Just a Teacher?
Discovering Teacher as Leader

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Abstract

This is an autobiographical study using narrative inquiry to gain insight into the factors that led the author to grow into a teacher leader and to see himself as such. The author examined key turning points in his teaching career when his sense of self was irrevocably changed; moments of turning that the German philosopher Martin Heidegger calls 'Kehre'. These moments of turning frequently involved others communicating their perspective of the author in the form of either conversations or writing. They frequently involve the author experiencing self-doubt when in a place of tension, indecision or mis-fit. While the study allowed the author to better understand his own story of accepting the identity of teacher-leader, the intent of the study is to facilitate others in recognizing, and exercising, their individual and collective capacities for teacher leadership. For the author, the insights gained from this study will allow him to project his story forward.

Key words: identity, leadership, narrative, teacher

Acknowledgements

There are numerous individuals who by being in the world and being a part of my story have made me a better person. I realize I am risking leaving an important name out but I to take a stab at naming some of the people who flashed before my eyes as I revisited the past twenty years. My growth as an educator is the result of people like Bruce, Dennis, Brett, Peter, Jolie, Roger, Mara, Dennis, Sheila, Cam, Bruce, Barbara, Terry, Ted, Peter, David, Angie, Moira, Andrew, Michael, Todd, Janet, Lynn, Chris, Shannon, Greg, Annette, Marion, Rene, Meredith, Faye, Pamela, Maryann, Val, Jack, Judy, Linda, Esther, Anita, Mary, Doug, Anne, Jill, Carl, Brooke, Paige, Laura, Cindy, Harry, Rosa, Neil, Leah, Gary, Rosemary, Karen, and Diane.

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My children make me a better person, and a better educator. They just do. They have so much to teach me as I learn to become the person they need me to be. In particular they have opened my eyes to see the sacrifices and supports my parents provided me. They also remind me not to take myself too seriously.

Margaret is an inspiration to me. Without her counsel and her support this paper would never have been started, much less finished. She supported this "education adventure" over twenty years ago and continues to do so. I am bolder and braver because of her.

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Introduction

One of the most prevailing norms in the teaching profession is egalitarianism, which

fosters the view that teachers who step up to leadership roles are stepping out of line.

A significant problem with formal leadership roles has been the conflict they create with

this norm (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 272).

For teachers to view themselves as leaders, in a formal role or informally, they must

navigate a cultural minefield. The word 'leadership', with its implications of power and

hierarchy, expectations of confident expertise and charisma, and narratives of 'us and them',

divides educators. Teachers are leaders in a multitude of ways – it comes out of who they are

and their passion for their students. They are leaders within their classrooms exercising

relatively high levels of autonomy and having a significant influence on the learning and

development of their students. However, new ways of conceptualizing leadership are needed for

teachers to confidently and comfortably self-identify as leaders and exercise that leadership

individually and collectively outside their classrooms.

In BC we have the phrase 'just a teacher', which limits this leadership to the classroom.

However, there are many ways teachers, from within their classrooms, exercise leadership

beyond their classrooms. This 'informal' leadership is generally bestowed by peers upon

respected colleagues and, whether intended or not, it has significant influence on the school.

Increasingly, informal leadership is being exercised by groups of teachers, particularly in schools

where the administrative leaders are sharing decision-making and initiative-taking with teachers

via distributed leadership. With Michael Fullan (1994) claiming, "teacher leadership is not for a

few, it is for all" (p. 246) and Muijs and Harris (2003) claiming, "every person in one way or

another can demonstrate leadership" (p. 439), one wonders how to reconcile the prevailing identity of 'just a teacher' with the potential of being a 'teacher leader'.

To provide a lens for viewing this thesis I will briefly share who I am, what I believe, my present context, the purpose of this thesis, and key terms I will be using. In this chapter my outside voice is written in regular font and my internal voice is written in italics.

Who I am

I was 'just a teacher'. I was a young man who was passionate about others and sharing knowledge with them. I have generally been very open to change.

