doubled as the participants’ logins.

In the 17 years that I have been teaching with my current school board, I have been involved in a number of board level committees as both a member and chair. Since all of the participants were selected from the same school board and had been volunteering in a board level committee, it was likely that some form of professional relationships existed prior to the start of this study. To eliminate the possibility of being in a position of authority or conflict with any participant, I took a leave of absence from all board level committees for the duration of the study.

As part of the research process, I followed all of the necessary steps to receive ethical approval from both Brock University (see Appendix A) and the school board involved with this study. This involved the creation of all required documents, clearance from both institutions, and the following of appropriate procedures and safeguards.
Data Processing and Analysis

According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research, in general, is an inductive process for the interpretation and analysis of data in order to identify a small number of large themes from a large number of small details. Creswell (1998) described a number of steps or stages that were adapted to my study. The first stage was the organization of the data. In this stage I transcribed the audio files and field notes and re-read to ensure clarity. The next stage was the verification of the information. The transcripts were sent to the participants for feedback to ensure accuracy and clarity. All of the participants approved the transcripts with only 1 suggesting minor changes to soften the tone of several responses. The field notes along with my responses to the interview questions were transcribed and included in the data as a primary source to assist in developing a priori codes and in data source triangulation: talking to multiple people in multiple circumstances (Cresswell, 1998). My responses were not included in the study beyond the early stages since data saturation was reached through the responses of the 8 participants interviewed.

As the member checks were being completed, I re-read the transcripts several times to increase familiarity in preparation for coding. In the coding stage I used descriptive and pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) based on the deductive codes found in the literature review, the key questions of this study, and in my own responses to the questions. Examples of the deductive codes included; (a) leadership development, (b) effective curriculum, (c) leadership experience, (d) mentoring, (e) reflection, (f) positive factors, and (g) negative factors. I quickly found these codes to be too broad to capture the nuances of the responses and began to allow inductive codes to emerge from the data.
Examples of the inductive codes included; (a) recruiting the right people, (b) tapping people for selection, (c) practicing leadership, (d) lots of talk and little action, (e) unfinished tasks, (f) good for kids, and (g) leadership checklist.

As the process continued, the number of codes, called free nodes in NVivo 8, continued to grow until I reached the end of the first round of descriptive coding with a total of 179 free nodes. Three of the participants provided feedback on the free nodes after they had been posted in the conference. The feedback from all 3 participants focused on collapsing similar free nodes which allowed me to reduce the number from 179 to 145. The next step was to study the free nodes and look for patterns and create pattern codes called tree nodes to connect them. Seventeen tree nodes emerged from the data, including several that closely resembled the original deductive codes that I had found too broad at that earlier point of the process. Examples of the tree nodes included; (a) leadership practice, (b) committee goals, (c) effective committee management, (d) atmosphere, (e) board support, (f) reflection, and (g) commitment. All 17 of the tree nodes were posted in the conference and 2 participants responded with statements of encouragement and agreement.

Once the coding had been completed, the next step was to look for themes within the codes to determine groupings or categories based on common elements within the text (Charmaz, 2006). I used the online conference to post themes as they developed and invited participants to provide feedback and reflections as I moved forward to explore the possible relationships between the themes. It was at this point that the dwindling responses within the online conference system stopped altogether. Although I continued to post the themes and request feedback, the participants did not respond. To keep the
process going, I began to use the pseudonym-based email accounts to send individual messages to each of the participants describing the information posted in the conference and requesting feedback. Six of the 8 participants began to respond using this format and expressed agreement and support of the emerging themes but did not share any personal reflections.

Methodological Assumptions

There were five main points to consider when discussing methodological assumptions as related to this study. The first was the actual level of participants’ involvement in the voluntary committees. Not all members had the same level of involvement or commitment to the goals or processes of the committee and it was possible that members who were involved less, or even in name only, may not have been exposed to factors that potentially contributed to leadership development. As a result, the information provided could have been based more on their thoughts or suppositions rather than actual experiences. Probing questions were used to gain insight into each participant’s level of involvement in the committee. These questions explored the participants’ reasons for joining the committee as well as the length and degree of involvement.

The second assumption that needed to be considered was that the most common answers provided by participants were not always the most important answers. When interviewing more than a single participant, there is the possibility that a number of responses may be repeated. The frequency of a particular response, however, does not necessarily indicate a greater level of importance or significance in terms of the purpose or goals of this study. It was possible that a key concept or factor may be found in a
single response from a single participant. This issue was addressed during the descriptive and pattern coding process. The creation of free nodes within the software was not based on frequency, but rather on the descriptive qualities of the data, meaning that even points that were mentioned only once by only a single participant had the same opportunity to become a free node as a point that had been mentioned several times by several participants.

The third assumption was that all of the participants had an interest, awareness, or knowledge of leadership development in general and their personal leadership development in particular. Individual participants were involved in voluntary committee work for a variety of reasons, which may or may not have had anything at all to do with leadership development, and may not have had given any thought to developing a personal understanding of the leadership development process. Asking them then to provide insights into that process, even from their own perspective, could have created a situation where they felt unable to articulate an authentic response.

Following on that point, the fourth assumption was that participants were able to articulate factors that contributed to their leadership development. The gap between being involved in a process and identifying factors that contribute to that process can be a large one, especially for individuals who may not have given any prior thought or reflection to the situation. To address these issues, the participants received the questions in advance as part of the interview schedule to allow them time to prepare and reflect on their responses.

The fifth assumption was that participants felt safe enough to provide authentic information. The interview process can be stressful or intimidating to participants if not
properly conducted and can greatly impact the authenticity of the responses, which could undermine the value of the overall findings of the study. To address this issue, I practiced my interviewing techniques prior to the first interview, made sure each location was safe, comfortable, and private, and minimized the visual impact of the audio-recording equipment.

**Limitations**

There were several limitations related to this study. Firstly, the process of choosing participants, while structured, was still largely based on convenience and many of the potential participants had a professional relationship with me. Secondly, the small sample size of 8 participants increased the probability that key points or perceptions might have been missed. Thirdly, the lack of full and continued feedback from the participants through the online conference system represents a missed opportunity for shared creativity and discussion. Finally, the qualitative research process itself contained inherent limitations in that it was not designed to generalize findings to other situations, but to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences from the perspective of the participants (Krefting, 1991), leading to a lack of generalizability. It is my hope, however, that the findings may be used to inform future decisions on the development of leadership development within school boards.

As part of the qualitative research process, the use of interviews to gather information also allowed several limitations to arise. The authenticity of information could have been affected if participants were trying to impress, afraid to say the wrong thing, or impacted by preexisting relationships with me, either as a colleague, fellow committee member, or former committee chair. The use of audio taping during the
interview may also have made participants uncomfortable and impacted the depth and authenticity of the information. Lastly, the level of the participants’ knowledge or understanding of the leadership development process may have limited their ability to articulate or even be aware of how they were being impacted by their experiences in the voluntary committees.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified four main criteria to consider when establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. There are distinct and overlapping strategies to increase trustworthiness for each criterion that can be incorporated into the qualitative research process depending on the specifics of the study (Krefting, 1991). In this section I briefly explained each of the four criteria and described the strategies I used to increase the trustworthiness of my work.

Credibility

Krefting (1991) defined credibility, also called truth value, as representing the perceptions and experiences of participants as accurately as possible, to the point that someone with similar experiences would immediately recognize the descriptions. There were several strategies for increasing credibility that I incorporated into this study, including reflexivity, triangulation, member checking, and interview technique.

Reflexivity, as described by Krefting (1991), focuses on the impact of the researcher’s own perceptions, backgrounds, and opinions on the research process. In order to address potential bias or assumptions on my part, it was necessary for me to be aware of the internal monologue and multiple roles I brought to the study before the
research even began. To accomplish this, I used a research journal to capture, describe, and interpret my behaviours, opinions, and experiences, from my own point of view, throughout the study. In this way, I hoped to bring to light any preconceived notions, personal biases, or limitations on my interpretations of the participants’ experiences and to explore and reflect on how my perceptions impacted the research. As part of this process, before the first interview was conducted, I responded to the questions, as a participant, to identify my expectations for each question. My responses were included in the data and coded as part of the study to assist in the development of a priori codes as the first step in the coding process.

Triangulation of data methods, as described by Cresswell (1998), is the use of multiple means of data collection to gather and compare information. In this study, I used four different methods: interview transcripts, interview field notes, secure online conferences, and my researcher journal. The information from the various methods was compared to provide corroborating evidence and possibly add insight to emerging patterns and themes.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described member checking as a continuous process focusing on the researcher going back to the participants to make sure that the interpretations, summaries, and representations of their information is accurate. With the use of interviews in this study, member checking took place when the participants were asked to review and provide feedback on the interview transcripts and synopsis. There were also ongoing opportunities through the secure online conference for participants to review, verify, discuss, and provide feedback on patterns and themes as they developed. The secure online forum also provided an opportunity for a terminal member check to
verify that the final presentation of the information was an accurate and fair representation of the participants’ experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The interviewing process itself was used to increase credibility through properly preparing and explaining questions, the repetition or expansion of questions through probing, and the maintenance of internal consistency (Krefting, 1991). In this study, the interview questions were intentionally designed to create a flow from general concepts to specific experiences and were provided to participants in advance to allow for reflection. Probing questions were also prepared in advance to help initiate conversation if necessary and expand responses to verify experiences and meanings.

**Transferability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described transferability as the degree to which research findings in one study fit into other contexts outside the study situation. While the onus or responsibility for finding the fit falls on the person initiating the transfer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), it increases the overall trustworthiness of a study to provide dense descriptions of the data and context to make situational comparisons possible. In this study, particular attention was placed on the design of the interview process to provide thick descriptions of the participant experiences and a rich contextual description of leadership development within voluntary board-level committees. Semistructured interviews allowed participants to dig more deeply into their personal leadership experiences, the secure online conferences encouraged participants to continue to discuss and reflect for 6 months after the interviews had been completed, and the inclusion of notes and materials from my personal research journal contributed to the thickness of the contextual descriptions.
Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described dependability as the ability to identify and track variability in a qualitative research study. The key to increasing dependability in a study is to provide a dense description of research methods so that repeatability can be measured, not in terms of the end results, but in the creation of a similar research process including methods of data gathering, analysis, and interpretation (Krefting, 1991). In this study, I provided detailed descriptions of the methods used to gather, analyze, and interpret the data. The use of member checking and triangulation through interview transcripts, field notes, secure online conferences, and my research journal also added to the dependability of the information by ensuring that a weakness in one method was compensated for by one of the others (Krefting, 1991).

Confirmability

It has been widely recognized that in qualitative research the worth or value of data increases as researchers work more closely with participants. As a result, the concept of neutrality is shifted away from the researcher, as in quantitative research, to the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, confirmability was considered to be reached when credibility and transferability had been established (Krefting, 1991). In this study, in the absence of an external auditor, I attempted to increase confirmability through triangulation and reflexivity as described in the credibility and transferability sections above.

Restatement of the Problem

Effective educational leadership has been linked to school and student success. Many well known researchers in both business and education have focused their attention
on leadership development, specifically in response to a growing leadership shortage, to compare existing programs and best practices on a global scale. The findings have been extensive and varied, but a common thread that has emerged, as described in Chapter Two, is the inclusion of four key elements in any leadership development program: knowledge/curriculum, relationships/mentoring, practice/experiential learning, and reflection. Based on a review of the literature, all four areas have received attention from researchers to varying degrees (see Appendix E for definitions of key terms related to leadership development for the purposes of this study). A gap exists, however, in the area of leadership practice or experiential learning for teachers. A number of examples were found for teachers to develop their leadership practice, but an important opportunity seems to have been overlooked: the use of voluntary board-level committee work as a vehicle for leadership development. All school boards have used committees, at both the school and board level, as a means to accomplish a wide range of goals or outcomes. More and more, school boards have been viewing these committees as a recruiting or proving ground for potential educational leaders.

The gap in the research exists in the space between using existing committees for recruitment of new leaders, and purposefully constructing the committee process to provide leadership practice and experiential learning opportunities. The purpose of this study was to explore how being involved in a voluntary district board-level committee contributed to the development of teachers’ leadership skills and to identify key factors that either facilitated or hindered the process. The findings of this study could form the basis of future work relating to innovative committee structures and assist in the recruitment, retention, and development of future educational leaders. The findings could
also contribute to theory in terms of the link between experiential learning and leadership development, the key factors perceived to impact, positively or negatively, on leadership development, and the role that committees could play in the design of future leadership development programs.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study examined teachers’ perceptions of their experiences within voluntary board-level committees to understand the key factors that contributed, positively or negatively, to their leadership development. The data collected reflect the key questions of the study: How does being involved in a voluntary board-level committee contribute to the development of teachers’ leadership skills? There are two subquestions that support and expand on the main question:

1. What do teachers identify as the key factors and processes that facilitate the development of their leadership skills?
2. What do teachers identify as the key factors and processes that hinder the development of their leadership skills?

These findings represent data collected through one-on-one semistructured interviews with 8 participants, a mix of teachers and new administrators from both elementary and secondary panels who have been involved in voluntary board-level committee work within the 3 years previous to the study. All participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities throughout this process. The pseudonyms were Alison, Anthony, Claire, Clark, Daniel, Marianna, Sarah, and Thomas. Of the 8 participants, 2 were new administrators, 2 were elementary teachers, and 4 were secondary teachers. There were no noticeable differences in responses between the 3 participant groups. The participants’ stories and experiences revealed a number of factors contributing to leadership development, and even though participants used different terms and examples to describe these factors, there were enough similarities to allow grouping into either positive or negative categories within four distinct themes that
emerged from the data: (a) the role of committee leadership, (b) interactions with committee members, (c) the committee structure, and (d) the experience gained through being a part of the committee.

This chapter organized the findings according to a framework of factors and themes contributing to leadership development that was drawn from the data. It begins with an overview of the participants’ descriptions of the definition of leadership development in order to provide a foundation for the discussion of the themes and factors that follows. Each theme will then be discussed with a focus on identifying the factors that contributed either positively or negatively to the leadership development of the participants.

**Participants’ Definition of Leadership Development**

During the interviews, participants were asked to provide a personal definition for leadership development. While a single definition did not emerge, some overlap did occur with a number of concepts being discussed including life-long learning, experiential learning, skill building, mentoring, risk-taking, and formalized instruction. Of all the participants, Thomas spent the most time exploring the value and meaning of leadership through his personal experiences. He spoke at length about “true leadership” and how it can be developed along with the importance of maintaining a “humanist perspective.”

I was first struck by the concept of leadership in reading the Tao. There is a passage in there that I am paraphrasing. It says, follow me, I am right behind you. I love that piece because to me that is what true leadership is. It is about having the confidence in yourself to be able to say, I gotcha. I want you to rise. I want to
help you rise to whatever it is you are going to do, and so on. To me, any leadership development that allows for that kind of an experience to happen is true leadership development. (Thomas)

There are two levels of leadership development described by Thomas, careerist and humanist, with humanist being described as the more valuable of the two.

Then [there] is the leadership development that I believe exists on a higher plain. I see it in kids, I see it in staff, and I would like to think I see it in myself, and that is that leadership development is about becoming more human. About becoming more yourself and reaching into your own potentialities on what that can mean to bring goodness. To me that is what leadership is about ... The humanist side would say, well shouldn’t we try and encourage those people to see that there is more to it? I have seen that happen with people who have lead committees, to try to bring that goodness out in folk. Then being on the other side of things, seeing people in a capacity of building their humanity and building their positive, that could be, in a larger system. (Thomas)

Thomas also highlighted the value of seeking out new and diverse experiences to challenge comfort zones and provide personal growth opportunities. He uses a diamond metaphor that nicely expresses his philosophy of leadership development.

Having been in two boards, five schools, being a teacher for 18 years and an administrator for 2, I’ve recognized that change is beautiful. Change is wonderful. Every time that I have changed I have realized a new facet to the diamond. I will say diamond because I believe we are all good and we are all just getting different cuts and we just need a different polish. Every new experience gives you that.
Every new committee will give every leader that chance to see what aspect of their diamond shines. I think that the secret to true leadership development is to not become stale. To continue to seek those new experiences that tap those uncomfortable positions you may have now and see if you really have it in you to live by your creed. To see if it really is something you are capable of doing.

(Thomas)

All of the other participants' definitions were captured by Thomas' descriptions, except for Daniel, who shared a different view, focusing on what he described as the natural leader.

I really do think that people are born leaders. Through all of the experience that I have had, I think that you are born with a sense of how to guide people and you are born with an innate sense of how to attract people to you and get them to follow what you say. I know that you can develop the skill of leadership and you can work on it, but there is that natural leader. You have to work well with people, you have to develop relationships with people, you have to remember things about them. You can't listen to a whole conversation and then forget everything they said. You have to treat with respect and then they will follow... Leadership [development] to me is learning how to guide people, learning how to lead people, learning how to get people to work harder. (Daniel)

Factors Impacting Leadership Development

While reviewing the participants' stories and experiences, several common themes emerged which were used to create a framework of factors and themes contributing to leadership development (see Figure 1). As shown in Figure 1, each of the
four themes contain both positive and negative factors in differing amounts, leading to
the shifting of each theme area to either side of the middle line, with left being positive or
supporting factors and right being the negative or hindering factors.

Participants repeatedly linked the factors they were discussing with the committee
chairs, or other committee members. They spoke passionately about the structures within
the committee with either high praise or strong disdain, and all of the participants spoke
at length about the importance and impact of the overall committee experience, urging
other educators to take advantage of the learning opportunities available through
committee work. It became clear that these four themes could work as a framework to
organize the various factors and directly compare the positive and negative contributions
to leadership development within each one. The four themes that emerged from the data
as impacting leadership development were: (a) the role of committee leadership, (b)
interactions with committee members, (c) the committee structure, and (d) the experience
gained through being a part of the committee.

Many factors were identified by the participants but these eight were highlighted
more often and given greater emphasis as having a significant impact on their leadership
development. Of the eight factors, four were described as supporting leadership
development and four were described as hindering. All eight factors can be found in
varying degrees across all four themes and will be included in the following section
discussing each theme. The factors that participants identified from within their
voluntary committee experience as most significantly contributing positively to
leadership development were: (a) leadership practice and experience, (b) having mentors
and role models, (c) building relationships and networks, and (d) creating positive
Figure 1. Factors within voluntary committees contributing to leadership development.
outcomes for students. The factors that participants identified from within their voluntary committee experience as most significantly contributing negatively to leadership development were: (a) frustration caused by a lack of follow through and support, (b) interacting with committee members who have a careerist approach to the experience, (c) dealing with personal and political agendas, and (d) overcommitment leading to burnout.

**Committee Leadership**

The first theme, committee leadership, encompasses the concepts of the importance of committee leaders as effective managers, committee atmosphere and environment, and role models/mentors in facilitating the participants' leadership development.

**Importance of Committee Leaders as Effective Managers**

The leadership role of the committee chair was identified by 7 of the 8 participants as an important factor contributing both positively and negatively to leadership development. Drawing from the participants' responses, it was possible to create a list of characteristics and behaviours possessed by committee leaders that either increased or decreased their effectiveness in fostering leadership development within the committee members. The most common characteristics or behaviours associated with increasing effectiveness were respectability, competence, and trustworthiness. The most common characteristics or behaviours associated with decreasing effectiveness were poor decision making or goal setting, allowing personal or political agendas to influence the committee, and an absence of shared leadership or credit for accomplishments.
Participants highlighted the importance of mutual respect and the ability to trust the skills, intentions, and convictions of the committee chairs. Thomas described the impact of the committee leaders on his personal understanding of the leader's role. Being on those committees and watching and listening to how other people chaired them. It was those leaders that took that enthusiasm and allowed the people to grow, with a sense of direction in terms of pushing them to be all they could possibly be and catching them when they fell. Showing them, here is why this might not work at this time, but let's see how it can. Those are the people that I found were the true leaders because they had the greater picture in mind. They never diminished the enthusiasm of their participants. (Thomas)

Marianna focused on the importance of leaders who stand by their convictions even against opposition. “Very strong people who stood by their convictions and some of them paid a price for that ... I felt that in the end, they stuck to their convictions and I thought that was important.”