And like most I preferred change on my terms.

I am becoming an old man. One who is still passionate about making the world a better place. One who has learned, and is frequently reminded by life, that listening to and learning with and from others is a form of giving to others.

I am better able to accept change, embrace it, and not require it be on my terms.

Is that true or just something I'd like to believe about myself?

I have a growth mindset and am very curious with lots of questions.

I am adaptable and tend to re-frame challenges as opportunities – find the 'bless in the mess'.

I have the wisdom that comes from experience and years of reflection.

People see something in you that you can't see in yourself, so you step in, even when you feel like an imposter, and eventually begin to feel more comfortable. I am willing to shoulder responsibility. How did I come to this place?

Paradoxically, as I incrementally learn more I am exponentially becoming aware of all that I do not know or understand. The result being that I feel less sure and confident as the unknown outruns the known. *The imposter syndrome gets worse not better as one ages.*

Ray Bakke (1997) names fear and the grief that accompany loss as the first emotion felt with any change.   I suspect I have come to accept these as part of the "change experience." Palmer (2007) advises that we can move beyond our fears by "reclaiming the connectedness that takes away fear" (p. 59). I am compelled to understand, to be understood, and to exchange insight and knowledge; the desire for connectedness is strong which may in part explain my general willingness to embrace change.

Is this a story I tell myself? Is it true or am I describing the person I'd like to be?

I often wonder, "Does what I do matter? Do I need to matter?"

What I believe

I believe every student is capable of being successful.

I believe that the majority of teachers have the best interests of students in mind and are doing the best they know how with the supports and resources available to them.

I believe our goal should be that all students are successful.

I believe that sometimes we are the barriers to student success.

Ownership of learning with a growth orientation (with the aim of intellectually engaged students) is important to my learning, and I believe (and extensive research supports) that this is very important to nurture in our students. It is a priority that students grow into active learners with agency and purpose versus passive consumers.

I believe we can all do better; that we can change our practices, our system, and our educational culture so that more students are more successful.

It is something I have strived to do (maneuvering within the constraints of the "traditional" school culture and structures as well as my own self-imposed constraints) and now am free (encouraged) to do this as much as possible.

I believe change is hard. So hard that one cannot do it by oneself. We need professional friends who can encourage and support us.

Change is unavoidable and necessary. It involves risk (moving into the unknown) and courage (moving thoughtfully in spite of our trepidation). It also presents an opportunity for growth.

I wonder about change that is unwanted and unpleasant (and it can be horrible – I've lived long enough to know). I wonder if the nature of the way we are changed, in the long term, is determined largely by our response to the initial change?

Context

I am entering my third decade of 'teaching'. During the past 20+ years I have taught in six different schools in two countries, taught students age 11 through 19 about mathematics, science and physics.

What else have I taught them? To think? To dream? To own their learning?

I have served my colleagues in three different district teacher positions and on several inter-district committees and working groups. Over the past four years I have made two significant job changes both requiring I move well out of my comfort zone.

Looking back over the past 20 years much of what I've learned has required repeated reinforcement/exposure – with me learning something new each time.

There have been key stages: year 4/5 ready for new practices, year 8-10 ready to own leadership responsibilities.

Hmmm…. thinking of a parallel between the "Adult ways of knowing" Kegan & Lahey (2009) reference and "Teacher's ways of being".

Purpose

What I am trying to do with this project is better understand how teachers effect change and how we grow our capacity to do that.

I am curious to understand what we mean by "teacher leadership", how I've come to the place I find myself, and how I fit in as a teacher and a leader.

This project will draw on recent research and literature to provide a context for the important role of teacher leadership in improving schools.   It will also draw on my personal experiences over the past two decades to explore the question of How does one begin to see oneself as a leader capable of contributing to change?