Participants also identified the need for these leaders to be able to focus on vision and goal setting, using a team approach, and maintaining a high energy, positive attitude. The creation and communication of realistic and practical goals was described by Marianna as a crucial function of the committee chair and as a factor impacting leadership development.

[We] have these goals, we have this direction [but] ... I have learned the worst mistake, you can have the best vision as a leader and the best ideas, but if people aren’t comfortable yet and don’t have a good understanding of where you want them to go it is all for naught. (Marianna)
The participants described goal setting as a process, facilitated by the chair but involving all of the committee members, that provides the foundation for the continued actions and existence of the committee itself. Daniel outlined, from his own experience, the importance of making sure the committee’s goals are relevant and worthwhile.

I would want to put that email out there to anyone that is interested first of all. Whoever wanted to come to the meeting, come on down. From that meeting I would get some feedback as to what people want to see and what people want to see happening. Then form the committee around that. There is no point in me starting a committee from my own head, other people have to buy into it. That is what we do with a committee I am involved with right now, the agenda comes from the members and our attendance is better because of that. We don’t let people come to speak to the committee that don’t have a direct connection to the goals of the committee. You have to make it a worthwhile process. There has to be point or you are going to lose people very quickly. (Daniel)

Once the goals had been set, the next steps of the process entailed managing the tasks and logistics involved with working towards the goal, following through to reach the goal, and finally, celebrating the successful completion of the plan. Participants spoke about the value of the process as a part of their leadership development and the need to take action to reach the end goal. Anthony strongly expressed the need to move forward from the planning stage into action.

I think a lot times we get bogged down in talking about what we plan on wanting to do and not doing it. I think in terms of when you are trying to get something done, the whole thing is a process, it is not just the plan, it is doing it all, and then
it is ending it and then after that you have got to reflect on it. A lot of times we just get bogged down in the start and it never really gets anywhere, and that is another one of my frustrations. (Anthony)

Sarah and Alison also spoke directly to the frustrations that could result from failure to reach the end goal of the committee.

[There is] a lot of talking at times and the plan doesn’t actually happen. You don’t see the follow through. It starts with great ideas and then it doesn’t happen … there hasn’t been any leadership development opportunity because we didn’t actually do anything. (Sarah)

Added to the overall feeling of frustration, Alison also mentioned her feeling of a lack of control over the process at times.

[When] you have a great idea but you never get to see it come to fruition. That is the frustrating part because you think about all the time that you put into meeting as a committee and generating these wonderful ideas and you get all excited and you get more people on board and then all it takes is one or two people just to make it fizzle out. That can be very disheartening because it makes you think, why the heck did I spend all that time, when all of a sudden the powers that be decide to go in another direction and I have no control over it. That is difficult. (Alison)

The importance of keeping the end goal in mind, and making sure that end goal is somehow connected to benefiting students, was also described as a critical factor in reaching success, both for the committee and the leadership development of the individual members. Thomas expressed the importance of impacting students as a
m motivator and end goal within itself in the following quotation.

This committee is not just about what this committee does, it is about the
goodness for kids, the goodness for what is good for us all. Those are the pieces
where you see people doing the out of the box thinking, the I’ll take that on, or
that’s a great idea, let me run with that and I’ll come back with it next time.
(Thomas)

Part of any process dealing with a group of people has to include a discussion
about the impact of managing individuals, groups, and situations. Marianna noted the
importance of leaders developing the necessary skills to manage team members.

The most useful part is, you are developing a skills set, and I wouldn’t call them
soft skills, but they are things that are not explicitly taught to people, unless you
are taking a formalized leadership course. It is how to interact with people. It is
how to manage people, and I don’t mean management with a large capital M, [it
is about] how you negotiate relationships with people. (Marianna)

The participants also spoke about the many challenging situations arising for committee
leadership from their own experiences including shifting timelines, personality clashes,
changes in policy, frustration and disappointment, and political agendas. In the following
quotations, Sarah and Thomas highlight the importance and challenges of working with
others, and how that experience is integral to leadership development. Sarah stated that
“part of your leadership development has to be managing the people, making them feel
valued and making them understand that they are definitely contributing and not just
warm bodies on a committee because you had to strike one.”
I found that the negativity was also the interpersonal conflicts that you get in just with personalities that you don’t necessarily know coming together on one cause. You are not always going to agree. This is a question about leadership. (Thomas) The impact of charisma and overall personality were also highlighted by several participants and Marianna attributed the success of her personal leadership development, at least in part, to the rapport developed between the committee chair and members.

A respect that includes convictions but is also fair enough to listen to other ideas and say, yes that is a great idea, but it doesn’t align with our vision. Maybe we can incorporate it somewhere but let’s figure out how we are going to do that all together. I have seen heavy handed and I’ve seen too soft and I think it is finding that medium of support and pressure. Saying to people, this is an absolute, we do need to take the [committee] in this direction, what do you need me to do to help you get there? (Marianna)

She later went on to specifically describe the impact of personality on the group dynamic within a committee. “I find some committees work better than others just because of personality. You get the right gel of people and suddenly it becomes fun and friendly” (Marianna).

Committee chairs sharing the leadership role with committee members was also identified as an important positive factor contributing to leadership development, while the lack of shared leadership or credit for success was described as having a strong negative impact. Participants spoke about the importance of the chair taking on the role of facilitator while empowering committee members to participate as leaders with equal responsibility for decision making, goal setting, and credit for success upon completion.
Participants also mentioned how important it is for committee chairs to be willing to invest in the goals and outcomes of the committee process and be willing to work hard and be dedicated to reaching those goals. Thomas highlighted the importance of committee leaders sharing the leadership while still providing support and guidance.

The development comes in sharing the leadership, that is so important, to letting people know they are safe and supported. If they feel they have messed up, or they might not know a piece, or they might have gone down a path either politically or policy wise, something that might get them into trouble, that I gotcha, it is okay, we can fix this. Leadership has to be about, in these experiences, to give it over and let it germinate from the group itself. To not always be the one who is ushering the direction – follow me, I am right behind you. (Thomas)

Anthony also described an effective leader, based on his own committee experiences, in the following quotation.

As the leader you need to be the person that does a little bit more and tries to direct things, but first and foremost you want to get everybody involved. A leader can also be part of the process, to be involved, without leading the process or trying to control the process.... You are more of a facilitator than somebody who needs to come in and say this has to be done and this has to be done, because that is one of the frustrating things. You don't want to be the one that has to make these decisions because you think you know best or you have all this experience. You want to be able to say, okay, this is where I see this, this is what we need, this is what I'd like you to do, so let's put this together and see what we can do.
All of the participants described situations that challenged the committee leader’s ability to be effective. The participants spoke about how the committee leadership handled each situation, often through management techniques, and what they learned from being a part of the situation. In several cases, the participants were themselves involved in the situation and were able to gain a more personal perspective from the experience that impacted their own leadership development. Marianna shared a story from her committee experience that compared two different management styles and their impact on her development as a leader.

[You see a lot of different kinds of management styles. You see people who do a lot of “sit and get” for a group and you can see the reaction. Or you could see someone who involves that group in the learning and the process and says, okay, here is some information, have a look at it, talk it over with your elbow partner, and then we are going to talk about it as a group, what do you see, what do you not see … Being on [that type of] committee, the experience gives you a sense of ownership and confidence. I always said to people, we want our kids to move up Maslow’s Hierarchy, that now I am beyond just doing, I am now a thinking sentient being, and don’t we as adults want that for ourselves too? That sense of ownership that someone, number one, has trusted you to be on this committee, and number two, believes in you enough and has confidence in your abilities to say, I think you can do it. It gives you confidence. (Marianna)]

Clark described a situation where the committee leadership displayed an acute lack of understanding of how to motivate him.
You could get 10 times more out of me, if you knew how to deal with me or you could get nothing out of me because I could just pull the old, that’s not my job.

But if you ask me in the right way, I know I’m not going to get any money to join a committee, I know I’m not getting any money to stay after school and hang with the kids, or help another teacher, but if he asks me, I don’t mind. People forget how to get things out of people by just being nice, decent. I think that is the leadership thing that is lost the most. (Clark)

Not all of the situations described by the participants were handled in a way that the participants considered to be positive, but even cases that had less than satisfactory outcomes contributed to their understanding of leadership and management. Thomas explored his observations of various committee leaders and members and described the impact of their actions.

[I don’t think the leaders of that committee] understood that these people need to be bolstered, these people needed their enthusiasm guided, and these people needed the leader to be behind them. They needed to be shown that this was more than just something to spin our wheels on.... realizing that true leadership is finding people who want to shout and help them get to where they need to be. That was a real learning experience that came from participating in those kinds of experiences. So watching that was huge .... The things that have impacted me negatively, have been watching those who have received that kind of support, yet balked at it, because they saw critiques as criticism, they saw suggestions as roadblocks. (Thomas)
Committee Atmosphere and Environment

All of the participants noted the importance of the atmosphere or tone created by the committee chair during committee meetings. One of the key elements is the creation of an informal atmosphere, free of restrictive practices or policies and cynical thinking, allowing everyone to be more comfortable and relaxed, fostering creative freedom, risk-taking, and engagement. These themes are reflected in the following quotations.

One thing that was positive, I think, was that it was really informal. It wasn’t like you were going in and it was totally scripted and we’re doing this, this, this, and this. It wasn’t a lot of downloading of things, it was more like a sharing of things. Everyone came in and it was like an informal meet and greet based around a task with activities to break the ice and get people talking. (Anthony)

We could carve something out that was fresh. There were really no restrictions put on, in terms of what the content itself or the process looked like.... That was fun, because there really were no sacred cows like in different projects that I have worked on. If there are no sacred cows you have a fair amount of decision making and input into the process. (Claire)

While highlighting the importance of the informality of the committee atmosphere, participants also stressed the necessity for well planned and organized meetings that optimized the limited time available for members with busy schedules. The committee chairs would play a large part in creating and maintaining the atmosphere, but all of the members would be involved in the process. Having people involved in the process was one way Daniel described to overcome the challenge of getting people to take time out of their busy schedules to attend meetings.
The hard thing is getting people out to meetings. It is really tough because people are really really busy. They have to be worthwhile. There has to be something being said at those meetings that is worthwhile and helpful to them, so make sure that the agenda speaks to them. (Daniel)

Creating and maintaining a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment was also identified as an area of importance by the participants. Drawing from the participants’ comments, a safe committee environment is one based on trust that is free of judgment and negativity where all members are made to feel important and their opinions valued, leading to a sense of community and shared purpose. Anthony, in particular, felt strongly about the impact of the committee environment on his leadership development as seen in the following quotation.

There are no right or wrong answers, everyone has an opportunity to speak about something and no one is judging, that all puts you at ease. Sometimes if you go to these things and you are an inexperienced teacher or you’ve been around a long time but maybe this is something new to you, there is a lot of anxiety. As a leader it is good to make sure that everyone is at ease and on the same page. When everyone is able to say something without being worried about looking foolish or something like that, people will give more as opposed to sitting back a little bit. It is really important to make sure everyone feels welcome and valued and it is free from judgment or worry that you are doing or saying the right thing ... I would say those are two things that are really important, trust and being able to be open with people and making them feel really comfortable. When you can do that and create that rapport people are willing to go that extra mile. (Anthony)
Sarah also noted the importance of committee leadership working to create a safe and positive environment but added the fact that those leaders were also a positive role model for her leadership development.

Part of your leadership development has to be managing the people, making them feel valued and making them understand that they are definitely contributing and not just warm bodies on a committee because you had to strike one... So when I sit in that room, when we meet as I team, I look and I can model myself after certain people, after people I see bringing positive change, and after people who, you can look at them and say, oh yeah that guy is making everybody feel good, everybody listens when he speaks, he is heard, everybody says, he has got it.

(Sarah)

On the opposite end of the spectrum, participants also described the destructive power of negativity, cynicism, and judgmental behaviour. Marianna and Alison noted the negative impact of committee leadership with an agenda that does not include shared leadership or success in the following quotations. “You get that sense, when you are on a committee with no distributive leadership, that the leader doesn’t really trust you and I think that is a definitive negative that I have experienced” (Marianna).

They don’t really care where it goes, they just know that we will do what needs to be done now. Get that check mark and then move on. If something comes of it, we are just left in the dust. They carry the ball, they take the credit. Or, at other times, it just fizzles out. I know that is a very cynical point of view, but in my experience, more often than not, that is what happens. (Alison)
Alison also related a personal experience outlining the impact of a lack of trust within the committee environment on her leadership development.

There is a mutual distrust, and so now when some people might be labeling me as a ladder climber it makes me very uncomfortable and to some extent I think it has compromised my relationship with some people on staff. That then injures my ability to become an effective leader down the road. (Alison)

**Mentors and Role Models**

All of the participants identified mentoring and role modeling as an important part of their leadership development and described a number of important elements including: support from the committee leadership, gaining a sense of confidence through guided experience, receiving positive feedback and critiques, and experiencing success. Daniel described his idea of an effective leader in the following quotation, “A good leader is someone who gives a lot of praise, and gently guides people to things they might like to try or other options” (Daniel). Thomas took it a step further when he described the positive dynamic between the committee leadership and membership in the following quotation.

It asks so much of the person who is leading as well as the participants being lead. There is collaboration on a lateral level, where everybody is a participant. True leadership emerges when the people achieve what their goal is without even realizing they had been lead. To me leadership development is about making sure the leaders can be confident enough to be that kind of leader, where the people they work with feel it was their success not because of you. (Thomas)
Anthony focused on a specific behavior as he stressed the importance of the committee leadership creating opportunities for members to be successful in order to foster leadership development.

I think the first thing I would do, if I was in charge of it, would be to try and give them a position where they would be successful. Whatever that problem was, or whatever we were trying to do, I would try to find roles for people that they were interested in right away and say, you are going to be responsible for this part of it, I am giving you autonomy to do what you wish with this, if you need help come and see me, but I want you to go and work on this and we’ll come back together and talk about things. (Anthony)

Most participants described mentoring as involving modeling attitudes and behaviors associated with effective leadership, the desire to help committee members reach success, both within the committee and on a broader scale, and encouraging members to stay positive, take risks, and seek out opportunities to practice their leadership skills. Thomas linked the modeling of committee leadership directly to his personal leadership development.

The key factor that contributed to my leadership development in a positive way was the modeling. It was the behaviors the effective leaders exhibited. It was the encouragements received, it was the directions, the critiques that were critical. They were supportive. Those were the pieces that impacted me positively, and I always try to think, am I doing that? Am I being that? (Thomas)

The role of leader within a committee experience, as described by participants, was filled most commonly by the committee chair but also included administrators,
superintendents, board consultants, and other committee members. Daniel, for example, spoke at length about working with and learning from a superintendent while participating in a voluntary committee.

I think being in the committee can make you a better leader because you are going to meet people there that will serve as an example for you through what they’ve done. For example, working one-on-one with a respected superintendent, where would I have had that experience if I wasn’t on the committee. She is really an amazing administrator and person, I think. So by meeting her through the committee and seeing what she does and how hard she works, that is a great experience for me. (Daniel)

Anthony described the impact of mentors and role models specifically within the context of committee work with a focus on consistency and alignment of ideas and goals. “You get that mentoring from people who have been there. You get to talk to other people in the same situation, and you are working together” (Anthony). Marianna spoke strongly about the impact of mentors, both within and beyond her committee experiences, on her leadership development. “I have had excellent mentors, excellent principals that had believed in me and gave me that sense of empowerment” (Marianna). In the following quotation, Sarah described the importance of having committee members at different stages of leadership development, learning from and helping each other.

[Y]ou do need, and I don’t know what the ratio or percentage would be of strong leaders to beginning leaders, you might want to include one or two people who are poor leaders and hope that they might learn from the experience as well. (Sarah)
The importance of role models, as expressed by the participants, was to provide demonstrations of decision making, conflict resolution, taking action, implementing policy or procedures, and leadership techniques. Learning through others’ successes and failures was seen by the participants as a common and legitimate leadership development tool. Marianna spoke at length about the importance of finding role models within any experience linked to her leadership development.

I think leadership development is how you are taught, through other leaders, so you can take courses like facilitation skills or leadership one and two, or seven habits. How mentors will share what their experiences have been, some of the barriers, and some of their vision as to how they got to where they wanted to be... The most important is the idea of emotional intelligence. EQ is something hard to come by but I also believe it is something that can be taught to people through good modeling. I go back to the fact that I’ve had good mentors. They modeled for me really good emotional intelligence and I liked the way they negotiated with people so I then want to emulate what they are modeling for me. (Marianna)

The role of a mentor in leadership development, as described by the participants, is more in-depth, personal, and involved than that of a role model. Mentors modelled behaviours, but they also provided additional support, guidance, learning opportunities, empowerment and, in some circumstances, even protection. Thomas provided a specific example of how a role model impacted his development when he said, “Looking back, that they had my back. They had seen my enthusiasm and they wanted to bolster it in that direction.” Daniel and Marianna added their voices to support the importance of mentors and the impact they have on developing leaders in the following quotations.
I will mentor him as to how it works, how the meetings are run, the kinds of things you need to do throughout the year, and then after this year I can step back and he can take it over. (Daniel)

I signed up for a lot of stuff, because people pushed me toward a lot of stuff. They said, I see this in you and I would like you to go in that direction. That kind of empowers an individual to say, hey you know what, I think I can do that. It gives you that confidence, something we try to do with students all the time. (Marianna)

Mentors often took a more personal interest in their mentee’s learning and development and work to open doors to create leadership experiences and even career advancement opportunities. Claire stated that having a mentor was a critical component in her leadership development when she said. “I believe that what is key in leadership is having the support of a mentor.” Anthony and Thomas both described their own experiences with mentors and emphasized the impact on their leadership development.

The other was the way that someone was there as a mentor for me, the way he spoke with a lot of passion, saying that you guys are really good, that you came here to volunteer, that you are making a big difference ... It was really empowering. (Anthony)

For me, those experiences helped me understand how I would like to be and, as I said at the beginning I still have a long way to go, and it is still quite uphill. But those are the kinds of leaders I try to emulate because of those [committee] experiences. Had I never had them, I think I might have been shouting from the rooftop, not to be stepping on stones to get across the river, but shouting on
rooftops saying, I've got a great idea! I've got a great idea! And never really thinking, hang on a second, who am I alienating by shouting so loud. (Thomas)

Committee Membership

The second theme, interactions with committee members, encompasses the concepts of recruitment and selection, member motivation and commitment, relationship building, and reflection and self-awareness. Anyone who has ever gone through the process of building a team for any purpose knows how challenging it can be to gather people, get them working together, keep them on task, manage the personal and political agendas, and get the job done. This section focuses on how committee members can contribute, both positively and negatively, to each other's leadership development.

Building Membership

A committee cannot exist without members. There are several different strategies for recruiting and selecting members for a committee and, as noted by the participants, each approach can have an impact on the effectiveness of the committee and the leadership development of its members. Alison advocated for a far-reaching invitation open to everyone within the board and described the importance of recruiting committee members who would bring energy and enthusiasm to the group, illustrating the potential impact on other members.

I think that providing opportunities and encouraging all people to get involved is the key. ... In the end, I would say, yes, by all means, bring your energy, bring your enthusiasm, because that is the type of the people that we need. (Alison)
Marianna, on the other hand, highlighted the challenges of working with pre-arranged groups of individuals that were chosen rather than choosing themselves to be involved with the committee.

In terms of committees, it is hard, because SO’s or chair people have in mind as to whom they would like on their team. It is hard work to gather together a team. It is a lot of work to make sure your task is met. ... You want people who are going to help make [things] happen for kids. (Marianna)

At some point in each of the interviews, all of the participants noted the existence of a relationship between the reasons for seeking out leadership development and the learning or development that took place. When the participants’ responses were combined, all of their reasons were organized into three groups based on why an individual would join a committee: (a) personal development (interested in the topic, looking for new experiences or to further their professional development); (b) recruited (approached by committee leadership, school board administrators, mentor, friends/colleagues); and (c) career development (expand skill set, improve leadership skills and experience, completing a checklist).

All of the participants identified various reasons to join a committee and some of the implications for leadership development associated with each one. When recruiting members for a committee, whether it is an open-ended process, as described in the following quotations, or more targeted, each pathway has its own advantages and disadvantages.

I think it is casting that net so in the selection process, open it up to everybody and say, hey, we are going to have this new idea. I know that is operationally a
nightmare, but you may get a diverse group of people that you would not have expected. (Marianna)

When you strike a committee, it means you are going to pull in all kinds of people and opinions and knowledge bases and skill sets, which is good, but it also means you are going to spend a lot of time listening to each others’ sides and opinions. (Sarah)

**Personal development.** The first grouping, personal development, is based on an interest in the committee coming from the individual. That interest can be in the specific committee goals, in the professional development opportunities available through committee work, or in personal career building. This is the group, according to the participants, that would bring the most passion, energy, and commitment to the committee. These are individuals who have made the choice to become involved and would most likely feel the strongest connection to the committee and its members. In the following quotes, both Anthony and Daniel expressed their personal reasons for becoming involved in voluntary committee work. “You don’t do it because they tell you to do it, you do it because it is something that you know will make a difference” (Anthony).

There has to be a committee to solve a problem. In schools and hospitals and businesses, if you have a problem, you need to form a committee to solve it. You need to talk about it, you need to talk about solutions, you need to follow a specific format of how to run your meeting, I think it is really important. If people are upset about things they need to find a solution. They need to get together with other people and they need to sort it out. If they want to run an event they need to
get a committee together and find out how they are going to get this thing happening and that thing happening. Committees are hugely important. How many meetings do we go to every week at school. It is just having the right facilitator and having the right person leading that meeting and making it worthwhile and not wasting people’s time - following an agenda for example. As a leader, you need to learn how to lead those committees. You need to learn how to lead a group of your peers without having them hate you. (Daniel)

Based on several participants echoing Anthony’s quotation above, there are people who join committees because of what the committee is working on or plans to accomplish. Teachers with a specific interest in student leadership, for example, would be drawn to a committee designed to promote student leadership. The focus is on exploring the connection between personal interests and committee interests, often with favorable outcomes for students as the end goal. The following quotations from Sarah and Claire illustrate the connections between passion and advocacy.

You want to develop leaders and you’ve got to get your team together, not everyone can be the strong leader, so you pull people who you think are going to be passionate or at least interested in the project and who are ready to take on leadership roles. (Sarah)

The people sitting on committees at board level it is like preaching to the choir. There is good news and bad news. You would like to think that those people are advocates for whatever the initiative happens to be, they are going to be driving forces back at their school. But if you also sit on a committee where everyone is
in agreement with you, then it doesn’t develop those skills to handle the what if.

(Claire)

There are people who join a committee because it provides opportunities for professional development through networking, skill building, and experiential learning, not necessarily connected to the specific goals of the committee itself. This type of experience can also revitalize an individual who may need to see beyond the classroom and gain new fresh ideas or energy. Claire spoke about the new wealth of information she was able to gain by working with other, more experienced teachers and leaders. “That gave me the opportunity then to work with teachers who were more seasoned than I was in the subject area but that also brought in a wealth of information from different parts of the province” (Claire).

On a similar note, Anthony highlighted the importance of being able to expand his understanding and experience and challenge himself to continue his leadership development.

I think some people have a much better idea of what it means to get together and work things out and speak back and forth about things that might not necessarily be attached to it. That is one thing I think I need to work on in terms of the committee stuff is just taking a step back and looking at all the different workings that go together with it in terms of how people interact, how conflicts occur, how you solve problems. Usually, I think it should be done this way, but I should be opening myself up to other ideas and enjoying it for what it is as opposed to just trying to get through it, sometimes. Just being a part of it, whether you get to the end or don’t get to the end, whether you get time to reflect on it or not, just seeing
it for what it is and looking at some of the smaller victories instead of just looking at the finished product. I think that is one thing that I would benefit more from in terms of the experience, but I think it is always a good thing to get involved in other things and look at things in different ways and challenging yourself in different ways and trying to improve the things you need to work on. (Anthony)

**Recruited.** The second grouping, recruited, is based on an interest in the individual from someone connected to the school board or the committee leadership. In this case, participants talked about two different types of connections: (a) someone with a strong personal/professional connection to a senior person within the board, or (b) someone who had been identified as having a particular skill or potential by committee leadership or friends/colleagues who are already part of the committee membership.

Both Claire and Thomas described specific instances when they were each recruited to join a voluntary committee.

I am going to say, one of the biggest contributors [to my leadership development], and this will go back almost about 10 years ago, was the encouragement from the current principal. It was something as simple as a note being put in my mailbox saying, I think you should consider this. And what “this” was, was an invitation to be part of a [voluntary committee]. (Claire)

It is not somebody who has been anointed, it is somebody who has been asked, would you share because you’re good. We’ve heard about you, because you’re good. That to me, I feel very confident with that. Do I have complete faith in it? Not any more than I have complete faith in anything. (Thomas)

Participants referred to the process of being chosen by a senior school board
official to participate in a committee, often known as sponsorship, as “being tapped” and provided three reasons why an individual would be tapped. The reasons are: (a) that person is known for doing exemplary work, (b) that person is known as a person who gets the job done, and (c) that person has demonstrated strong leadership potential. Clark spoke directly to the issue when stating that administrators should be looking for opportunities to provide leadership development to potential leaders on staff.

People who are administrators or who have influence at the board should be looking at their staff or at peers or their workers and saying these people are demonstrating talents or attributes that I think should be leaders at the board, and those people, we’re going to go tap them on the shoulder and say, would you consider, what do you think about this, would you be interested in trying something different or doing something. (Clark)

Whatever the connection, these individuals may or may not have an interest in the goals of the committee, they may feel they are being pressured to be a part of the committee, or they could be strongly interested in the leadership development opportunities they present. Alison and Marianna, having been tapped on a number of occasions in their careers, expressed the down side of the process in the following quotations.

It is always the same characters at the school, just like on the committees that I am involved with, we know each other. That is the same struggle even with the students that we get involved in leadership. You are preaching to the converted. If you want results you have to get the right people involved and that is why sometimes we are asked to do this because they know we’ll do it. They don’t
really care where it goes, they just know that we will do what needs to be done now. Get that check mark and then move on. If something comes of it, we are just left in the dust. They carry the ball, they take the credit. Or, at other times, it just fizzes out. I know that is a very cynical point of view, but in my experience, more often than not, that is what happens. (Alison)

I think it is just a different way of gathering the players. I shouldn’t speak because I was one of those people who was kind of selected as opposed to having a wide out invitation. I think that would lessen the resentment that some people feel at the school level, when asked why do you get chosen and I don’t? I have heard that too, and I’m not sure if others in this interview process have heard that. I’ve had people say to me, why do you get to go to that conference and I don’t? That puts you in an awkward position as a staff member because, again, our political federation model is that no one should be tapped on the shoulder. That means that you are special and you don’t want to be special in this board when you are a teacher, you just want to be one of the regular guys. (Marianna)

Thomas warned about the negativity that could arise from an individual feeling he or she cannot say no to being tapped for committee work when he stated that, “Sometimes you would get that negativity where people would feel like they had to sit in this committee or felt that they were just going through the motions.”

Marianna also described a negative experience she had with an individual who was tapped to join a committee.

I have heard people say to me in the past, that I was told to pick a project and flog it. My reaction was, wow, that is really something you really believe in and they
said, no, I was just told to pick something and flog it so that when I get into the interview I could tell them what I did. I think I have a little bit of trouble with that one. (Marianna)

Depending on the situation, these individuals could have a huge impact, positive or negative, on the leadership development of the rest of the committee members. In the following quotations, Alison and Clark describe some of the challenges related to tapping individuals for leadership development.

Some teachers may want an opportunity but might be intimidated or are just not known. When people are tapped on the shoulder to do something, other people might really appreciate the opportunity while the people that are tapped might not want to do it. You have to pick the right people. We were even talking about why some committees don’t have student representation on them. That is yet another perspective that could be brought to the table. When we look at the bottom line, a lot of the time it is student success. Who better understands students better than students themselves. (Alison)

You’ve got to start tapping people, but maybe that doesn’t solve the issue, because if everybody thinks and processes information the same way at the administrative level, the people they’re tapping to be successful, most likely, will be people like themselves. (Clark)

An interesting point raised by several participants was the idea that the people doing the tapping needed to consider the impact of seeking out fewer active leaders for these experiences and increasing the number of potential leaders so that they could grow through these leadership development opportunities. Sarah expressed a strong belief that
committees need a mix of veteran and novice leaders in their membership in order to maximize leadership development opportunities, when she said, "You would obviously have to involve people who are ripe for leadership but are not there yet." Alison supported and expanded on the same concept.

The other thing is we have to do as a system, find a way to reach out to the followers rather than the leaders, because I think too much emphasis is placed on providing opportunities and honing the leadership skills of the leaders, so essentially, you are preaching to the converted. We need to find ways to reach out to the followers and make them realize that some of them can be leaders, or leaders that don't know they are leaders, or leaders that are leaders in the wrong way. (Alison)

In the following quotation, Daniel spoke specifically to the need for people in the leadership development process to be aware of how long they stay on a particular committee with the same group of members and look for new experiences to both challenge themselves and provide opportunities for others to gain valuable experience.

I definitely think that by running a committee you will gain tons of experience. Maybe sometimes it won't be positive, but if you don't try you aren't going to learn. I think committees are definitely worthwhile, but after a while you kind of want to move on to something else. If you do the same thing year after year after year you get really bored of it. They need new people, I would rather move on to something new and different. I think I have been involved in some things for enough years now and I am ready to move on. They need new leaders with a fresh set of eyes who would try new things. I don't think you should be in one
committee for too long, you need to try new things and move on to give somebody else a chance too. (Daniel)

**Career development.** The third grouping, career development, is based on an interest by the individual in developing his or her career through the experience to be gained in a voluntary committee. As illustrated by both Alison and Thomas’s quotations below, there are people who join committees as a way to build their career, improve their leadership skills and, in some instances, gain a necessary experience to advance their careers. A distinction was made by participants between career builders, individuals who have spent time analyzing their career path and building the skills to follow it, and careerists, individuals who follow a checklist that must be completed for them to move up the ladder.

[Being on a committee] is good for networking, [it] puts me in touch with people that maybe are in positions of influence, so if I decide down the road to pursue a certain avenue, that I know who to talk to and they know me, I am not a stranger to them, just a name on a piece of paper, that certainly can help. I think that people have a lot to teach me and to offer me, as I to them. (Alison)

In being in a number of different committees at the board level, as I mentioned before, I saw the two planes exist: the careerist and the human. I was impacted by recognizing that, once again, some people were there for the careerist road and others were there for a far deeper, richer experience. (Thomas)

In the case of the skill builders, committee work provided opportunities for expanding existing networks, gaining practical leadership experience, filling gaps in knowledge and experience, and continuing to build a solid resume. This type of practical
experience also provided a chance to explore and reflect on career paths and choices. Alison spoke candidly about using voluntary committee work as a way to lay a foundation for possible future advancement through networking and skill development. Obviously, this experience would help me. It kind of paves the way for certain paths that I might wish to pursue. For example, if hypothetically, I wanted to become an administrator, these experiences would help me move towards that goal because that is the type of thing they are looking for and the kind of people they are hiring. What kind of experience do you have in leadership? What kind of leadership do you have at the system level as well as in the school and outside in the community? (Alison)

Also within this grouping, as described by participants, were the careerists, individuals who were focused solely on career development and had formulated or been given a checklist of experiences needed to move them up the ladder. In the following quotes, Sarah and Anthony are of opposing views on the issue. “I think the problem is that people will sit on committees just to build their profile. That is huge” (Sarah).

I think, having a checklist, because you are doing something and you have those competencies, it helps you, at the end of it, in terms of what that committee is going to do. The board has certain ideas of what makes a good leader. (Anthony)

These individuals were described as most likely not having a strong connection or commitment to the committee goals or outcomes. Participants voiced mostly negative opinions about this type of committee member and described such individuals as having a negative impact on leadership development for the rest of the committee. The concept of a “checklist” of experiences required to advance into administration is one mentioned by
7 of the 8 participants numerous times, and in all but one of the instances, with negative connotations toward leadership development. Clark, Marianna, and Daniel expressed the strongest opinions about the negative impact of joining a voluntary committee to check off a box on a checklist and call it leadership development. “There are people seeking committees because the checklist, so I gotta go find a committee, is it going to be one at my school or the board, I gotta go out and find a committee” (Clark).

I don’t think being nice is bad. I’ve found that the checklist doesn’t breed nice, it breeds “done.” Done does not always translate into good relationships... It is not about this personal agenda to say, done, I’ve done system committee X and now I am ready, and I’ve fostered a relationship with superintendent Y and I know he is on the hiring committee so I am in for sure. (Marianna)

There are definitely people on the committees that are there just to pad their resume for sure. I don’t think that is a good thing at all. They aren’t taking ownership. If they are just in it to pad their resume and check off a box, they are not buying into the goal, the purpose of the committee. (Daniel)

Thomas raised the question of expectations linked to leadership development in an organization that promotes the use of a checklist as described by the participants.

In a sense, being in a large organization where there are many opportunities for people to be careerist, or to take another route, it helps you understand that for the people on a careerist route, you might find yourself just having people show up for meetings, doing what is basically necessary so their name is on the list. That is all you can expect from that, and why should one expect more? (Thomas)
**Member diversity.** The participants highlighted the importance of having a diverse representation of members and the impact it has on leadership development opportunities. Diversity encompassed factors such as age, teaching experience, leadership experience, and position or role within the school board. In the following quotation, Alison stressed the importance of diversity within the committee membership in order to provide as many different perspectives as possible.

I would like to have as diverse a group as possible, to represent as many diverse perspectives as I could possibly get related to a given issue, whatever that ultimate goal is. You have to be careful, because there is the old saying, too many cooks in the kitchen. Too many people can bog things down, but I think that would be an important piece in assembling the people on the committee. (Alison)

Claire spoke about the importance of having a mix of experienced and inexperienced leaders, along with both effective and ineffective leaders to provide an opportunity for growth through observation, discussion, and shared experiences.

It is important to have that diversity. If we are going to select people on a committee who are like ourselves, then we almost know what the outcome will be before we even start. It will look like something we, ourselves, would have produced... [W]e have got to bring younger teachers on board. I think, what I would try and avoid would be too many people with the same general years of experience teaching with similar backgrounds in committee work. If we are to mentor younger people need an opportunity to develop those leadership skills. ... I think it is important that you always keep that blend of those that are there that have some experience and background, and have people that are at the
intermediate stage, and those that we would look at as newcomers coming on board. So that as people continue to move through, at some point, those that are the newcomers now, will be the ones holding the information and the history and bringing other new people on board. (Claire)

Participants talked about having a wide range of age and teaching experience within the committee membership bringing different types of energy, technical knowledge, perspectives, experiences, and opinions leading to an exchange of skills and ideas as well as the foundation for mentoring relationships. The value of relationships between committee members was stressed repeatedly as a way to network, share ideas and knowledge, discuss and reflect on a wide variety of topics, and assist each other's leadership development. They also described the advantages of having a school board representative sitting on the committee to provide direction, support, career connections, mentoring and role modeling, a system perspective, and assurances for follow through, while not taking direct control of the committee. Marianna, in particular, expressed the important role played by a senior school board administrator in a voluntary committee while also noting the impact on the dynamic of the group.

I think from that structural perspective, as well, it is important that superintendents are there, because I think in a lot of ways, they have a direction that we don't know about. They receive information from the ministry or through the director as to where they want things to go. It gives it a little more leverage, when there is someone there to say, I am just an observer. We have a chair and I am just here to listen to the conversation and see how things are going. It would certainly kill some of the momentum if the SO was in charge... When there is that
person, an SO or a system principal, who is very top down, who just really does want people on the committee to agree and to make it go quicker. It is just about being critical friends. That we are going to have a conversation and say, yeah that might work, that might not work. There is nothing wrong with people facilitating as leaders, but I think it doesn’t work at the committee level when they are just telling you what they want you to do. At that point you are just a drone, you’re not really a committee member anymore. (Marianna)

**Motivation and Commitment**

The previous section described some of the reasons why people choose, or were chosen, to join a committee within the context of recruitment. This section will focus more specifically on the motivations, as perceived by the participants, behind the decision to join and stay with a committee. Participants spoke about the challenges of getting members to attend meetings because of busy schedules and multiple commitments. Both Daniel and Alison stressed the need to make meetings worthwhile in the following quotations, keeping the focus on goals and outcomes as much as possible, and linking everything to the positive impact on students.

There has to be something being said at those meetings that is worthwhile and helpful to them, so make sure that the agenda speaks to them. That is what we do with a committee I am involved with right now, the agenda comes from the members and our attendance is better because of that. We don’t let people come to speak to the committee that don’t have a direct connection to the goals of the committee. You have to make it a worthwhile process. There has to be point or you are going to lose people very quickly. (Daniel)
I see committees as a good thing, but, it is hard to get certain people involved because of time, because of philosophies, some people don’t believe in committees. I think a challenge would be to have whatever work the committee is trying to achieve, trying to embed that whether it is the classroom, school, or system, to embed these ultimate goals to wherever they need to be, that is the challenge. That goes back to what I was saying earlier, one of the difficulties or pitfalls of committees, a lot of times you have great ideas and great concepts that are put on paper and just sit there and never go anywhere from there. I also think about what a waste of resources that is, not only from the time perspective, but financial as well. I have been trained in a number of things over the years that I have actually never been asked or given the opportunity to share with anyone, including my own staff. (Alison)

Considering the difficulties associated with recruiting and holding on to committee members, it is not surprising that participants spoke at length about the significance of motivation and commitment and their impact on leadership development. Alison spoke openly about her selfish motivations for seeking out leadership opportunities in the following quotation.

Why am I a leader, because it makes me feel good. From a selfish point of view, it makes me feel good because I feed off the positivity that other people are feeling and they can’t get that unless I am doing my job properly as a leader, as a mentor, as a teacher. (Alison)

Claire spoke from her personal passion and urged anyone else considering becoming involved with voluntary committee work to do the same.
To any colleague, I would say, seize the moment. If the opportunity presents itself for you to be involved in a committee or in a leadership role where you have the passion, pursue it. If you are doing it only because it is a checkmark against one of the many requirements, then stop and ask yourself, how effectively you are going to contribute to that committee. (Claire)

In the following quotation, Thomas directly linked his committee involvement with his development as a leader. “It just felt like getting involved in a leadership capacity, or being in a leadership environment, that that was more or less its purpose and my function in it was either to lead or learn how to” (Thomas).

While Thomas focused on his own leadership development, Alison spoke more to new teachers and the pros and cons of committee involvement as they begin their leadership journey.

Some people get involved for the wrong reasons. Some people are doing it to just pad their resume. There are people who are in it for the right reasons and they are paranoid that people might think they are in it for the wrong reasons. Unfortunately for young teachers they are more impressionable, they have high energy, they are very naïve, and so they can be persuaded to do things that more veteran teachers might think twice about becoming involved with. That is the negative, the positive is that being involved in these committees broadens their horizons and gives them experiences that can translate into the classroom, their own teaching, their relationships to their colleagues and admin, can open doors for them, and just make them more well rounded people. (Alison)

Several participants stated their belief that individuals being open, honest, and
aware of their individual motivations had a positive impact on relationship building, commitment, and follow through, and by extension, leadership development. Throughout the interview, Thomas was very direct and open about his personal leadership journey and the discoveries, insights, and reflections he had made along the way. One such reflection, focusing on his motivations for leaving the classroom in search of leadership opportunities, was captured in this quotation.