Really I'm trying to answer a whole bunch of questions:

  1) *What do we mean by teacher leadership? Aren't we just teachers?*

  2) *How did I get here? Who am I fooling?*

  3) *Why is it so hard for me to "fit in"?*

Key Terms

   Cultural practices. In an educational context, these are the manner in which individuals relate to one another, the vision, or absence of vision, for student learning and success, the work ethic of individuals, the level of responsibility individuals take for their success and the success of others, and staff engagement with ongoing professional inquiry (Danielson, 2006).

   Kehre. This is the German term used to by the philosopher Martin Heidegger to describe those moments of turning when "we rise above our everyday world and come to see, hear, and understand life and being differently" (Chambers, 2004, p. 10). Even though we do not remain in that state, the memories of those turning points remain and we are never the same after.

Project Overview

My research question – how does a teacher come to see him or herself as more than 'just a teacher' – is one I have wrestled with for many years. With this paper I propose to unpack the awkwardness of 'teacher identifying as leader' by the examining key junctures where I came to recognize, accept and nurture in myself what others saw in me – namely the capacity to provide leadership. My intention is to provide you with a series of vignettes, written from my perspective, that tell the story of how I came to accept myself as a teacher-leader. As a reader, you will find yourself alternating between the vignettes in italics and my reflections on their significance in regular font.

Literature Review

In this chapter I will identify and synthesize current ideas about leadership, teacher leadership and more specifically the informal leadership role of teachers in influencing school culture and supporting change/innovation. My focus is primarily on North America and other similar contexts. In particular I will draw on the following five sources: Day, Harris & Hadfield's (2001) multi-perspective study of effective school leaders in southern England; York-Barr & Duke's (2003) overview of teacher leadership research that draws on 100 sources including 41 studies; Muijs & Harris' (2004) synthesis of the teacher leadership literature that draws from 79 sources largely from the United States but also including Canada, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom; Danielson's (2006) book *Teacher Leadership That Strengthens Practice* where she presents a framework for teacher leadership drawing on 47 print sources and conversations with thousands of educators from all around the United States; and Lai & Cheung's (2014) study identifying teacher leadership practices in nine different schools that were engaged in effecting change initiated by curriculum reform in Hong Kong.

Traditional Conceptions of Leadership

The topic of leadership is a vast one with no shortage of literature, from antiquity to present, documenting, exploring, contrasting and critiquing various forms and styles of leadership. While leadership can mean many things, the term leadership usually refers to one or more of the following: the position of responsibility for leading others, the duration of holding such a position, the power or ability to lead people (Miriam-Webster, 2014). Most commonly, leadership is understood as holding a position of authority that comes with power to compel others to action. With some exceptions, the leadership position is held for a limited period of time which leads to the false assumption that one stops being a leader once one stops holding

such a position (Beynon, Grout & Wideen, 2004). The third use of the term speaks to the

capacity to produce desired outcomes from a group; a capacity that is not necessarily dependent

on holding a formal position. It is this capacity that we will unpack further as we examine

leadership in context of 21st century schools, emphasizing the role of individual teacher leaders

in building the collective capacity of teachers to contribute to making effective change in their

schools.

> **Administrative Leadership.** Traditional views in education frame leadership as a

quality that resides exclusively in administrative positions and suggests that teachers are

immature beings that need direction and guidance (Danielson, 2006). Muijs and Harris (2003)

note that "schools as organizational structures remain largely unchanged, equating leadership

with status, authority and position" (p. 437) and their review of leadership literature found that

leadership "is largely premised upon individual endeavor rather than collective action, and a

singular view of leadership continues to dominate, equating leadership with headship" (p.437).

> In many jurisdictions there is a clear demarcation between leadership positions that come

with 'power over' and those that do not (Danielson, 2006; Day, Harris & Hadfield, 2001; York-

Barr & Duke, 2004). 'Power over' includes the ability to do any of the following: direct, hire,

fire, promote, transfer, or change compensation. Teachers who take on 'power over' positions

are re-branded as 'administrators'; they are still referred to as educators but none of the literature

includes school administrators under the conception of a teacher leader. Other terms for

administrative leaders include principal, vice-principal, headteacher, head, and deputy head to

name a few. Regardless of the terminology used, the individual assuming the 'power over'

position occupies a position that is higher in a hierarchical structure.