Over time I thought, I can do this okay, I am pretty good at [teaching], so what’s next? That is where this came from. It wasn’t hubris. It wasn’t, well, now I will be a vice-principal and that is what I’ve always wanted! I never wanted this. My being here is an answer to the question, well now what? Once I started asking that question, I was receiving the answer, spend time on a board level committee, take courses, go and do this and that, and I remember thinking, okay, hoop jumping. That kept me away from doing this for a number of years. I thought, I am tired of working for hoop jumpers because I’ve worked for them for 18 years, in various different schools. I’ve seen the hoop jumpers and they weren’t that good. They were good at jumping hoops, but they weren’t that good at leading. (Thomas)

Clark focused more on the motivations of other committee members he had worked with in a variety of situations and was very clear on how he felt about following a checklist to move into a leadership position.

The problem with the checklist is that it’s not a guideline, it’s like a checklist, so if it was a guideline with things that we think you should do to be a leader then people might be more honest with themselves and with the group. But when it’s a checklist, I’m going to go join that for a year, and that’s it. At the next checklist,
for the next level you have to run a group or run a meeting that involves teachers, a superintendent, and principals... [that is] where I think leadership fails. When they’re going through that checklist, how does that develop a leader? So you can run a meeting, well you know what, again, there’s a million ways to teach that, I don’t think that teaches leadership, all you did was teach them that they can run a meeting that isn’t important. (Clark)

Participants stressed the relationship between being open and honest about the reasons for joining a committee and the development of trust, rapport, and relationship, and how that, in turn is linked to leadership development. Anthony directly addressed this point in the following quotation.

I would say those are two things that are really important, trust and being able to be open with people and making them feel really comfortable. When you can do that and create that rapport people are willing to go that extra mile. (Anthony)

Clark provided a specific example from his own experience describing a situation where he felt he was being lied to by someone in an official leadership capacity, resulting in his developing a negative view of the leadership development process within the school board.

They become their own worst enemy because here you are talking, and for the rest of the people around the table maybe they will believe that, because they don’t know who you are, but I’ve been around and I know who you are, I’ve worked with you when you were a teacher and now I work under you and I know you don’t do this. So as a leader you are lying to me... When you get into that group [of formal leaders], I find, that they all talk this game, but this is the game
that the policies laid out, this is the game where we’re going to say, this is what we want, oh, it’s all about the kids, these standard lines that make me choke, because it is more than that, it is more than just about the kids, it’s also about us.

(Clark)

He went on to further describe a situation within a committee that became a revolving door for people using the committee experience to check off a box to forward their career.

In the first year it seemed to me that everybody in the group were people who were going to become VPs so there was a real slant towards teacher bashing but also towards, this is what I have to do for a year to check that off my list, and then all those people left. I think some of the problems are that when you put this one year thing out there, like how many people are joining committees because they just want to be a future leader, but not really want to join the committee for the long haul. Do you want to join for 5 years or just do your 1 year and out. What happens when you have that, you have this turn over, and that one project that should take no more than a couple of months to do, takes 2 years to do because every semester you’re reeducating everybody on what you are doing and you change the parameters. (Clark)

When the topic of motivation came up across all of the interviews, each participant spoke about his or her reasons for wanting to develop as leaders or for seeking out leadership roles, and often mentioned how other staff members and colleagues would question the honesty of their motivations creating an uncomfortable situation. Alison captured the essence of that concept in the following quotation.
I think the answer is obvious, even me, when you asked me that question, I wasn’t comfortable answering it because of how it could be construed by some individuals. People even ask me at work, why do you do these committees, you’re busy enough? Why do you do them? Oh, oh, you are a climber aren’t you! And I hate that, especially now since the days of Mike Harris, the relationship between admin and the staff has been tarnished irreparably. There is a mutual distrust, and so now when some people might be labeling me as a ladder climber it makes me very uncomfortable and to some extent I think it has compromised my relationship with some people on staff. That th{injures my ability to become an effective leader down the road. Even now, if I am asked to do some PD with my staff, it is like yeeuk, now we have to listen to this guy and his crap again, here we go. (Alison)

**Relationship Building**

The participants highlighted the importance of trust to relationships and linked relationships to leadership development in terms of learning from each other, working together to gain a better understanding of leadership, and creating a sense of community and shared leadership. In the following quotations, Anthony and Marianna described the impact that relationships have on leadership development. They explored the potency of putting in the time and effort to build positive mentoring relationships that are based on passion, integrity, and realistic expectations and the skills sets and outcomes that were enhanced through those relationship-based experiences.

[H]e spoke with a lot of passion, saying that you guys are really good, that you came here to volunteer, that you are making a big difference… It was really
empowering. It made me think that I really was making a difference with what I was doing. When he was speaking about those things it was really great to know that he valued what people were talking about, and you could see how happy the people were... Just being positive is a really good thing. You give more of yourself when you think you have a relationship with the leader, if he is a good guy, you can tell him anything... When it comes to dealing with group members, whether it is voluntary or not, it goes back to celebrating what they are doing. You have to show appreciation for what they are doing because it is extra and it is a lot of work. You have to constantly say to these people, you are doing a great job. It might be frustrating, it might be tough, just like with the kids, but you have to keep plugging away at it and when we get to the end of it we are going to celebrate this, it is going to be a positive thing whether it works really well or it falls flat on its face. Then you move on from there, I think that is really important. (Anthony)

It is interesting that the best teachers, and I am not saying I am the best teacher, but good teachers are also good committee members. They know how to negotiate relationships because they do it all the time in their classrooms. They are constantly doing that quid pro quo with students. I will give you this if you give me that, I’ll do this if you do that. Sure you can go on the computer for ten minutes but after class I want to see that work done. Or, we are going to do this today, then tomorrow you can choose. Or, you can choose from these activities and it is the same on a committee. Fine, I don’t think we should do it at Liuna station, let’s do it at Karmen’s instead, big deal. Unless you have had a chance to
practice that skill set you get onto that committee and you are kind of lost. So I think the committee experience is good. (Marianna)

Participants linked passion, trustworthiness, and commitment to their understanding of effective leadership and highlighted how observing and working with individuals who share these traits can contribute to personal leadership development. The following quotations are excerpts from Sarah, Daniel, and Thomas, each of whom described at length the impacts on their own leadership development, both positive and negative, of watching the leaders and members of committees as they worked together over time.

(P)eople are motivated by an extrinsic reward. If you want to be a leader you are going to make sure that you follow through and make sure that you do what you need to do to satisfy the committee’s needs so that you can check your boxes... People will follow through, are they passionate about it, do they always make the right choices? Not necessarily. Their heart may not be in it and they are just on the committee to satisfy the checking of the box. (Sarah)

(W)e definitely saw some people that weren’t there for the right reasons. Those people are there one year and then gone the next, so it is pretty obvious.... I don’t think that is a good thing. I think you should want to be there and be interested in what you are doing. The work sometimes falls down on other people, so that is not always good for the people that are there to really help the kids and help out around the board. (Daniel)

“People were dying off as a result of curbed enthusiasm ... I felt a little whittled away by the fact that optimism never quite always reared its face with a smile” (Thomas).
Reflection and Self-Awareness

In addition to considering the relationships they had with others in their voluntary committee experiences, all of the participants also expressed the importance of both reflection and self-awareness as a part of the leadership development process. They described using the reflective process, both individually and as a group with shared committee experiences, to gain insight into complex issues and situations, to develop strategies for improving skills, decision making, and goal setting, and to avoid making or repeating mistakes. Reflection was described as an essential tool for becoming a better leader. Several participants also noted the impact of peer feedback and critique as part of the reflective process, stressing the need for honest and critical feedback for leadership development. Marianna provided an insight into the importance of reflection when she described herself going through the process when considering the effectiveness of her own leadership style.

Is reflection important, absolutely yes. I think committing it to paper, you should be able to say, on paper, I’ve seen this happen and I’ve realized that, that is not the way one goes about a conflict, and this is what I’ve learned and this is how I solved it. That is what we ask students to do all the time, is to reflect. In coming to school, because I’m new, and I said to my principal, who is also new, in the past I’ve made lots of mistakes with people, lots of mistakes in terms of how to get people to follow you. I’ve said to people, either you’re on the bus or you’re not with us. Then I realized, you don’t say that to people because they’re not there, you’re here and they’re back here and instead of helping them understand where you want them to go, I was very heavy handed with them. Thinking back,
reflecting, no wonder they didn’t follow. Who is going to follow a leader like that? They are not in the process, they don’t understand it, they don’t have a shared vision of what it is. So they become defiant, the same way anybody else would. I think you have to look back and say, you can’t do it that way. It doesn’t work. (Marianna)

Thomas also provided a glimpse into his personal reflective process as he described the impacts of his perceptions of becoming a leader within the school board.

If I could only have changed my perception sooner, I would have had a more comfortable approach to moving my sense of leadership along from a sense of real criticism of the process to a greater sense of introspection on a positive level that allowed me to move ahead with it. (Thomas)

Participants spoke about self-awareness in terms of decision making, motivation, skills development, and leadership development. Thomas, Alison, and Clark, in the following quotations, stressed the importance of examining personal motivations, strengths and weaknesses, and decision-making processes throughout the leadership development process. Thomas described a situation where a group of teachers came to him for advice on how to prepare to move into administration.

The first question I asked was, do you know yourself? Have you had a good long look in the mirror? I’m not kidding, have you closed the door to the bathroom and taken a good long look in the mirror and talked to yourself. Do you know who you are? Do you have a good sense of why you want to do this? Are you prepared for the answer to come out your mouth that may be sitting in your head? Do you really really know why you are doing it? (Thomas)
Alison spoke openly about the need for self-awareness, even at the cost of time, described by all of the participants as the most precious commodity, as a critical tool for leadership development regardless of the specific leadership destination.

What a lot of this training does is teach you how to use tools to better analyze yourself and the people around you, to know what to do to empower them. I think that is an important quality to have. Once you have a greater understanding of yourself I feel that it empowers you to be able to do whatever you want in some respects. Admin would be one, a system level job is another one perhaps, or maybe leaving teaching altogether, I don’t know, what the future holds. But definitely, I am gaining through these experiences even though it is a bit of a sacrifice on my time. The benefits far outweigh any cons that I might have to experience. (Alison)

Clark talked about the value of learning your strengths and weaknesses using whatever sources are available, whether it is through internal reflection or external feedback.

So to me, there are two phases to leadership, there is the one that is your own personal, whatever your personal goals are, how you view yourself and your own environment, and then there’s the people who in some ways control your career, so how do they view you and do they see you… To me, I think, as a person, you need to know your strengths and weaknesses. And work with your strengths and try to improve your weaknesses but sometimes you have to accept that they are your weaknesses and go somewhere else. Find a person who has that strength and work with them. (Clark)
Committee Structure

The second theme drawn from the data was the impact of interactions between committee members. Participants spoke about the essential role played by relationship building between committee members in leadership development and highlighted the need for trust, mutual respect and support, and shared leadership. The third theme, the impact of committee structure, encompasses the concepts of processes and procedures, effective communication, and board support and follow-through. Every participant relayed a story or anecdote that added to the development of this theme. Each felt strongly about the impact, either positive or negative, that structure or lack of structure, communication or lack of communication, and especially support, or lack of support, had on their leadership development.

Processes and Procedures

Participants spoke passionately about the need for a process to govern the workings of the committee in order to create, maintain, and accomplish goals. Sarah and Anthony both spoke frequently about the importance of working to successfully accomplish goals and the need to recognize the importance of process within the committee structure as it impacts leadership development. Sarah described one of the functions of leadership as being responsible for developing a plan of action. “All leadership, whether the project is huge or little, the steps are pretty close to the same, you have to identify your starting point, you have to develop your plan and your goals and all that stuff” (Sarah). She later went on to describe the messiness that happens between the forming of the plan and the implementation.
There needs to be a careful plan laid out so that the goal can be achieved and the messiness, that I like to refer to, can be taken away.... I know that there is a plan somewhere in place. There is always a plan... But what happens between the onset of the plan and the reality of what transpires, there is a whole big fat mess in there. I don’t have all the answers to how to get it to be un-messy, my guess is we need just a little bit more planning and probably fewer people. (Sarah)

During the interview, Sarah also provided a specific example of a committee experience where the committee leadership did not have a plan, and as a result, nothing was accomplished and, according to Sarah, no leadership development took place.

There hasn’t been a lot of, okay, this is what you are going to do, and this is what you are going to do, and what other needs do we see. I am thinking of a couple of committees that I have been on like that, where there hasn’t been any leadership development opportunity because we didn’t actually do anything. (Sarah)

Anthony also highlighted the responsibility of the leader to be responsible for the planning process and focused on the need to share the control or leadership with the committee members to increase their involvement and skill development.

As the leader you need to be the person that does a little bit more and tries to direct things, but first and foremost you want to get everybody involved. A leader can also be part of the process, to be involved, without leading the process or trying to control the process. It is nice to see people have the same sort of skill set, or want to develop those skills, getting like minded people together. (Anthony)

He went on to describe his personal committee experiences and reflected on his own leadership development in terms of being a part of the overall process.
In terms of the committees that I have been on in the past, it is always a process. I am a person that is usually really task-oriented, I want to get stuff done in the most efficient way possible. Sometimes I tend to get frustrated with things that are happening or aren’t happening. But there is a bigger thing out there sometimes that maybe I don’t get, in terms of what is going on with the people I see in committees. It is voluntary but it is still a part of your profession and it is still usually business oriented so sometimes you miss a lot of the human aspect of it that goes into different committees and different things that are going on.

Sometimes I think that I forget about that. (Anthony)

Anthony also described his frustration at times when the process bogged down in the planning stage and never reached implementation.

We are not going to talk about what we can’t do right now, we’re not going to talk about what we can do, this is what we are focused on, this is the goal that we have set for ourselves, we are going to work on it. I think a lot times we get bogged down in talking about what we plan on wanting to do and not doing it. I think in terms of when you are trying to get something done, the whole thing is a process, it is not just the plan, it is doing it all, and then it is ending it and then after that you have got to reflect on it. A lot of times we just get bogged down in the start and it never really gets anywhere and that is another one of my frustrations.

(Anthony)

While there was no unilateral agreement as to what that process should be, it was consistently supported by participants that some sort of process should be in place.

Several participants highlighted the value of working subcommittees as a vehicle for
increasing opportunities for leadership development as part of an effective committee structure. Marianna described the working subcommittees as where the committee work actually takes place.

[S]ubcommittees have to break off from there. I think that the main work is coming from all the subcommittees, so we are getting time to branch off and do our own thing and then we go back and report... Everybody has to know what all the subcommittees are doing because it helps to inform everything that is happening. (Marianna)

Thomas described the subcommittees as a tool for even further leadership development.

Being on those committees and watching and listening to how other people chaired them. On a subcommittee we’d say, okay, there is the direction here, how do we want to proceed. It was those leaders that took that enthusiasm and allowed the people to grow, with a sense of direction in terms of pushing them to be all they could possibly be and catching them when they fell. Showing them, here is why this might not work at this time, but let’s see how it can. Those are the people that I found were the true leaders because they had the greater picture in mind. They never diminished the enthusiasm of their participants. (Thomas)

Other participants spoke about the need for a strong facilitator to keep the committee on track. Sarah, in particular, stressed the importance of someone within the committee taking on a coordinator position. “I think you might need just someone, maybe a coordinator position, where you take a really big idea and coordinate and facilitate it and make it just nice and easy for the people who are delivering your idea” (Sarah).
Claire, while agreeing with Sarah's point of having a facilitator, stressed the need for specific strategies being developed for task management and collaboration.

For our first meeting I introduced them to the seven norms of collaboration.

Afterwards, meaning by about 3 months later, I had some of the people on the committee say to me, you know when you first did that I wondered why is she spending the time doing this? But we’re so glad that you did, because it set for us just an understanding of mutual respect. We may not always agree on every topic, but as long as we can be professional and respect one another’s viewpoints and debate or discuss it knowing we are all professionals and knowing that we all truly want the same results, then we will be okay. That worked! (Claire)

What they all had in common, however, was the link between recognizing the need for a process and becoming a better leader. Anthony expressed the concept succinctly in the following quotation.

I think the first thing you need is people that are able to communicate effectively and are honest and task oriented. They have to be able to look at a situation and say, where are we going to go with this and what do we have to put together, so that what we are doing is going to have an impact in some way, shape, or form. You need to have some organization. People that are there need to be able to separate those tasks into workable parts so that you can do this and I can do that, and again they have to work collaboratively. (Anthony)

While many of the participants also noted the necessity for a transparent decision-making process, it was Clark who placed the most emphasis on this point and linked it to his leadership development.
I like it when I can see into the process of decision making. I don’t have to be the
decision maker, but I like to see how or why people are making decisions...In that
budget committee I could see why decisions were being made. So when you go to
a meeting and people are just yip-yapping about, I can’t get this, or I can’t get
that, like there’s somebody magically holding back a bunch of money because he
didn’t want that. You start to see the process, well, this money has to be allotted
for this, and this, and that. You can start to see that there are decisions being
made... that committee, by opening up so I could see for myself, allowed me to
see the process of thinking behind the decision making, and that helped me out.

(Clark)

Effective Communication

Communication was identified by the participants as a key to creating and
maintaining an effective committee structure as well as an essential component of
leadership development. Participants described communication in terms of the openness
of communication pathways between members and placed a great deal of emphasis on
creating a platform where individual voices could be heard, where everyone has the
opportunity for input, and where the importance of listening was recognized as being a
vital part of the leadership development process. Sarah strongly stressed the importance
of active listening as a key component of leadership development as shown in the
following quotation.

What I found is, the reason why committees help build good leadership skills is
that you have to just do that, you have to just zip up and listen and make people
feel valued... Everybody has some skill, or experience, or knowledge set that you have to listen to. That, as a leader is really really key in managing people. (Sarah)

Claire echoed Sarah’s point and added the importance of communication being engaging to the entire committee membership with a strong link to the decision-making process.

Through open communication and a lot of it, and not only open, but honest, open and honest communication and engaging others... I felt it was important for people to feel that they were being heard and that their concerns were legit and that they had a fairly safe venue to express their concerns. From that point, basically validating, you’ve had your opportunity to share, and based on the feedback though that people have given us, we will move forward. (Claire)

Anthony took it even a step further when he described the role of the committee leadership as a facilitator of the communication process, making sure that everyone feels welcome to speak and has a chance to be heard.

The teachers were really forthcoming in the discussions. There are no right or wrong answers, everyone has an opportunity to speak about something and no one is judging, that all puts you at ease. Sometimes if you go to these things and you an inexperienced teacher or you’ve been around a long time but maybe this is something new to you, there is a lot of anxiety. As a leader it is good to make sure that everyone is at ease and on the same page. When everyone is able to say something without being worried about looking foolish or something like that, people will give more as opposed to sitting back a little bit. It is really important to make sure everyone feels welcome and valued and it is free from judgment or worry that you are doing or saying the right thing. (Anthony)
Several participants also spoke at length about the importance of using technology as a communication tool to increase the effectiveness of the message going out, and the impact technology could have on developing future leaders. Clark spoke about the use of familiar technologies, like First Class, a piece of electronic communication software common to school boards in Ontario, being used more effectively. “I look at things like First Class, there are mediums there that can be used to promote things and they are getting better” (Clark).

Anthony spoke at length about being creative when using any type of technology, even something as commonplace as Powerpoint, a piece of presentation software, to bring fresh ideas and concepts to increase the effectiveness of the medium.

There are a lot of different ways you can put this information forward, you need to be creative and look outside the traditional method of doing things. A lot of times you go to committees and there is a Powerpoint and you are reading the exact same notes from the Powerpoint and filling out the same feedback form about the Powerpoint. You’ve got to shake it up sometimes when you are talking to people… Of course, the trick is how do you do that, given the limited amount of time and resources you have, or the committee has? A lot of times you get so overwhelmed by what you have to do all the time, especially with something voluntary. You have to be ready to put that commitment into it when you say you are. That is one of the toughest things you have to balance. The biggest things would be creativity, effective communication and organization, and being honest. (Anthony)

Alison focused her comments more on the impact of younger educators becoming
involved in committee work and leadership development with an entirely new set of technology skills and experiences that need to be considered.