Effective Administrative Leadership. Historically, the ability to consistently produce the desired outcomes has been believed to reside in an individual with strong managerial skills. In their literature review, Day et al. (2001) found that existing theories adhered to this 'person centred' philosophy where the primary task of the leader is to improve teaching and learning by "managing inter-personal relations and challenging others to give of their best in the context of policy-driven imperatives which were not always universally welcome" (p.26). This middle management model of leadership, unquestioningly sub-contracting policies mandated from outside the school context onto teachers, is pervasive in many jurisdictions. This ineffective model for making meaningful change in schools contrasted with the practices of effective leaders that Day et al. uncovered in their research.

They considered twelve schools in southern England representing a variety of contexts ranging from small rural primary schools to large urban secondary schools to explore whether this historical view of leadership was represented in these schools. All twelve schools had headteachers, what we call principals in North America, who were considered effective school leaders based on the following three criteria: their school received a 'positive' Inspection Report by Ofsted (the national school inspecting body), their school performed better than the local and national means on external tests and examinations, and the school's headteacher was widely acknowledged by their professional peers as being an effective leader. They drew on additional perspectives provided by numerous stakeholders including students, teachers, parents, deputy headteachers, support staff and governors, as well as that of the headteachers, in order to capture the multiple perspectives they needed to triangulate their data. This was unique since the majority of leadership research Day et al. had found had the head teacher as the sole source of data.

In their study they found that effective leadership was "defined and driven by individual value systems, rather than instrumental managerial concerns" (Day et al., 2001, p. 26). Meaningful change occurred when school-based leaders held the view that "…the headteacher's main role is to influence the quality of teaching and learning in the school through purposeful transformational leadership" (p. 19). The headteachers in the study "communicated their personal vision and belief systems by direction, words and deeds. Through a variety of symbolic gestures and action, they were successful at realigning the school community to their particular vision" (p. 28). These effective headteachers had 'persistence of vision and values' while simultaneously focusing upon both process and achievement, all within a school context, which by nature is imperfect, complex, dynamic and unpredictable. According to Day et al., these were vision and values that focused on "the betterment of the children, young people and staff who worked in their schools" (p. 27).

Evolving Concepts of Leadership

Day et al. (2001) found the effectiveness of the head teacher depended on their ability to manage key tensions and dilemmas. They identified seven key tensions that required heads to continually strive to balance competing demands and three dilemmas, situations where heads were faced with two choices – neither of which would be entirely satisfactory.

Power With or Power Over. The dilemma of "Power With or Power Over" speaks to the extent that a leader can reconcile conflicting values as they balance what they learn through consulting with staff and their own vision of the direction forward for the school. This dilemma arises when the tension between autocracy and autonomy becomes too great. The head teacher needs to be able work collaboratively and democratically with staff by involving them in decision-making while still owning the responsibility and accountability for the school's success.

One will note that the tension and the resulting dilemma hint at teachers' participation in decision-making and action taking at their schools.

       Sub-contracting or Mediation. The second dilemma of "Sub-contracting or Mediation" speaks to the challenge of being responsible for implementing externally imposed policies and at the same time managing "changes with integrity and skill, integrating them into the vision, values and practices of their schools" (Day et al., 2001, p.31). Mediating external demands on behalf of teachers allows them to get on with the work of achieving the priorities of the school and points to their autonomy and freedom to exercise initiative. This too suggests a school culture where teachers share in decision making, have agency and the needs of its students are a high priority.