They are just coming in and being younger, we are talking about kids that are born into technology. We are the last generation that was not born into technology. Some of these kids are now coming up and joining the teaching ranks. Just to bring that perspective alone into any kind of committee is invaluable. (Alison)

**Board Support and Follow Through**

All of the participants stressed the importance of school board support for voluntary board level committees and their impact on leadership development. They identified three distinct areas that include (a) communication pathways, (b) timelines, and (c) follow through. Each of these areas was described by participants as having both positive and negative impacts on their committee experience, their leadership development, and on their level of involvement within the board, and several even noted the impact of these factors on their future career choices. The following quotation from Marianna illustrated her reaction to the Director of Education showing up at a committee meeting and showing his support.

[T]he director showed up and he spoke and his message was very clear, this is what I believe. He walked around and said hello to people and then he left. He didn’t take over the session, he was just there to greet and tell people he valued that they were taking the time... It was good, it was fun. (Marianna)

While Marianna was uplifted by the presence of a board representative, this second quotation from Alison illustrated the level of her frustration at the lack of support and
follow through from the school board. “Upon reflection, what a waste and when I talked to my colleagues… it was the same answer, what a waste of time and money…. That is the frustrating and disheartening part.”

**Communication pathways.** Communication between the school board, the various board level committees, and, ultimately, the classroom was identified as an important issue. In situations where the communication between the school board and the committees had been open, effective, and timely, the committees were more likely to reach their goals and implement strategies, events, and initiatives. Problems with communication often lead to frustration, finger pointing, and a lack of consistency with vision, goal setting, and follow through. Committee members felt frustrated that they were wasting their time, and that they were being asked to hit a moving target in terms of school board vision and expectations. In the following quotation, Alison emphasized the need for a clear process for communication pathways that touched on all levels of the education system.

There needs to be a clear, transparent process with accountability at all levels for information to filter its way down, all the way down to the classroom... Part of the problem is communication. Something, an idea, a concept, a new initiative, whatever, comes out and this is our new direction, here are our goals. It starts from the top and flows down. (Alison)

A large number of participants expressed concern over the poor communication that existed between the school board and the committees and described communication breakdowns as inevitable with a lack of consistency in vision and outcomes as a result. Both Alison and Daniel expressed this idea in the following quotations. “[S]ome boards
think the communication breakdown would start at the top, and others think it starts at the bottom, and still others think it happens somewhere in the middle. It is always happening somewhere” (Alison).

I find with our board, communication is so poor... It doesn't need to be that way. Is it the people at the board? The special assignment teachers, the consultants, that need to organize those things a bit better. I don't know whose fault it is. (Daniel)

**Timelines and follow through.** Timelines, as described by the participants, focus on the amount of time it takes for things to happen at the board level, and the necessity for everything to match the school board calendar. Voluntary board level committees were often waiting for information, feedback, guidance, or approval from the school board on a variety of issues that impacted how they moved forward. Four of the participants described their frustrations with the length of time spent waiting and the consequences of missing school board deadlines as a result. Alison said that “With volunteer [committee work], the biggest thing is time.” Sarah stated that “[I]t takes a lot of time, which is something that at our board level seems to take far too long, but it is part of the process” (Sarah). Both Clark and Anthony expressed the same idea in the following quotations.

Now we’re back to the same point we were at last year, hoping to kick it off, again, but who knows, if we don’t get the thing out by June, we might be doing the whole thing all over again. (Clark)

What I wish, for a lot of the committees that I’ve done is just more time and more resources. When something finishes, either by its own end or not by its own end, it is not always a good thing. (Anthony)
Follow through, as described by the participants, focused on the implementation of tasks, initiatives, or events that were planned by the committees but required continued board support or approval to actually take place. Many participants voiced frustration and disappointment at the lack of consistency and follow through provided by the school board for committee work, but also recognized that time, resources, and the complex nature of the school board environment all impacted the situation. Daniel described the consequences for committees when there were changes in school board strategic directions and identifies the value for his personal leadership development in the process.

Things come and go really quickly. What one director is interested in is not going to be what the next one is interested in. So that whole committee is going to be scrapped. A lot of work can be put into something and then nobody is behind you and it is done. . . . I think it was important for me to get involved and learn all of those things. I definitely think it made me a stronger leader.

(Daniel)

Both Alison and Anthony, in the following quotations, reflected on the frustration created by the lack of follow through for committee work.

One of the difficulties or pitfalls of committees, a lot of times you have great ideas and great concepts that are put on paper and just sit there and never go anywhere from there. I also think about what a waste of resources that is, not only from the time perspective, but financial as well. . . . Once we have the big idea there has to be follow-up with collaboration and implementing plans instead of always going with the latest and greatest idea. . . . and most importantly, have some
kind of assurance from the upper echelons that what they are working towards can
and will actually be executed once it is presented to the board. (Alison)

For this committee I am hoping that we get to see it to the end and get to reflect
on the process. I hope it doesn't just stop because of resources, time, and all that
stuff, that is probably the most frustrating thing, when you don't get to finish it.
(Anthony)

Without the clear support of the school board and their peers, committee members felt
like their efforts were not being valued, that committee work in general was a waste of
time, and that their attempts at developing their leadership potential were only a matter of
going through the motions. Thomas referred to this situation as jumping through hoops.
“To allow me to say, I am doing the right thing, I am ready for this, I am not just a hoop
jumper, I am not one of those who I don't want to be.”

Clark expressed the impact of a lack of follow through as an intensely personal
affront and raised a number of interesting and important questions.

While I'm there I'm thinking, hey this is great, I'm just a teacher out in this
outpost and here I am interacting with some principals and a superintendent and
they are listening to me and they think, hey that's great, but then there's no follow
up, that committee is over with, one shot and you're out. That makes me think it
was all bullshit and that you weren't really interested in me, or maybe you were,
and what's worse? Were you interested in me but now the committee's done so
we're never going to continue with the idea or you weren't really interested in me
and this is just your job to pretend you're interested. (Clark)
Committee Experience

The fourth theme, the value of the overall committee experience, encompassed the concepts of systems thinking, skill building, leadership practice, peer pressure, and burnout. Participants described the importance of system thinking and experience in terms of understanding the bigger picture, making connections and networks throughout the school board and across elementary and secondary panels, and gaining a broader understanding of how the education system impacts individual classrooms. Committee work was also identified by participants as a vehicle for building a variety of skills, including leadership, and gaining essential leadership experience. All of the participants stressed the importance of the realistic, hands-on leadership practice that was gained through voluntary committee work.

Systems Thinking and Decision Making

One issue touched upon by all the participants was the concept of system thinking and experience. Working with a board level committee provided an opportunity to expand perspective beyond a single school or classroom and begin to think on a larger scale, to see the bigger picture, and gain a deeper understanding of how education works as a whole instead of as individual schools, classrooms, and subject areas. Daniel highlighted how working on a voluntary committee forced him to see beyond his own school.

We are very segregated in our schools, by being on a board wide committee you get to meet other people from other schools and find out what their experiences are like at those schools. You find out that there is a world beyond your own high school. That is very important. (Daniel)
Committee work at the board level also provided an opportunity to learn about and practice within the larger political arena with its vast array of personalities, policies, procedures, and power dynamics. Sarah described the broadening of her educational horizons through her committee work from school to school board.

You have to join committees because it helps you understand where education is at. Most committees get you out of your classroom box, which is an important box, but it allows you to see things from a broader perspective. If you eventually get to the board level, you see things from a board perspective. It just makes you, probably, a better educator. It allows you to look at the whole education piece, not just students, but education as a whole. What we are doing and what we are trying to do as a board or as a school. (Sarah)

Several participants highlighted the importance of learning about the practical mechanics of how a school board functions on a day-to-day basis and how being a part of a board level committee provided insight into that process. Areas of interest included communication between different levels within the board and schools, bringing educators together from different parts of the board structure, and maintaining consistency of goals and vision. Thomas spoke about the challenges he faced in bringing together teachers from all across the school board to work on a committee, “Trying to get a hold of and pulling together disparate elements, I hadn’t had that experience before.” Anthony noted the importance of communication and shared experiences in terms of working within the context of a voluntary committee.

I think the board has a focus, it has a vision, and even though it changes sometimes depending on who is in charge and who is in front of you, it is pretty
similar. So, if everyone is thinking the same way and has the same mindset when you go to that committee and you have those competencies and you have those things you need to follow, and you've been on a committee yourself, you know the ins and outs of it, you know what works and what doesn't work so well, and then you are able to put that in there. It helps with consistency more than anything in terms of what people are trying to get across. (Anthony)

The participants stressed the importance of gaining an understanding of how decisions are made on a board-wide level as part of the voluntary committee process.

In that committee I could see why decisions were being made. So when you go to a meeting and people are just yip-yapping about, I can't get this, or I can't get that, like there's somebody magically holding back a bunch of money because he didn't want that. You start to see the process, well, this money has to be allotted for this, and this, and that. You can start to see that there are decisions being made... and that, for me, provided a bit of clarity. I may not have agreed with all the decisions, but I could understand where they were coming from... that committee, by opening up so I could see for myself, allowed me to see the process of thinking behind the decision making, and that helped me out. (Clark)

Thomas spoke at length about the complexity of decision making at the system level and linked the increased awareness and understanding directly to his leadership development.

I would have to say that in leadership development in any organization, I think any movement in leadership has to be encompassed by an experience at seeing the really big picture..... It is a humbling experience when you realize that what you thought was the reasons why x, y, and z happened or didn't happen might not
have been what you thought....When you have that experience and you see it from that macro level, I think it humbles you to realize, it is not just black and white answers. You realize and you become a little more human. You realize that life is complex, organizations are complex, and to be a leader you have to understand those complexities. Understanding it at a committee level, at a board level, even as a quiet observer is so important to any leadership development one could ever want to cultivate. (Thomas)

Marianna also spoke about her increased understanding of the system perspective and focused on the impact of decision making at that level on the classroom, and, ultimately, the students.

[I]t gave me a good understanding about the system perspective. It is good for your school, but at the higher committee level, the question always is, but is it good for our system? What do you have at your school that would also be good for everybody else? As long as the people were talking about kids, that was my one criticism. After all this was implemented what is going to be the benefit to that average kid? (Marianna)

**Politics and procedures.** One of the most challenging areas of system thinking, as expressed by the participants, was the understanding of politics and procedures at a level beyond an individual school. Working in a closed environment like a school, it is possible to know all of the players and motivations involved in the political landscape. It is a totally different situation, however, at the much larger and more complex system level. Several participants described their involvement at a board level committee as providing an opportunity to begin to explore the broader landscape, network more
extensively, and begin to map out the communication paths that make it possible to get things done. The political environment was frustrating to newcomers and presented a host of new challenges. Claire described her challenges with the political arena at the system level as someone just wanting to get the job done and avoid playing games for control.

[W]e really weren’t [ready] because there was some red tape along the way, the frustration of the political aspects. I tend not to be a political player. I look at myself as a team player but not a game player. When I foresee that something is really coming down to games, it is difficult for me then to remain patient on a project. I just want to get it done and move forward, if indeed I feel the quality is there and there is no other reason to hold it back than someone just wanting to be in control of the situation. (Claire)

Thomas described his personal philosophy about interacting at the system level and how his eyes were opened when he became involved with the process through his committee work.

I think it gives you a picture of what I call the three P’s: the people, the politics, and the policies. Whom do I talk to, what are the policies, and what are the politics involved in all of it? These three things will always emerge in anything you’re in, but I think at a system level, I never really quite got a picture of just how much those three things play until I was in it. That really shocked me, enthused me, scared me, and encouraged me. I would never have known any of those pieces [without] having that experience. (Thomas)
He later went on to describe his frustration with just how political committee work can be at the board level.

Although you get into it with your enthusiasm and your reasons for being there, you realize that it is a platform for others, or it is a wheel spinning exercise. Those were a little bit deflating.... Not every idea that comes out of a committee is a good one. Not every committee struck is necessary. Sometimes you feel like you are spinning your wheels for some agenda that is maybe political or the flavor of the month, or those kinds of things. (Thomas)

Networking. Another key concept highlighted by most of the participants was the importance of networking across the school board and creating contacts from a variety of jobs and functions within education. Within a single school, the number and diversity of contacts is limited to the individuals working within that environment. Depending on the nature of the board level committee, there could be individuals from multiple schools, different panels (elementary and secondary), different levels within the board (administration, Superintendents, Trustees, etc), different school boards, the Ministry of Education, and even community groups and businesses.

Daniel spoke about the importance of networking with people in different positions within the school board system to gain a better understanding of how it all fits together.

I never would have been able to meet some of the other people... getting to know some of the trustees, and seeing what their job is all about and understanding more about how the board works. ... If you don't put yourself out there, you won't get to know people. (Daniel)
Anthony described a specific committee experience that involved his working with teachers from both the elementary and secondary panels and spoke at length about the impact on his understanding of how the two groups interact and how that increased understanding linked to his personal leadership development.

[W]orking in conjunction with elementary and secondary schools for transitions in mathematics. It was really beneficial to see the secondary side of it and what they are doing in terms of trying to make a difference. A lot of times for us, you sort of feel that it is a lot of downloading when you are a grade 8 teacher, they need to know this, they need to know this, they need to get into that proper stream. It was nice to see their side of it and some of the struggles they are facing ... It was nice to sit down with those people and say, okay this is what we need to learn and then come back and talk with the other grade 7 and 8 teachers about putting a plan into place that could facilitate some of those things. It was nice to see that it wasn’t an us versus them mentality, it was more like trying to work together to solve this problem. (Anthony)

Claire shared her experience working on a province-wide committee and spoke about the positive impact of expanding her own understanding of the educational system on that large a scale.

There was someone from Toronto District, so it was insightful to be working alongside someone who worked for the largest board in the province. Also to do a comparison in terms of where they were and we were in many aspects of the new curriculum and changes that were being introduced. There was a gentleman from the far North, so he faced very different challenges than what we do on
Southern Ontario. There was someone from South Western Ontario, again, someone who had a different perspective on the province. (Claire)

Skills Building. System thinking and experience, as described by the participants, also provided insight into the role of administration. Working on a board level committee, as described by participants, provided practical experience with the demands of an administrative position and assisted in both the decision-making process involved with entering into administration as well as the hiring process. Participants talked about running board-wide events, becoming familiar with a wide variety of schools and board facilities, dealing with board level politics and multiple agendas, and learning how to consider the additional variables involved in the larger scope of board-wide activities.

Alison spoke directly to the issue of how working within a voluntary committee prepared her for a potential role in administration.

It kind of paves the way for certain paths that I might wish to pursue. For example, if hypothetically, I wanted to become an administrator, these experiences would help me move towards that goal because that is the type of thing they are looking for and the kind of people they are hiring. What kind of experience do you have in leadership? What kind of leadership do you have at the system level as well as in the school and outside in the community? (Alison)

Anthony also highlighted the importance of committee work in terms of providing the skills, experiences, and insight for making the decision to move into an administrative role.
It is nice to see people that are in the same boat as you, in terms of starting your journey, or if you are an educator thinking about becoming an administrator, thinking about pushing forward and there are always lots of different things that hold you back. You should always take those opportunities… challenge yourself and reflect on things. (Anthony)

Participants described the relationship between building specific skills and leadership development. In several cases, the concept of skill building was even included in the definition of leadership development, as stated by Anthony, “Leadership development is the chance to look over where my skills are and it is a chance to go beyond and improve my skills in certain circumstances.” While Anthony talked about skills being developed through leadership practice and experience, Thomas spoke specifically about learning from others as a skill set that is a part of the leadership development process.

What it looks like and what I have attempted, not always successfully, is to take the learning of others. Let’s take the concept of rotating chairs, from month to month to month, the person prior to that will take the minutes, then they’ll be the chair next month. I saw that work in one committee and thought it was a fabulous idea. I have employed it in a number of committees I’ve struck and it is working, it is good. There is a piece of the diamond that was cut and polished from a prior experience, so that is great, that is a take away for me. (Thomas)

The participants identified a number of different skills linked to leadership development including relationship building, goal setting, communication, problem solving, management, and to a much greater extent, conflict resolution. Marianna
described her insights on leadership development and stressed the need to get the most out of the learning process.

I think all people who are on this road, this journey, should definitely take advantage of the things our board has to offer. I think that our board does a good job, the facilitation skills class is fantastic and I know there is leadership one and two, and seven habits. I think that if you are interested and you want to go to committee work or do leadership work, you should definitely take those because you need to develop that thick skin. You have to be able to say, I am not going to own it, I understand where it is coming from. It is perhaps a little bit of insecurity on your part, and that is okay, or a little bit of even professional jealousy, which is okay, not nice but it is fine. It gives you that confidence to keep working forward. If you don't develop a thick skin and you want to be a leader or you want to sit on committees, you would just really lose your mind, because it is not easy work. I am sure you know that it is not easy work. Especially when you have people who are dissenters who are very vocal or you are at a school where there is a strong political or federation group who opposes things because it would change the dynamic or the hierarchy, and I've seen that as well. (Marianna)

Sarah spoke about the opportunities for practical skill building within projects being run by committees.

It is a huge project with a massive committee with an opportunity to learn about leadership styles and about how to take a major massive project and deconstruct it and make it work all the way from the board level into classroom level. (Sarah)
Most of the participants shared a story that included some form of conflict, the skills that were necessary to deal with it, and the impact of the situation on their leadership development. Claire focused on the practical skills that she gained through negotiating conflict as a leader within a committee. “In working through that group, the conflict resolution skills certainly were honed, because there were times when we really were not in agreement and that presented some different dynamics in terms of how the project was going to go” (Claire).

Marianna focused on the sense of community that comes from working as a group to address issues, challenges, and conflicts.

Dealing with people that might be oppositional can be frustrating if you have a sense of aloneness. So being in a group in terms of leadership or committee, all of a sudden you realize that you are not alone. Everyone else is dealing with the same issues... It gives you that sense of community more than anything. (Marianna)

In every instance, the participants expressed a belief that learning those particular skills were a key factor in their personal leadership development. Claire spoke about the valuable learning, linked directly to improving leadership skills, that can be gained through conflict management and went so far as to express disappointment with the board level committees that purposely avoided contentious issues to prevent conflict.

I am not sure, and perhaps it is not a fair comment to make, I’m not sure that there are committees at the board level where you get into some of the issues that can be so contentious. If you are one of the trustees and you are trying to deliver a message about the equity and diversity policy, then yeah, you can get into some
contentious issues. You have to take a stand and you have to do what you think is 
in the overall best interests of the students in the board and staff and other 
employees. But by and large, I haven’t heard any of my colleagues that sit on a 
board level committee, who have expressed that same kind of passion or 
learning… The committee that I am a part of at the board level I would have to 
say is probably one of the nicest committees to be on. When we do meet, there 
really aren’t contentious issues. I haven’t experienced that same growth, the same, 
some days frustration, the same challenges but not nearly the same sense of 
satisfaction of watching that progression as to where that committee ended up. 
(Claire)

Thomas took it in a slightly different direction and linked skill building, specifically 
conflict resolution, directly to the leadership development process, expressing the concept 
of leadership as a journey that some individuals are not willing to take.