       The Potential for Shared Leadership. In both dilemmas one sees that leadership is not solely situated in the formal head of the school. Danielson (2006) sees administrative leadership as a necessary condition but in itself "is not sufficient; it must be complemented by teacher leadership" (p. 17). She recognizes that teacher leadership and administrative leadership are not in conflict or competition but rather they are complementary concepts that "work together on behalf of students and their learning" (p. 18). Lai and Cheung also recognize that while "conventional understanding of school leadership has perceived the role of the principal to be the primary source of educational expertise and the leadership function of the school to be residing with the principal" (2014, p. 1) there has been "a change in leadership thinking from an emphasis on one-person leadership to recognition of the potential of shared leadership" (p. 1). Eight years earlier, Muijs and Harris (2003) pointed out that "(P)principal leadership does not stand out as a critical part of the change process but that teacher leadership does have a significant effect on student engagement" (p. 441). However, principals do have key role to play. We need to

redefine the role of formal leaders to include responsibility for distributing leadership, for

making the shift from the individual to the collective (Bower, 2006).

Teacher Leadership

There is consensus that the capacity for leadership is a potential of both teachers and

administrators. However, Lai and Cheung's (2014) recent literature review shows that there is

still a lack of a clear, agreed-upon definition of teacher leadership. The existence of numerous

overlapping definitions of teacher leadership is due in part to its use as a catch-all term to hold

the many ways thinking about teacher leadership has evolved and expanded over time (Muijs &

Harris, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Current ways of thinking are grounded in leadership

conceptions that are "inclusive of formal *and* informal leaders: participative leadership,

leadership as an organizational quality, distributed leadership, and parallel leadership" (York-

Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 261). These conceptions recognize teacher leadership as "a unique form

of leadership not necessarily vested in a formal hierarchy or role description" (p. 263). It is a

form of leadership that is "practiced through a variety of formal and informal positions, roles,

and channels of communication in the daily work of school" (p. 263). It is "the process by which

teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members

of the school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased

student learning and achievement" (pp. 287-8).

Formal Teacher Leadership. Whitaker, writing to administrators, states the obvious:

"formal teacher leadership roles are essential to the smooth operation of a school" (1995, p. 1).

Teachers lead in formal roles that come with a position and title but not 'power over' (Danielson,

2006; Lai & Cheung, 2014; Whitaker, 1995; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Formal teacher

leadership tends to take the form of titled positions with specific responsibilities and explicit, and

implicit, role expectations that reflect traditional individual roles. They include union

representatives, department heads, curriculum specialists, athletics coordinators, district

consultants, helping teachers and teacher mentors to name a few (Danielson, 2006; Muijs &

Harris, 2003; Lai & Cheng, 2014; Whitaker, 1995; York-Barr & Duke).

      Formal teacher leadership can disrupt the egalitarian norm. There can often be

"significant tension between teacher leaders in formal positions and their colleagues" (York-Barr

& Duke, 2004, p. 264). A large part of the tension comes from the collegial norm of

egalitarianism that exists, particularly in North American school culture, and the perception that

formal teacher leaders have "violated professional norms of equality and independence" (p. 269)

by taking on a formal role that creates a hierarchy within the teacher community. This

egalitarian norm discourages teachers from presenting themselves as leaders for fear of the

conflict and tension that could arise with their peers (Danielson, 2006; Muijs & Harris, 2003;

York-Barr & Duke, 2004). So, while teachers who take on positions of leadership demonstrate a

learning orientation and a willingness to assume risks and responsibilities, they quite often

experience a diminished affiliation with teaching, even when their roles keep them close to the

classroom (Muijs & Harris, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Both formal and informal teacher

leaders run the risk of conflict and ostracization if they fail to be sufficiently self-deprecating in

how they exercise leadership (Muijs & Harris, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

      Formal teacher leaders tend to preserve the status quo. One common limitation of

formal teacher leadership positions is that they tend to be created by, and work within, existing

hierarchical structures with a focus on the smooth running of the school; the roles and functions

of the position are usually slotted into the constraints of existing structures (Lai & Cheung, 2014;

Whitaker, 1995; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). When formal leaders gain their legitimacy through

assigned roles or positions, particularly ones with responsibilities focused predominantly on administrative activities and managerial functions, they tend to exercise a 'transactional leadership' that prioritizes the efficient maintenance of the school's systems and structures. System change is not part of the job description (Lai & Cheung, 2014).