I found that the negativity was also the interpersonal conflicts that you get in just 
with personalities that you don’t necessarily know coming together on one cause. 
You are not always going to agree. This is a question about leadership….That is 
when I realized that maybe they didn’t get it yet, as a participant, the capacity of 
our organization to see the goodness that could be. The negative side of it was 
really watching people who weren’t willing to change. That was disheartening. 
(Thomas)

**Leadership Practice**

All of the participants noted the importance of developing new leaders through 
the committee experience, the concept that the best way to build leaders was to have them
practice being leaders in practical situations. Claire addressed this directly when she said, "If we are going to mentor younger people [they] need [to have] an opportunity to develop their leadership skills." Daniel supported this idea when he stated that, "A new teacher leadership program needs to have more realistic experience." Opinions and stories were shared outlining different methods for providing effective experiences to facilitate leadership development including job shadowing, a process for gradually increasing scope and responsibility, collaboration, and mentoring. Sarah spoke about the need to take the time to develop leaders by building a team of passionate people and then providing leadership opportunities with a high probability of success, starting small and growing the tasks to match their growth as leaders.

You want to develop leaders and you’ve got to get your team together, not everyone can be the strong leader, so you pull people who you think are going to be passionate or at least interested in the project and who are ready to take on leadership roles... I would start small, and it might be if that person is a classroom teacher, a project within their class, it might be something that is cross-panel or cross-curricular. They might involve the grade 8 teachers and they might be doing a literacy lesson in the math classroom with the grade 8 teachers, or whatever it is, something that is small and very tangible and very do-able. So that they can work the process, make them reflect very easily upon it, make their assessments, make their changes, and then make the projects grow as they grow. (Sarah)

The participants were all in agreement that the overall committee experience was a positive one in terms of leadership development, with special emphasis being placed on the opportunity to practice leadership in a variety of different situations with the support
of mentors, more experienced leaders, and peers on similar leadership journeys. Thomas shared his ideas on the importance of practicing leadership within a voluntary committee, and stressed the value of self reflection.

Leadership is an amorphous thing. It needs to be understood that you can watch leaders, you can take a piece away, but you will never know unless you involve yourself, unless you put yourself in a committee and stand up and say, let me give it a shot. When you look at the perceptions of voluntary committee work, to put oneself out there is to make oneself more human. No matter what you do with it, whether you go into administration or stay in the classroom, you’ll come away with a better understanding of yourself, if anything. To me that is one of the greatest merits of that kind of experience. There is nothing more wonderful than finding another facet of yourself that you never knew you had. (Thomas)

Daniel was very direct and stated that committee work and leadership experience, positive or negative, resulted in valuable learning. “I definitely think that by running a committee you will gain tons of experience. Maybe sometimes it won’t be positive, but if you don’t try you aren’t going to learn” (Daniel). Alison took it a step further and linked the learning from her leadership practice in a voluntary committee to all aspects of her life as a teacher, a coach, and a person.

Being on committees provides me with opportunities I otherwise would not have had. Where can I get, because really there is no prescribed leadership course or leadership PD that all teachers have to participate in. So, by me volunteering on these committees it gives me something that I otherwise would not have access to. Again, it makes me a better teacher, a better person, a better department head, and
more effective in all those roles. I coach as well. It helps me in all those regards because it goes back to that whole mentoring and modeling behaviour piece.

(A Alison)

Participants spoke often about the importance of practicing leadership as an example of experiential learning and described it as an essential part of any leadership development program. Claire described her committee work as experiential learning and provided a specific example from one of her experiences where problem solving was the key learning.

[I]nvolvement in committee work provides the opportunity for experiential learning. In different committees that I’ve worked on there have been times that we just didn’t know what to do with a particular issue or situation. So we had one of two choices, we could either sit and do nothing, or we could become resourceful and start to work through whatever the problem or the issue was. Sometimes, that meant that on the fifteenth phone call, we finally had the answer that we needed, or by presenting something to an audience and getting the feedback that maybe we weren’t quite expecting, meant that we had to look and rework. (Claire)

Thomas described the interaction and benefits of multiple experiences and urged developing leaders to continue to seek out a wide range of experiential learning opportunities to expand their repertoire.

There were pieces of leadership development that one experience didn’t give me, and maybe couldn’t give me, until I had another experience. Then realizing, oh, if only that first one had given me the ability to handle this next one, it would have
been great. But then, what would be the point? In my mind, I think, the best way to realize what you didn’t get out of the last one, is to keep going and getting involved and to expand your repertoire of your own abilities by being a part of other and different committees and leadership experiences. (Thomas)

**Peer Pressure and Burnout**

At some point during the interviews, all of the participants spoke candidly about the negative impacts of being involved with committee work as part of their leadership development. A consistent issue that emerged from the data was the perception and labeling of individuals joining voluntary committees by their colleagues. Several participants related stories of encounters with colleagues disputing their stated motivations and labeling them as climbers, a title intended to be negative. Alison spoke about not being sure if peers believed committee members were involved for the right reasons.

It has to include committee work because that is the only way to get known...They don’t really look at how good teacher A is compared to teacher B, they look at the big picture, and so, unfortunately that is why some people get involved for the wrong reasons. Some people are doing it to just pad their resume. There are people who are in it for the right reasons and they are paranoid that people might think they are in it for the wrong reasons. (Alison)

Daniel described his feeling of being overwhelmed with negativity brought on by peer pressure and labeling and then described a situation where he caught himself doing exactly the same thing to another colleague.
The thing in teaching is, people are always going to be negative. Maybe it is everywhere, I don’t know. People are always going to say, oh, she wants to be the next principal or, oh, look at her, she’s telling us what to do. It is just the nature of teachers so you have to learn how to deal with it and move forward and almost have fun with it. If someone is going to say that, then just laugh it off and say, no I don’t actually, but I would really like to make this happen. There are definitely people that give leadership a bad name and it is too bad. One of my friends at work, recently was being kind of, like, she was bossing me around, and I thought, what she was saying, I don’t think was right, but maybe it was, I don’t know, but I thought to myself, oh, she does want to be a principal! Then I caught myself and I thought, I shouldn’t judge her. (Daniel)

Marianna shared several stories from her personal experience that highlight this particular issue. Early in her career Marianna was recognized for her passion, dedication, and overall effectiveness in the classroom. As a result of her success, she was asked to become involved in a number of skill-building and leadership-focused activities beyond the classroom and school level to enhance her leadership journey.

P)eople would say to me, you know you’d be a good leader for this or a good leader for that, so why don’t you head up this group within our school, why don’t you head up that learning community. Then you reciprocate by saying to other staff members, I think you’re great at creating web portals. Why don’t you sign up and get all the staff to sign up with a workshop with you. I think leadership development is how you are taught, through other leaders, so you can take courses like facilitation skills or leadership one and two, or seven habits. How mentors
will share what their experiences have been, some of the barriers, and some of
their vision as to how they got to where they wanted to be. (Marianna)
She was guided by a number of mentors and consistently brought her knowledge back to
her school and classroom and was eager to share with colleagues and assist them in their
own leadership development. Her goal was to continue to learn and grow as an educator
and leader, to have a positive impact on her classroom and school, and to one day,
potentially, leave the classroom to become an administrator and possibly have an impact
on the broader system. “The whole idea is that you go somewhere, you sit on a
committee, you have greater understanding, and then you go back to your school and
disseminate that information” (Marianna).

During the process, however, Marianna was faced with increasing negative
attention from her colleagues that lead to feelings of isolation, disillusionment, and
frustration.

I’ve been called a climber to my face I don’t know how many times, and I will
say to them, that’s okay, I am okay with that because that means that is where you
are comfortable. You are comfortable with calling me a climber and I am okay
with that...In my experience at the committee level, when I was out so much, it
became a joke to my colleagues. They would say, oh are you here today? Do you
feel like working today? But they didn’t understand that concept of building
capacity. I didn’t want to keep all that information to myself, that is a waste of
resources. (Marianna)

Marianna described the process she went through and her feelings of frustration and
isolation in the following quotation.
In the past, there has been a misconception that people got on committees because you were in favour with a certain SO. That is the way my colleagues viewed me. Oh well, so and so likes you and that is why they invited you to this committee. At first I felt, not offended, I felt sorry that they didn’t understand that if I was taking the time to do something in my school, it is the fact that someone is recognizing that I have an interest in this. They are saying, you have an interest in this, so I think you should go to the next level and now see how your school interests can impact our system. That was hard, how your colleagues deal with the whole shoulder tap situation because it sets you apart. It really does isolate you. I did go through a time in the past where, on staff, I felt very isolated because people viewed me as a pseudo-administrator. That is a hard place to be when you are a teacher. There is a strict pecking order and you are not allowed to be special. Especially when you have very strong administrators, very capable, but they confide in you or empower you to help them with decision making. That is a hard place to be for people. (Marianna)

At the time of this interview, she had drastically reduced her involvement outside of the classroom and asked her administrators to share any new opportunities with other staff members. “I told my principal that if I don’t have to be out of the school, I don’t want to be this year. I want to concentrate a lot of things right now on what’s going on in the school” (Marianna).

Several other participants also disclosed their intentions to step back from committee work in the future. Their reasons included increased workload, changes in position, and making way for younger teachers, as well as disillusionment with the
system, feelings of being taken advantage of, abandonment, and frustration with a lack of follow through or success at reaching committee goals. Both Alison and Daniel openly shared their feelings of exhaustion, disillusionment, and frustration leading to their stepping back from committee work and putting their personal leadership development on hold.

I have to tell you, next year I am pulling back. I am pulling back from a number of committees because I just can’t do it anymore. It is disheartening at times, the time and effort I’ve put into it, and again I don’t want to sound defeatist, but my priorities are shifting. I would rather focus my efforts on fewer things and trying to get results with those one or two things more closely related to my passions and beliefs than spreading myself thin and trying to make a difference that way, just because I was asked to or thought I could help, or no one else would. (Alison)

The time to do it is when you are young and first starting out, I think. Right now, I am really tired and I am probably dropping quite a few of the committees I am involved with for next year. But, there are not many people who are willing to get involved with those committees, so it makes it a smaller group, so, therefore, you have to do more work and then you get frustrated. (Daniel)

In several cases, participants talked about the negative impact that their committee experiences have had on their leadership development and stated that as their reason for leaving particular committees or committee work in general. Clark began his pursuit of leadership with a positive outlook: “[Committee work] gave me the freedom and the confidence to do what I wanted to do or to try new ideas or to be outside the box.” It became apparent, however, during the course of the interview that he had been affected
by his negative committee experiences leading to frustration and a stagnation of his leadership development.

I get frustrated on the committees when people come in and out every year and after a while it makes me not want to join a committee because then it's like, really, we're going to keep turning over people, and starting over, and hee hawing. You get tired of every 3 years a new leader [coming in] and having a totally different philosophy than the last person. (Clark)

While all of the participants identified negative instances or situations within their committee experiences, the reactions were not the same for all of them. Where Marianna and Clark seemed to put their leadership development on hold, Thomas described his disappointment with the established leadership, leading him to push himself further in his leadership development to reach a point where he could create positive change. Daniel's experiences lead him to change his path completely, stepping back from a formal leadership position, and focusing on his classroom work. “Those kinds of experiences really challenged my sense of wanting to be on [that committee] and then wanting to necessarily still be lead by those in it because I didn’t get the feeling that necessarily they got it” (Thomas).

[Being involved with committees] has made me realize that I don’t want to be a VP and I don’t want to do that, so in a negative way, it has at least given me the experience to realize that I am happy doing what I am doing. I think I can do that for another 20 years and be fine with that. (Daniel)

Daniel was not the only participant to give voice to frustration and disappointment and express an extreme lack of motivation to continue working with board level
committees in the future. He was also not the only one to comment on how his experiences within a board level committee, while making him a better and stronger leader, also turned him away from the formal leadership path to focus on the role of teacher leader instead.

**Chapter Summary**

The participants shared stories and descriptions of their voluntary committee experiences with a focus on factors that contributed, positively or negatively, to their leadership development. A single definition of leadership development did not emerge from the interviews but several common threads were identified to allow for a consistent understanding across all participants: (a) being part of a process, (b) interacting and being influenced by others (fellow learners and mentors), (c) the impact of learning and experiences, (d) positive change or growth, and, (e) a focus on meeting the needs of students. Four themes emerged as a framework that helped to organize the data: (a) the role of committee leadership, (b) interactions with committee membership, (c) the committee structure, and (d) the experience gained through being a part of the committee.

The first theme drawn from the data was the importance of committee leadership. Participants described the role and impact of the committee leadership on their own leadership development. There were several areas identified as being influenced by the committee leadership. The first was the role of committee leadership as effective managers with a focus on facilitating goal setting, staying on task, and pushing to reach the goal within the timelines set by the committee. The second was creating an informal atmosphere and safe environment for committee meetings and activities. The third area identified by the participants was the concept of role modeling and mentoring. The
committee leadership, and on occasion other members, modeled appropriate attitudes and
behaviours and provided mentoring specifically for leadership development but also for
skills development, career planning, and personal growth.

The second theme drawn from the data was the impact of interactions amongst
committee membership. Participants spoke about the essential role played by
relationship building between committee members in leadership development and
highlighted the need for trust, mutual respect and support, and shared leadership. They
emphasized the importance of recruitment and selection to ensure the creation of a strong
and diverse group with a mix of leadership and teaching skills and experiences. The
impact of motivation and commitment on the development of trust and overall committee
success was discussed and contrasted with the results of fragmented groups with high
turnover. And finally, the relevance of reflection and self-awareness was presented as it
relates to personal and interpersonal development.

The third theme drawn from the data was the importance of committee structure.
Participants highlighted process and planning, effective communication, and board
support and follow through. Participants shared stories and experiences that highlighted
the need for planning and follow through to avoid frustration, effective communication to
increase understanding and engagement between committee members, and the huge
impact that support from the school board and peers for involvement in committee work
has on leadership development.

The fourth theme drawn from the data was the value and impact of the overall
committee experience on leadership development. This section examined participants'
experiences with system thinking, skill building, and leadership practice within voluntary
committee work as they relate to and support the development of new and experienced leaders, as well as the concept of peer pressure and burnout. In addition, participants identified voluntary committee work as an example of experiential learning connected to leadership development.

Within each theme, a variety of factors were highlighted including eight factors that were given greater weight by the participants as contributing, positively or negatively, to their leadership development. The positive factors were: (a) leadership practice and experience, (b) having mentors and role models, (c) building relationships and networks, and (d) creating positive outcomes for students. The negative factors were: (a) frustration caused by a lack of follow through and support, (b) interacting with committee members that have a careerist approach to the experience, (c) dealing with personal and political agendas, and (d) overcommitment leading to burnout.

Chapter Five focuses on the discussion of findings and recommendations for practice, theory, and research. In the discussion section, the eight main factors identified by participants, four were described as supporting leadership development and four were described as hindering, will be described and linked to the leadership development literature. The recommendation for practice, theory, and research is organized around three main groups, practitioners, school boards, and scholars. The focus is on ways each group can use the information, suggestions for future practice, and suggestions on areas for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Developing teacher leaders is more important than ever in the increasingly complex world of education. Most school boards have leadership development programs that involve a combination of leadership training courses, expectations of leadership development experiences, and, in some cases, even experience-based checklists for advancement. A common experience for developing leadership potential is involvement in a voluntary school-board level committee. The focus of this study was teachers’ perceptions of voluntary committee work as an experiential learning tool, with the goal of identifying factors that contribute positively and negatively to leadership development.

This chapter begins with an overview of the study including the purpose, an exploration of teachers’ perceptions of their leadership development within voluntary committee work, and a discussion of the qualitative nature of the study. This is followed by a description of the analysis strategies and the overall findings, listing eight factors identified by the participants as impacting their leadership development.

The chapter then moves on to a description of the findings of the study, looking at each of the eight key factors and considering their impact on theory and practice. It then looks at recommendations for teachers, committee leaders, school board administrators, and provides suggestions for future research. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the overall importance of the study, and a reflection on the researcher’s experience and final thoughts.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the question of how teachers perceive being involved in a voluntary district board-level committee as contributing to the
development of their leadership skills. A qualitative research approach was chosen for this study to describe and understand teachers' perceptions of the factors involved in the leadership development process. This study used semistructured interviews to allow participants to express their thoughts, feelings, and stories in a comfortable and safe environment. The participants were all teachers within a single school board who have volunteered their time to work in board level committees. A variety of committees were represented with distinct foci and representation from both elementary and secondary panels.

A qualitative approach was used to allow participants to share their stories and experiences as developing leaders. Qualitative research is generally used to study human behaviour, perceptions, and decision making, as well as the reasons behind each (Creswell, 2005). This approach allowed for rich descriptions, a contextual framework, and a chance to dig deeper into the data to go beyond surface ideas (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Using a qualitative approach allowed me to ask open-ended questions with enough flexibility for participants to articulate their responses through descriptions of their personal experiences and stories to reach my goal of identifying the core factors that impacted leadership development in committee work as perceived by the participants.

**Overview of Analysis Strategies**

This study used one-on-one semistructured interviews with 8 participants, a mix of teachers and new administrators from both elementary and secondary panels who have been involved in voluntary board-level committee work within the 3 years previous to the study. Of the 8 participants, 2 were new administrators, 2 were elementary teachers, and 4 were secondary teachers. There were no noticeable differences in responses between
the three participant groups. All participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities throughout this process. All of the participants were drawn from a single school board and were involved with a variety of committees. All of the interviews were audio taped and transcribed then imported into Nvivo 8 qualitative data analysis software. The coding process (Cresswell, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994) was ongoing throughout the interviews and involved several rounds of reading and re-reading the transcripts, creating codes, sharing the codes with participants and seeking input, then adjusting the codes as necessary based on feedback and new transcripts being added. Once the initial coding had been completed, pattern coding was used to organize individual codes into related groupings based on themes emerging from the data.

Overview of the Findings of the Study

This study provided each of the participants with the opportunity to share his or her stories and explore their perceptions of how being involved with voluntary committees impacted their leadership development. All of the participants provided rich and detailed descriptions of their experiences and described the factors that they perceived to have had both positive and negative impacts on them as developing leaders. During the interviews it became clear that all of the participants were passionate about leadership development for themselves, their colleagues, and their students and each held a strong opinion about the existing process for developing leaders within the school board. All of the participants agreed that being involved with voluntary committees was an essential tool for developing leadership potential but was limited by the value placed on the experience by each individual within the process.
Four common themes emerged from the data (see Figure 1) incorporating a number of factors identified by participants as either supporting or hindering leadership development. Of all the factors described by participants, eight were mentioned more often and given greater emphasis as having a significant impact on leadership development. The four factors described as supporting leadership development were: (a) leadership practice and experience, (b) having mentors and role models, (c) building relationships and networks, and (d) creating positive outcomes for students. The four factors described as hindering leadership development were: (a) frustration caused by a lack of follow through and support, (b) interacting with committee members who have a careerist approach to the experience, (c) dealing with personal and political agendas, and (d) overcommitment leading to burnout.

Discussion of Findings

The main question at the heart of this study was: How does being involved in a voluntary board-level committee contribute to the development of teachers' leadership skills? There were two sub-questions that supported and expanded on the main question:

1. What do teachers identify as the key factors and processes that facilitate the development of their leadership skills?
2. What do teachers identify as the key factors and processes that hinder the development of their leadership skills?

This section of the chapter will be structured as a response to these questions.

Factors Supporting Leadership Development

All of the participants provided detailed descriptions and stories of situations from their committee experiences that positively contributed to their leadership development.
The factors, both positive and negative, were organized into four themes (see Figure 1). In the first theme, committee leadership, the participants described the importance of the committee leaders as effective managers, communicators, organizers, and facilitators. They emphasized the need for a safe and positive environment where everyone's voice could be heard without judgment or ridicule. They also spoke at length about the value of committee leaders as role models and mentors. In the second theme, committee membership, the participants focused on the positive impact of relationship building through networking and the sharing of ideas and leadership. In the third theme, committee structure, the participants focused on the need for clear roles, planning, and communication with special emphasis on working subcommittees and the concept of shared leadership. In the fourth and final theme, committee experience, the participants highlighted the importance of leadership practice and skills development, system thinking and experience, and providing positive outcomes for students.