Informal Teacher Leadership. Teachers can lead in informal ways. Lai and Cheung, in studying teachers managing an externally mandated change, observed that while teacher leadership can sit with an individual it can also be held collectively; this dichotomy allows us to "conceptualize formal teacher leadership as role-based and informal teacher leadership as community based" (Lai & Cheung, 2014, p. 3). Informal leadership includes volunteering to take on responsibilities such as sitting on school or district committees, sponsoring a club or sports team, coordinating a school trip, or sponsoring a pre-service teacher. Informal leaders also influence school culture by coaching peers, encouraging parent participation, collaborating with colleagues, modeling reflective practice or articulating a vision for improvement (Danielson, 2006; Lai & Cheung, 2014; Whitaker, 1995; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Danielson's book focuses on identifying and nurturing the attributes of these teachers. She defines teacher leadership as a concept that, while it includes roles and positions that teachers may hold, transcends formality and includes "those teachers who choose to remain primarily teachers of students, but have the inclination and the skill to extend their reach" (2006, p. 27). She recognizes the critical role that teachers play in 'improvement efforts' and the importance of an 'enhanced sense of professionalism' if they are to play their role.

Informal leaders are key to transformation and innovation. In a study conducted in 2013, Krueger identified that, when making changes in nursing culture, many nurses played the integral role of 'advocate.' Krueger asserts that autonomy and empowerment in the work

environment are key attributes supporting advocacy. In this environment nurses honed "their

communication skills in order to follow through with, or change, interventions to create more

positive outcomes for patients" (2013, p. 2). This empowerment, driven by a desire to produce

positive change in practice, parallels the potential of transformational leadership provided by

teachers to influence a schools' capacity to improve student achievement (Danielson, 2006;

Halbert & Kaser, 2009; Muijs & Harris, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Though formal teacher leaders have important roles in the life of a school, it is the

informal teacher leaders who are key to transformation and innovation in schools (Danielson,

2006; Lai & Cheung, 2014; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Whitaker, 1995; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Danielson (2006) recognizes the critical roles played by teachers who have an enhanced sense of

professionalism; one that leads them both to work directly with their students and to provide

leadership beyond their classroom settings. That is, teachers take ownership for not only the

learning of students in their direct care, but also for improving student learning for the general

population of students at their schools. Bower (2006) was intrigued by the longevity of reform

initiatives, in some cases being refined and developed for more than a decade, at a middle school

where he had served as principal. To collect data he conducted individual interviews, focus

groups, document review, and journal notes. In his view:

> The role of leadership cannot be just to maintain order. Order based upon rules someone
>
> else has created does not allow us to respond to increased demands and complexity of
>
> local work. School systems are characterized by the paradox that those leaders farthest
>
> from the students, such as superintendents, have the most official authority and power.
>
> While teachers may not set a direction for an entire school district, they do have personal
>
> power. Teachers often exercise their personal power behind the closed doors of

classrooms (p. 70).

To sustain reform and improvement, teachers are needed to provide leadership by exercising their personal power beyond their classrooms – this is informal teacher leadership.

Enabling Teacher Leadership

Within the walls of their classrooms teachers have historically held high levels of autonomy for both decision-making and initiative taking. Lai and Cheung (2014) identify the emerging conception of "teacher leadership beyond the classroom" (p. 2) that shifts "leadership thinking from an emphasis on one-person leadership to recognition of the potential of shared leadership" (p. 1). This change recognizes the power of teacher talents to drive change and improve schools. A decade earlier, Muijs and Harris (2003) identified that a "shift towards more collaborative forms of development both within and between schools has set a climate that is much more receptive to the idea of teacher leadership" (p. 438).   Bower (2006) observed that when "teachers are involved collectively in the creation of rules and order, they can collectively assert their power" (p. 70).