While all of these factors were important, the participants placed a greater weight on four factors, in particular, as making the largest contribution to their leadership development: (a) leadership practice and experience, (b) having mentors and role models, (c) building relationships and networks, and (d) creating positive outcomes for students. All four of these factors have been described in the existing literature, especially the first two, leadership practice and mentoring relationships, in regards to leadership development. None of them, however, aside from a brief mention in a list of leadership experience opportunities, were linked to voluntary committee work.
Leadership Practice and Experience

The opportunity to take the lead in “real life” situations was perceived by all of the participants as being the single most important factor supporting their leadership development, a viewpoint that is supported by Barth (2001) and Normore (2006), both of whom emphasize the value of practical experience in realistic settings. Hemmingsen, et al. (2008) highlight the impact of experience, both positive and negative, on leadership development as a teaching tool, emphasizing the importance of direct leadership practice on developing overall leadership potential.

The participants spoke at length about the impact on their learning and leadership development as they took on the leadership role for board-wide events, critical decision making processes, running subcommittees with specific tasks and timelines, and making budgetary decisions, just to name a few of the opportunities for growth provided by their committee experiences. A common theme expressed by all of the participants was the value of being able to practice being a leader with the support and guidance of more experienced leaders and peers within the committee, knowing that they were working to create positive outcomes for students, and being able to discuss and reflect throughout the process. This type of transformative experience was described by Kolb (1984) as experiential learning, a process that involves deriving knowledge, forming thoughts, and testing ideas through our own subjective experience in a continuous cycle of forming, modification, and re-forming.

The participants’ perception of the importance of this factor is further supported by numerous examples in the literature that describe the inclusion of experiential learning, specifically, providing teachers with a chance to practice their leadership skills.
and explore the application of theoretical models in a meaningful educational context, as a key element for success in many international educational leadership development programs (Bush & Jackson, 2002; Kolb, et al., 2000; Normore, 2006; Walker & Dimmock, 2006). Course and Russo (2006) also support the participants’ perceptions of the importance of leadership practice as they highlighted the need to practice collaboration and reflection through practical learning experiences in the field. They stress the need for teachers to go beyond what they have already learned as classroom teachers and experience new leadership situations within the broader field of education to gain a deeper understanding of the leadership development process.

The value of reflection, as described by Cranton and Carusetta (2004) as part of the teacher development process, is the link between reflection and authenticity in terms of transformative learning. Mezirow (1991) described critical reflection as the trigger for transformational learning, and Boud and Walker (1998) spoke at length about the role played by reflection in the development of teachers and stressed the importance of context within the process. Kamler (2006) described reflection as a tool for self-analysis and assessment to identify and explore strengths, weaknesses, and values throughout the leadership development process, and Walker and Dimmock (2006) considered individual and collaborative reflection to be a key element of any successful leadership development program.

While the literature provided many examples and support for the link between experiential learning and educational leadership development, there was very little that focused specifically on voluntary committee work as an example of experiential learning. While Phelps (2008) recognized the value of experiential learning as a vehicle for
leadership development, encouraging teachers to focus on their knowledge, skills, and dispositions, committee work was only briefly mentioned as a single item in a list of possible activities. The findings of this study add to the body of literature by strongly supporting the value of voluntary committee work as an intentional tool for providing leadership experience for teachers within an educational context.

**Mentors and Role Models**

Every participant shared at least one story, and often several, that focused on the positive impact a mentor made on his or her leadership development. Participants described mentoring relationships forming and evolving naturally based on personality, shared vision or work ethic, previous relationships within a teaching environment, shared experiences, and respect or admiration earned through practical observations and experiences within a voluntary committee. While I was not able to find any references in the literature to mentoring relationships forming within voluntary committees, there was an abundance of authors discussing the importance of mentoring as a key component for leadership development including Bush and Jackson (2002) and Walker and Dimmock (2006) who emphasize the importance of mentoring as a part of effective leadership development programs around the globe.

While not all the mentors mentioned by the participants were directly connected to the individual’s voluntary committee experiences, all the participants did, in fact, become involved in a mentoring relationship while a part of a voluntary committee. Normore (2006) was one of many authors who described the powerful impact of mentors and leadership role models on aspiring leaders and stressed their role as both mentors and recruiters who need to look for strong leadership qualities in teachers and encourage them
to develop their potential and consider pursuing administrative roles. While many authors focused on mentoring as part of leadership development programs or within a classroom setting, there was a clear gap in the area of mentoring within the voluntary committee structure.

The findings of this study are in agreement with the existing literature on the importance of mentoring relationships as a crucial component of effective leadership development. The major difference, however, is the focus on voluntary committees to foster more naturally occurring mentor-mentee relationships, a topic that is lacking in the current literature. The participants described the critical role played by mentors in developing leaders, and gave specific examples of their mentors guiding them through the political environment of the committee, the school board, and the local community, providing key contacts and information for career development, and helping them to develop crucial skills for decision making, problem solving, and leadership in a variety of “real life” situations.

A comparison can be made between the participants’ perceptions of the importance of mentors within a voluntary committee experience and those described by Lyttle (2007), a participant in a leadership development program, as she described her mentors as being critical in her reaching success as they guided her through goal setting and developing plans, and providing essential role modeling: “My assigned mentor assisted me in developing plans and strategies that would help me to meet my goals” (p. 104). She went on to describe a number of scholars within the program as “role models to be emulated” (p. 104), not only for sharing invaluable leadership concepts but also for living by them as well. While a comparison can be made, it is important to recognize that
Lyttle was describing her experiences within a structured leadership development program, a topic that has been well developed within the literature, and the participants of this study were having similar experiences through their committee work, an area that has not been developed in the literature.

The importance of mentors stressed by the participants is mirrored by Stott and Walker's (1992) study of leadership development programs, defining mentoring as a developmental relationship between individuals, often with a more senior person, as the mentor, guiding or assisting the junior person, as the mentee. The participants mentioned a variety of situations within their committee experiences where mentoring took place. The mentors were often the committee chair, board representative, experienced teacher, or experienced committee member, which fits with the mentor-mentee relationship found in the literature, with the major difference being the lack of a formalized mentoring relationship being established as part of a leadership development program. Several participants also shared stories of when they were the mentor to newer, less experienced committee members and teachers.

The participants often described the mentoring roles within their committee experiences as intertwined, shifting, situational, and even shared by multiple individuals working to mentor each other. These descriptions lead to a comparison between voluntary committees and mentoring networks, defined by Kamler (2006) as a form of alternative mentoring that focuses on fostering relationships that can lead to leadership development and career advancement. Once again, while a comparison can be made, it is important to note that Kamler was exploring intentionally created mentoring relationships while the relationships established within voluntary committee work, as perceived by the
participants, were not the main focus of the experience but something that grew through the interaction of committee members.

The participants also highlighted the continuation and expansion of their mentoring relationships beyond the specific committee experience where it was established. While they all agreed that being involved in a voluntary committee, gaining the experience and mentoring, were crucial parts of their leadership development, they also stressed the need for their leadership development to expand beyond the committee into their practice. The notion of connecting leadership development and teaching practice is supported by the literature, most notably by Normore (2006) who highlighted the powerful impact of mentors and leadership role models on aspiring leaders as part of a continuing leadership development system. He went further to say that within schools, existing leaders need to act as mentors and recruiters who look for strong leadership qualities in teachers and encourage them to develop their potential and consider pursuing administrative roles. Couse and Russo (2006) identified mentoring opportunities within service-learning in advanced field experiences and Kamler (2006) described the success of a mentoring network, a form of alternative mentoring, in developing leadership potential. While many authors described mentoring in relation to leadership development, there were no direct connections that could be found relating to voluntary committees as a tool for intentionally creating mentor-mentee relationships or as alternative mentoring networks.

Building Relationships and Networks

Building relationships and networks was identified by all of the participants as one of the key factors supporting their leadership development within a voluntary
committee. They described the positive impact of learning from each other, creating a mutual support network, exploring best practices and challenges as a group with open communication and reflection, and being able to cultivate relationships specifically for the future sharing of resources and career advancement. Martin (2007) stated that networking is essential to sharing ideas and best practices, to creating opportunities for analyzing expertise and experiences, and as a tool for mutual support in career advancement. Both Chin (2006) and Selinger (2006) view committees as governing and learning communities that provide opportunities for individuals to practice leadership, develop both networking and mentoring relationships with colleagues, and gain valuable experience as well as contacts linked to career opportunities.

Participants spoke at length about learning from peers, colleagues, established committee leaders, and mentors. They shared stories that included demonstrations and discussions of leadership styles and techniques, collaborative problem solving, and shared decision making, all with the dual focus of working together towards achieving a common committee goal and providing leadership development experiences. Hemmingsen, et al. (2008) described this type of activity as collaborative networking and highlighted the importance of linking collaborative networks to organizational success and leadership development. Slater (2008) also described networking in terms of collaboration, and expanded it beyond teachers to include administrators, teachers, and parents, a combination of individuals that is not uncommon to voluntary committees.

Many authors mentioned in this study, including Walker and Dimmock (2006), focused specifically on leadership development programs. There are a large number of similarities between their findings and the stories shared by the participants in this study.
suggesting that voluntary committee work, while not providing any new insight into the importance of relationship building and networking in relation to leadership development, should at least be considered as a potential addition to structured leadership development programs. Walker and Dimmock emphasized the value of leadership networks as a tool of leadership development programs. They highlighted feedback from program participants and summarized the positive impact of networking and relationship building with both peers and experienced leaders. The main areas identified were: (a) interacting with experienced leaders to focus on raising questions and discussing solutions; (b) observing, discussing, sharing, and reflecting on best practices; (c) building a network for professional interaction, interpersonal relationships, and mutual support; and (d) actively accessing relationships with experienced leaders for practical solutions to real challenges. All of these findings were echoed in the statements made by the participants of this study as they shared their voluntary committee experiences.

**Creating Positive Outcomes for Students**

One consistent message that emerged from all the interviews was the importance of being able to create positive outcomes for students as a result of the voluntary committee work being done. Walker and Dimmock (2006) highlighted the importance of the connection between successful school outcomes and effective leadership development by linking teacher learning directly to realistic and practical educational contexts, often through the use of experiential learning opportunities. The findings of this study focus more specifically on a direct link between the work being done within the committees and student achievement. From a leadership development point of view, the participants stressed the crucial role being able to impact student achievement played in establishing
motivation and incentive for becoming a leader, and the need to create a positive framework to prevent burnout from overcommitment. The participants described the creation of positive outcomes for students as a key incentive as they worked through the challenges of the leadership development process.

**Factors Hindering Leadership Development**

All the participants also provided detailed descriptions and stories that highlighted experiences that hindered their leadership development. A number of factors perceived to be hindering leadership development were mentioned by participants and I was able to organize them according to the four themes that emerged from the data (see Figure 1). In the first theme, committee leadership, the participants highlighted the negative impact of poor leadership, committee leaders placing their personal or political agendas above that of the committee, and a lack of shared leadership and credit for accomplishments.

In the second theme, committee membership, the participants focused on the negative impact of working with other committee members who had joined the committee with a strong personal or political agenda that was not aligned with the goals of the committee. Special emphasis was placed on the difficulties of working with careerists, described by the participants as individuals who were only interested in furthering their own careers above all else. The participants also spoke at length about the impact of negativity, conflict, and high turnover on their personal leadership development.

In the third theme, committee structure, the participants focused on the lack of purpose or vision within the committee and board environments. They also stressed the negative impact of a lack of board support and follow through.
In the fourth and final theme, committee experience, the participants provided insights into their feelings of frustration, overcommitment, and eventually burnout, all contributing factors to a decreased level of future involvement and a hindering of their leadership development.

While all of these factors were important, the participants placed a greater weight on four factors, in particular, as making the largest contribution to their leadership development: (a) frustration caused by a lack of follow through and support, (b) interacting with committee members that have a careerist approach to the experience, (c) dealing with personal and political agendas, and (d) overcommitment leading to burnout. The first of the four factors, lack of follow through and support, was present in the literature and was mentioned briefly in relation to committee work in terms of creating an atmosphere of trust. The second and third factors, careerist committee members and personal and political agendas, were not present in the literature on leadership development, although a distant connection could be made between these factors and relationship building. The fourth factor, overcommitment leading to burnout, was mentioned in the literature as one of the factors leading to the leadership shortage. It was not, however, linked to voluntary committee work.

Lack of Follow Through and Support

A consistent theme that was clearly reflected in the stories of all the participants as a factor hindering their leadership development was frustration caused by a perceived lack of support for their efforts and a lack of follow through in terms of completing the committee goals. The participants shared numerous experiences where they felt unsupported and that their efforts were going unnoticed and unrecognized and, more
importantly, unheeded. The term “going through the motions” was used in almost every interview at some point referring to a perceived lack of commitment on the part of the school board or committee leadership in following through on the work done by the participants and committee members. There was nothing found within the literature that specifically spoke about a lack of support or follow through within a voluntary committee or even as a part of experiential learning opportunities. The closest connection could be found in the result of the perceived lack of support or follow through leading to a lack of trust. Such a situation prevents the creation of an atmosphere of trust, a concept that ties in directly to the leadership development literature, and although it is not discussed within the context of voluntary committee work, it is linked to effective leadership development programs (Burke et al., 2007; Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Phelps, 2008; Schoo, 2008).

One of the structures posited by Ward and Parr (2006) as being necessary for leadership development is the sharing of a collective responsibility in a safe environment where everyone is able to take risks, share ideas, and be a part of the discussion. Although the authors were not talking about committee work, their structure can be directly applied successfully to an effective committee. The authors provided a list of key elements that included the organizational environment, with a focus on communication, organizational support, and the degree of trust within the group. Turk et al. (2002) also provided several conditions for group effectiveness in both business and education, including training, release time, and a well established support system. All of these conditions, based on the perceptions of the participants in this study, can be applied to a
voluntary committee structure, a connection that has not been made in the existing literature.

These findings provide support for the prevailing concept of trust being an important component of leadership development found in the literature. The findings also add specific examples found within voluntary committee work that provide insight into the impact of both the presence and lack of trust in practical leadership development situations. The participants in this study felt that their effort and hard work was not appreciated and that nothing was being accomplished as a result, specifically, that their efforts were not resulting in positive outcomes for students.

Careerist Approach

An area that evoked a great deal of passion from the participants and was absent from the current literature was the concept of individuals joining committees for the sole purpose of completing a required task for their career advancement. The term "careerists" was used by several participants and was linked to the idea of a checklist for career advancement within the school board that included being a member of a voluntary committee as one of the required activities. Every participant shared a story about being on a committee with one or more careerists and each time it was described as a negative experience that interfered with their leadership development. The concept of careerists could not be found in the literature. The closest connection was commitment and focus on common goals. Goleman (2000) described the importance of commitment to a common purpose in order to foster leadership development within a committee or group setting. Selinger (2006) also supported this idea and noted the link between being
committed to a common goal and the overall effectiveness of reaching the committee’s stated outcomes and the opportunities for leadership development.

Several participants stated that they were offended by the actions of the careerists, describing them as showing up to the minimum number of meetings to be considered a member, not participating, not assisting with the work of the committee, and yet taking credit for the accomplishments and moving up the ladder into administration. The participants’ perception was that these individuals were merely checking off a box on a checklist of required activities, jumping through hoops, as a technicality for promotion, and not engaging in the leadership development opportunities existing within the committee experience.

Having not been involved in the activities of the committee, the careerists would not have gained anything from the experience other than a check mark and yet were able to move their careers forward as a result. Based on their descriptions of the reflective process being linked to both leadership development and recruitment, Couse and Russo (2006) and Normore (2006) would challenge these individuals to reflect on the missed opportunities within their committee experiences and would not likely support the use of a checklist system as part of the recruitment and selection process. Several participants described how they began to question the process being used by the school board for promotion and whether they wanted to be a part of it, or even if they should continue to put so much effort into committee work, a voluntary activity that took them away from their classrooms.
Personal and Political Agendas

The participants made a clear distinction between what they called careerists and individuals who were focused on a personal or political agenda outside the scope of the committee’s goals. Several participants related experiences where they watched individuals subvert the work of the committee to further personal or political goals. It was most often to make a name for themselves or further their careers, and it was perceived by the participants as taking place at the cost of the committee’s objectives. Patterson and Patterson (2004) described leader development as a fluid process of practical experience that grows from a collaborative, mentor-rich, nurturing environment based on trust and respect. In the absence of that trusting and respectful environment, the negative impact on participants’ leadership development, according to Patterson and Patterson, resulted in a loss of trust, disappointment, or disillusionment with the leadership development process, and a building frustration with people they perceived to be the wrong individuals receiving recognition and being promoted.

This situation, as described by the participants, was compounded when it was the established committee leaders or board representatives who were using their position of authority within the committee to pursue a personal agenda. Eadie (2008) described the importance of including representation from the school board in order to provide authority to the committee but did not discuss the impact on the effectiveness of the committee to act as a leadership development tool if that representative was not committed to the process. Several stories were shared by the participants describing the negative impact of watching and working with leaders who were no longer trusted or
respected and then having to choose between distancing themselves from these individuals or staying to reach the committee goals and, ultimately, help students.

In many of the interviews the participants expressed frustration at the feeling they were being held hostage by the political whims of the school board and felt a lack of control over the outcomes or completion of committee projects. One participant described it as trying to hit a moving target, one that seems stationary until after you have made your throw, and then spins out of reach. This situation diminished their sense of accomplishment, eroded their confidence, and hindered their leadership development.

One of the key assertions put forth by Ward and Parr (2006), also shared by Muijs and Harris (2007), is that teachers need opportunities to develop their self-confidence as leaders. The findings of this study support the arguments of these authors and add specific examples and depth to the understanding of the consequences of the loss of those confidence building opportunities.

**Overcommitment and Burnout**

Perhaps the most powerful and distressing concept to emerge from the interviews was the idea that these growing leaders, full of potential and energy and determination to help students, could falter, burn out, and turn away from their leadership journey. Most of the participants expressed a growing lack of interest or incentive to become a formal leader within the school board or even to continue their voluntary committee work, a finding that is in agreement with the literature on leadership development (Muijs & Harris, 2007; Normore, 2006; Phelps, 2008; Slater, 2008). The participants cited several reasons for their change of direction including overcommitment and exhaustion.
combined with a lack of incentives, recognition, support, and follow through, with particular focus on the lack of results for students.

Several participants spoke about the changing political landscape within the school board and a growing feeling of being disconnected from the leadership development process, describing it as empty and bureaucratic, when it was once energizing and empowering.

Many of the participants observed that it was always the same people doing the work, sitting on the committees, pushing for better outcomes for students and wanting to become leaders to make a positive difference. While all of the participants mentioned feeling overcommitted at some point in their leadership journey, several felt used, and, in some instances, abused, as other individuals whom they perceived to be less committed received recognition as leaders and were advanced into formal leadership positions within the school board. These findings force the implications of a looming leadership shortage to shift from a theoretical concept to a practical reality being perceived by the participants: individuals that are not ready, but are able to check off the right boxes, are being promoted into leadership positions. Fink and Brayman (2006) described how inexperienced and unprepared individuals are being pushed into leadership roles as a response by policymakers within education to the leadership shortage. Normore (2006) was in agreement with them and argued for a revamping of the recruitment and selection process to include more training, practical experience, mentoring, and leadership development to prepare potential leaders, increase incentives, and avoid burnout.
The findings of this study add support to the current literature and suggest that the inclusion of voluntary committee work into leadership development programs should be considered as a tool to provide practical leadership experience in an educational context.

**Recommendations for Practice, Theory, and Research**

Leadership development for teachers has become an increasingly important area of interest around the world with authors studying leadership development programs and providing analysis and discussion of key structures and components necessary for success (Bush & Jackson, 2002; Walker & Dimmock, 2006). With leadership practice being identified as one of the key components of effective leadership development (Barth, 2001; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Couse & Russo, 2006; Muijs & Harris, 2007), the use of voluntary committees as a tool to provide practical and realistic experiences for developing educational leaders has become much more significant and worthy of study.

The concept of voluntary committee work as a vehicle for leadership development is an area that has been neglected in the research. Voluntary committee work has been mentioned in several articles as one of a list of possible opportunities to increase networking or leadership practice (Chin, 2006; Phelps, 2008; Selinger, 2006), but it has not been explored in a more detailed or focused study of how it can impact overall leadership development. The findings of this study support the intentional use of committee work as a tool for leadership development and suggest several ways in which voluntary committee involvement creates authentic opportunities for leadership development. The study also provides a list of eight factors, four supporting and four hindering leadership development, that should be considered when designing or including voluntary committees in the leadership development process.
The four factors supporting leadership development within a voluntary committee are: (a) leadership practice and experience, (b) having mentors and role models, (c) building relationships and networks, and (d) creating positive outcomes for students. The four factors hindering leadership development within a voluntary committee are: (a) frustration caused by a lack of follow through and support, (b) interacting with committee members that have a careerist approach to the experience, (c) dealing with personal and political agendas, and (d) overcommitment leading to burnout.

Based on the findings of this study, recommendations can be made for the use of voluntary committee work as a vehicle for leadership development in the areas of practice, theory, and research.

**Recommendations for Practice**

The recommendations for practice based on the findings of this study are aimed at practitioners split into committee members and committee leaders, and the school board. There are several overlapping themes within the recommendations and a number of specific recommendations for each of the three groups. The main concept impacting all three groups, based on the perceptions of the participants in this study, is that voluntary committees are a viable tool for leadership development and should be studied further to increase their potential effectiveness.

**Committee members.** Based on the findings in this study, there are four key outcomes for practitioners as committee members looking to pursue leadership development. The first recommendation is that potential leaders should get involved with voluntary committees. Being involved with a voluntary committee will provide the
opportunity to practice leadership skills as well as develop networks for learning, support, and career development.

This leads into the second recommendation, that committee members should consider involvement in committee work to be a part of the leadership development process. Being involved with a voluntary committee should not be viewed as a hoop to jump through, it is a valuable tool for leadership development that can provide a variety of opportunities for practicing leadership, decision making, problem solving, relationship building, and mentoring.

The third recommendation is that aspiring leaders actively work to create positive relationships within the committee. Being able to initiate and sustain positive and supportive relationships and networks is an essential leadership skill that can be practiced in a voluntary committee.

The final recommendation for committee members is to seek out and establish mentoring relationships. A voluntary committee can be a vehicle for making connections that can lead to mentoring relationships as a mentor and a mentee, both of which contribute to leadership development.

Committee leaders. Based on the findings in this study, there are four recommendations for practitioners as committee leaders looking to pursue leadership development. The first recommendation is that committee leaders focus on developing effective management techniques. Effective management of a voluntary committee involves setting clear goals, creating and following realistic plans, making sure that meetings are efficient and productive, seeking input from all members, and demonstrating leadership.
The second recommendation for committee leaders is that they create leadership opportunities for all members. All committee members should have the opportunity to practice leading within the committee. This could take many forms including running a meeting, chairing a subcommittee, taking the lead on an event or activity, or providing PD for other members. Regardless of the specific situation, they should receive guidance, encouragement, feedback and support throughout the process.

The third recommendation is that committee leaders focus on creating and maintaining a safe, positive, and inclusive environment. All members should be encouraged to take risks, share ideas, provide input and feedback, and be recognized for their efforts. Negative talk, judgment, and exclusionary actions should be addressed immediately and removed from the environment.

The final recommendation for committee leaders is that they be a mentor to developing leaders. Established committee leaders should take on a mentoring role for developing leaders and encourage the development of mentoring relationships within the committee. They should model mentoring behaviours, share experiences as both a mentor and mentee, and share contacts with colleagues, peers, and more experienced leaders to assist members in finding mentors.

School board. Based on the findings in this study, there are four recommendations for the school board looking to develop potential leaders. The first recommendation is that the school board should recognize and support voluntary committee work as a tool for leadership development. Voluntary committees are valuable to the school board in terms of the committee-specific activities they perform but it is also important to recognize the value of these committees as a leadership development
tool. If properly structured, voluntary committees can provide experiential learning opportunities for a large number of developing leaders across a wide spectrum of leadership skills and experience. The Ministry of Education (2010a) Board Leadership Development Strategies document clearly states that “it is important for boards to provide talent development opportunities for teachers” (p. 10). The school board should also consider how committee involvement can be tied to selection, recruitment, and promotion processes, as well as student success and school effectiveness.

The second recommendation is that school board representatives should be involved at the committee level. Having a school board representative (administrator, special assignment teacher, or superintendent, etc.) as a part of the voluntary committee would provide an opportunity for direct contact for communication between the board and the committee, mentoring and networking relationships between experienced and developing leaders, and add a sense of legitimacy to the work of the committee that would encourage members to be more involved. Before putting this recommendation into practice, a number of questions would have to be considered: Which kind of board representative would be most helpful or successful? What are the ideal qualities of a board representative? How can the school board develop policies around the assignment of board representatives to committees? How can they ensure inclusion of nontraditional types of leaders?

The third recommendation is that the school board make it a priority to provide support and follow through for committee goals and objectives. It is critical that the work of voluntary committees be supported by the school board to recognize the efforts of developing leaders and provide an incentive for them to continue with their leadership
development. As described in the Ministry of Education (2010a) Board Leadership Development Strategy document, “an organization’s most effective leaders are not just acquired; they need to be grown...[the school board needs] a more strategic approach that identifies those with leadership potential early on and cultivates prospective talent” (p. 10).

The final recommendation for the school board is that they provide formal leaders as mentors for developing leaders. With the school board support of a mentoring initiative, it would be possible to provide experienced leaders as mentors to developing leaders both within and beyond voluntary committees. The Ministry of Education (2010b) document on mentoring states that “mentoring for newly appointed school leaders directly supports the two goals of the Ontario leadership strategy, which are to attract the right people to the principalship, and to help principals and vice-principals develop into the best possible instructional leaders” (p. 5).

**Recommendations for Theory and Research**

The findings of this study support the current literature on leadership development. This study also adds to the existing pool of research by expanding the understanding of leadership development specifically within the context of voluntary committee work and providing rich, detailed stories and examples from the participants’ experiences. Eight factors supporting or hindering leadership development within a voluntary committee were developed through this study. Six of the eight factors can be found in the existing literature, but they are not linked directly to voluntary committees, a gap that can be explored adding a new dimension to the discussion of these topics in terms of leadership development. Two of the factors, careerist committee members and
personal and political agendas, were not present in the literature and represent new areas for exploration and research.

Based on the findings of this study, the four factors that teachers perceived as supporting leadership development within a voluntary committee are: (a) leadership practice and experience, (b) having mentors and role models, (c) building relationships and networks, and (d) creating positive outcomes for students. While all four of these factors have been described in the literature related to leadership development, none of them, aside from a brief mention in a list of leadership experience opportunities, were linked to voluntary committee work.

The four factors hindering leadership development within a voluntary committee are: (a) frustration caused by a lack of follow through and support, (b) interacting with committee members that have a careerist approach to the experience, (c) dealing with personal and political agendas, and (d) overcommitment leading to burnout. Lack of follow through and support, the first of the four factors, was present in the literature and tenuously linked to committee work in terms of creating an atmosphere of trust. The second and third factors, careerist committee members and personal and political agendas, were not present in the literature on leadership development, although a distant connection could be made between these factors and relationship building. The fourth factor, overcommitment leading to burnout, was connected in the literature to the leadership shortage. It was not, however, linked to voluntary committee work.

Many authors have emphasized the importance of providing developing leaders with practical experiential learning opportunities that offer them the chance to practice leading and dealing with leadership challenges and situations in a realistic educational
context. There is a gap, however, between the theoretical approach to leadership development and the practical application of those theories. The findings of this study support the practical importance of committee membership as part of the leadership development process, for both teacher leaders and future administrators. All the participants stressed the value of their committee experiences as a tool for leadership development, but 5 of the 8 participants indicated that they were removing themselves from the formal leadership process as a result, at least in part, of their committee experiences. These findings emphasize the importance of further research into the specific factors supporting or hindering leadership development within voluntary committee work and the development of policies to include them as a part of the formal leadership development process within the school board.

The concept of voluntary committee work as an experiential learning opportunity and acting as a vehicle for leadership development is an area that has been neglected in the research. Voluntary committee work has been mentioned in several articles as one of a list of possible opportunities to increase networking or leadership practice (Chin, 2006; Phelps, 2008; Selinger, 2006), but it has not been explored in a more detailed or focused study of how it can impact overall leadership development. This study was conducted to begin to address that gap and provide a list of factors within a voluntary committee that either support or hinder leadership development. Based on the findings of this study, there are four recommendations for future research to build and expand on these findings.

The first recommendation is that more research be conducted on voluntary committees to explore their viability as a vehicle for leadership development. Specifically, each of the eight factors identified in this study needs to be tested in a larger
sample to see if similar results are obtained and to explore the transferability of the model to other settings within an educational context. The factors that participants identified from within their voluntary committee experience as most significantly contributing positively to leadership development were: (a) leadership practice and experience, (b) having mentors and role models, (c) building relationships and networks, and (d) creating positive outcomes for students. The factors that participants identified from within their voluntary committee experience as most significantly contributing negatively to leadership development were: (a) frustration caused by a lack of follow through and support, (b) interacting with committee members that have a careerist approach to the experience, (c) dealing with personal and political agendas, and (d) overcommitment leading to burnout.

Second, a study should be designed to explore the mentoring relationships formed within a voluntary committee and compare them to the structured mentoring relationships used in formal leadership development programs. In a voluntary committee, as perceived by the participants of this study, mentoring relationships form and evolve naturally based on personality, shared vision or work ethic, previous relationships within a teaching environment, shared experiences, and respect or admiration earned through practical observations and experiences within a voluntary committee. While many authors focused on mentoring as part of leadership development programs or within a classroom setting, there was a clear gap in the area of mentoring within the voluntary committee structure. The findings of this study are in agreement with the existing literature on the importance of mentoring relationships as a crucial component of effective leadership development. The major difference, however, is the focus on voluntary committees to foster more
naturally occurring mentor-mentee relationships, a topic that is lacking in the current literature.

Third, future research should be conducted on the stigma of teacher-leader development, specifically, the impact of the stigma attached to teachers openly pursuing an administrative track on the dropout rate for both voluntary committee membership and the overall leadership development process. At some point during the interviews, all the participants spoke candidly about the negative impacts of being involved with committee work as part of their leadership development. A consistent issue that emerged from the data was the perception and labeling of individuals joining voluntary committees by their colleagues, being referred to as “climbers”, and being treated differently as a result.

Finally, future research should explore how school boards structure and support voluntary committees to optimize their effectiveness as a vehicle for leadership development. This topic could be further explored using a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approach. A qualitative approach could be used to explore administrator and senior board employees’ perceptions of the value of voluntary committee work being included in the formal leadership development process, or to generate possible models or policies to support inclusion. A quantitative approach could be used to track aspiring leaders as they move through the leadership development process, including committee work, and link to successful promotion, dropping out of the process, student success, or any number of relevant variables or outcomes. A mixed methods approach could be used to capture both perceptions and data. Future researchers might also want to consider the use of a longitudinal study within a single board, or a study to compare data across several school boards.
Conclusion

Effective educational leadership has been linked to school and student success. Many well known researchers have focused their attention, specifically in response to a growing leadership shortage, on finding common elements across effective leadership development programs, and four key elements emerged: knowledge/curriculum, relationships/mentoring, practice/experiential learning, and reflection. The focus of this study was to fill a gap in the research by exploring the use of voluntary committees as a vehicle for providing leadership practice and experiential learning for developing leaders and generate a list of factors that either support or hinder leadership development.

All the participants perceived their voluntary committee experiences as being effective experiential learning opportunities and stressed the value of incorporating this type of experience into a structured leadership development program within the school board. This being said, 5 of the 8 participants shared their intentions of removing themselves from the formal leadership development path. They described feeling unsupported by peers, administrators, and the school board in general, they felt overworked, used, and exhausted, and even, in several cases, stigmatized by their colleagues as a result of their efforts to develop their leadership potential.

There seems to be a disconnect between the stated value of the voluntary committee experience, and the resulting exodus of promising and talented leaders. When reviewing the list of factors and recommendations generated by this study, however, the situation begins to resolve itself into a clearer picture. While all the participants agreed that the use of voluntary committees as a vehicle for leadership development has great potential, they also all agreed that the lack of consistent structure, delivery, and support
introduced a number of negative elements that hindered the overall effectiveness of the experience. The factors perceived as supporting leadership development included being able to practice leading in realistic situations, having mentors and role models, being able to build positive relationships, networks, and learning groups, and, ultimately, to be able to create positive outcomes for students. The factors perceived as hindering leadership development included frustration caused by a lack of follow through or support, working with careerists or individuals with personal or political agendas that subverted the learning experience, and overcommitment and negative interactions leading to burnout or dropout.

As more and more school boards begin to view voluntary committees as a recruiting or proving ground for potential educational leaders, it will become increasingly important to be aware of what factors need to be in place to ensure the best possible outcomes for leadership development. Committees can be an effective tool for experiential learning for leadership development, but it is critical for the individuals involved in setting up and running the committee to be aware of the factors and recommendations discussed in this study and to be sure the appropriate support structures are in place. If the school board supports this concept and develops it as a part of a larger leadership development program, it has the potential to be an effective tool, but without that intentional support, however, there is the chance that the hindering factors may continue to drive potential leaders off the path.

**Reflections on the Researcher’s Experience**

As a developing leader, being part of this experience has significantly altered how I think about my personal leadership journey. Having entered the latter half of my career
in education with a wide range of leadership experiences under my belt, having been on many committees and even having chaired more than a few, I came with preunderstanding of the role played by voluntary committees in the leadership development process. I am not sure what I was expecting, but I was surprised and moved by the depth of sincerity and honesty with which each of the participants approached this process. I must admit that I was not expecting the levels of openness and frankness in the interviews and the parallels between their experiences and my own.

The choice of topics for this thesis, at least in part, was motivated by my familiarity and experience with voluntary committees, but it was also based on a genuine belief that they can and should be an integral part of a structured, board-wide leadership development program. It is my hope that these findings will be used, in some small way, to open doors for anyone involved in developing leaders or working on voluntary committees to realize that they are making a difference and that there is something to be excited about!
References


Lapadat, J., & Lindsay, A. (1999). Transcription in research and practice: From standardization of technique to interpretive positionings. *Qualitative Inquiry, 5*, 64-86.


Appendix A

Research Ethics Board Clearance Letter

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: Accepted as clarified

This project received ethics clearance on January 12, 2010. The study may now proceed.

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to http://www.brocku.ca/research/policies-and-forms/forms to complete the appropriate form Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form Continuing Review/Final Report is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

MM/ep
Appendix B

Interview Schedule

Principal Student Investigator: Pieter Toth, M. Ed Student
M.Ed Programme, Thesis
Brock University

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Denise Armstrong
Faculty of Education
Brock University
(905) 688-5550 Ext. 5166
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Thank you for agreeing to participate in the Teachers’ Experiences and Perceptions of Voluntary Committee Work as a Vehicle for Leadership Development study. You have been invited to participate in this study because you are an educator who has volunteered for a school board level committee within the past three years. This interview will last for approximately sixty minutes and will ask you to explore your experiences and perceptions of voluntary committee work as a vehicle for your leadership development.

Please be aware that you have already provided signed consent to participate in this study, including consent to the audio taping of your interview. Before we begin the interview, we will review the consent form together and ask you to re-affirm your consent. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time and/or to choose not to answer any question with which you are uncomfortable.

These questions are being provided in advance of the interview to allow you time to reflect.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers’ experiences and perceptions of voluntary committee work as a vehicle for leadership development. A focus of the study is identifying factors that contribute, positively or negatively, to the leadership development process.

Interview Questions:

Question 1: What does leadership development mean to you?

Question 2: How do you perceive your involvement in a voluntary board-level committee as impacting your leadership development?

Question 3: Does being involved in the committee experience help you to become a better leader? Please Explain.

Question 4: What factors from your committee experience do you perceive as having contributed positively to your leadership development?

Question 5: What factors from your committee experience do you perceive as having contributed negatively to your leadership development?

Question 6: What key factors, if any, were missing from your committee experience that would have contributed to your leadership development?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. Your input has been invaluable!

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University’s Research Ethics Board (file # 09-107 - ARMSTRONG) and through the school board involved in the study.
Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. What does leadership development mean to you?

2. How do you perceive your involvement in a voluntary board-level committee as impacting your leadership development?

3. How does being involved in the committee experience help you to become a better leader?

4. What factors from your committee experience do you perceive as having contributed positively to your leadership development?

5. What factors from your committee experience do you perceive as having contributed negatively to your leadership development?

6. What key factors, if any, were missing from your committee experience that would have contributed to your leadership development?
Appendix D

Probing Questions

1. Why did you become involved with board level committees?
2. What committees have you been involved with at any level?
3. Why did you choose to be on these committees?
4. How were you selected to become a member of each committee?
5. What challenges have you encountered?
6. How did you negotiate these challenges?
7. How long have you been involved in committees?
8. How do you experience the committee(s)? e.g. the dynamics, politics?
9. What are your recommendations to make committee work more effective at impacting your leadership development?
Appendix E
Definition of Key Terms

Leadership

Based on a review of the literature, it would be difficult if not impossible, to provide a single all-encompassing and universally accepted definition of leadership. According to Phelps (2008), “Definitions of leadership abound” (p. 119) and Vroom and Jago (2007) state that the problem “stems from the fact that the term leadership, despite its popularity, is not a scientific term with a formal, standardized definition” (p. 17). A discussion of several leadership definitions and theories can be found within the body of this paper.

Educational leadership

Although educational leadership is as difficult to define as any form of leadership (Ward & Parr, 2006), it can be described as leadership applied specifically within an educational context, often associated with school efficiency (Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008) school reform (Barth, 2001), or some form of change (Bush, 2008). Although it has traditionally been interpreted as a reference to formal leadership roles within education (Muijs & Harris, 2007), Bush (2008) describes it as “a fluid process, potentially emanating from any part of the school, independent of formal management positions and capable of residing with any member of the organization” (p. 277). This description is appropriate for the discussions within this paper.

Teacher-leader
There is some debate as to an exact definition of the term teacher-leader, but the following definition seems to capture most of the common elements. “A teacher leader is a teacher who works with colleagues for the purpose of improving teaching and learning, whether in a formal or an informal capacity” (Patterson & Patterson, 2004, p. 74).

*Mentoring*

Stott and Walker (1992) describe difficulty of crafting a universal definition of mentoring and provide several examples from the literature. Gandz (2006) defines mentors as “people to whom the unsure, the inexperienced, the perplexed or the puzzled can turn for advice, interpretations and guidance” (p. 2). “For the purpose of this paper, mentoring can be defined as a structured relationship between two individuals with the more experienced acting as the mentor “who provide a continuum of supportive and educationally based mentoring functions” (Kamler, 2006, p. 299).

*Leadership Development/Preparation*

Leadership development is a complicated and challenging term to define. The following definition expresses the relevant concepts. “While recognizing a broad range of meanings for the term leadership preparation, we use the term here to include formal policy intent, structures, frameworks and programmes designed and implemented to provide an articulated set of activities for both the preparation and ongoing development of potential and serving school leaders” (Walker & Dimmock, 2006, p. 125).

*Experiential Learning*

Experiential learning is the process of creating knowledge through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984). The process involves deriving knowledge, forming thoughts, and testing ideas through our own subjective experience in a
continuous cycle of forming, modification, and re-forming (Kolb). Structured applications of experiential learning can be seen in education and development programs around the world and include internships, field placements, work/study assignments, structured exercises, role plays, and gaming simulations (Kolb). In our increasingly complex world, there is an even greater need for strong linkages between educational programs, at all levels, and the “real world”. Experiential learning theory can provide that link and is a key element for success in education and development programs (Kolb, D.A., Boyatzis, R. E., & Mainemelis, C., 2000).