Empowerment and Agency. The two qualities of teacher leadership that distinguish it from other teacher collaborative endeavours are empowerment and agency. The principal reason for teacher leadership is "to empower teachers to become involved more closely in decision-making within the school" (Muijs & Harris, 2003, p. 439). Empowering teachers entails principals sharing power. Bower's (2006) examination of "sustained improvement over time that emerges from within a school and is based upon the needs that the school has identified from internal and external feedback" (p. 64) recognizes that schools "still need a principal but leadership must be distributed throughout the school" (p. 62). When administrative leaders are able to distribute leadership they allow schools to break out of hierarchical thinking and create

space for all the school staff to contribute to, and have ownership of, improving learning and

teaching practices (Bower, 2006; Lai & Cheung, 2014).

An administrator who adheres to a top down management style presents a significant

barrier to shared leadership; not all administrators are able or willing to shift from a management

model to a facilitation model. York-Barr and Duke (2004) see teacher agency in action when

teachers are "establishing relationships, breaking down barriers, and marshaling resources

throughout the organization in an effort to improve students' educational experiences and

outcomes" (p. 263). The barriers that need breaking down can include an individual whose

guiding philosophy is transactional leadership; one who focuses on maintaining current

structures rather than changing culture and developing the capacity to innovate (Lai & Cheung,

2014). Bower (2006) argues that using top-down management processes to implement school

changes denies "the creative processes of the teachers who will have to implement them with the

result that teachers find their own sense of ownership by circumventing the direction or

modifying the design" (p. 68). So, while principals have the greatest power in the 'principal-

teacher dyad' and set the tone for that relationship (York-Barr & Duke, 2004), we see the

potential for teacher agency regardless of the disposition of the formal leaders.

Collective Teacher Leadership is Essential. Teachers rightly and importantly, "hold a

central position in the ways schools operate and in the core functions of teaching and learning"

(York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 438). Recognizing the "variety, uncertainty, and ambiguity" that

form the daily realities of teaching, and the need to relentlessly exercise professional judgment in

responding to them, York-Barr and Duke affirm that "teachers hold tacit or craft knowledge

needed to inform and lead improvement initiatives" (p. 256). Teachers are not immature beings

that need direction and guidance. They are professionals engaged in professional work, informed

by professional research, making complex decisions, and exercising judgment and autonomy in support of student learning (Danielson, 2006).

York-Barr and Duke (2004) consider teacher leadership a form of participative leadership, which stresses group decision making, and an organizational quality, rather than an individual quality, with teacher leadership influencing both the actions of individual and the very system in which they act. They speak of expanded leadership actions for teachers that place them alongside administrative leaders in interdependent relationships that share leadership across roles and positions. They identify the existence of "new understandings about organizational development and leadership that suggest active involvement of all individuals at all levels and within all domains of an organization is necessary if change is to take hold" (p. 255). This participation in collective action, with its increased collaboration and increased responsibility, leads to significant positive effects on transforming schools (Muijs & Harris, 2003). For that matter, Halbert and Kaser (2009) argue that building leadership capacity "by developing the identity and direction of the school collectively and by distributing leadership" (p. 39) is essential to sustaining meaningful change in a school.

Exercising Collective Leadership

Distributed leadership changes the power relationships within schools. It blurs the distinction between followers and leaders and, by incorporating multiple individuals and/or groups, it builds social leadership through the interaction of multiple 'leaders'. Its focus is interdependency rather than dependency (Muijs & Harris, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). It is not necessary that all teachers demonstrate leadership in the same way nor in the same domains (Lai & Cheung, 2014; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), rather what is important is that "teacher leadership reclaims school leadership from the individual to the collective, from the singular to

the plural and offers the real possibility of distributed leadership in action" (Muijs & Harris, 2003, p. 445). For example, Krueger (2013) found that the individuals most influential when a group is first exposed to a change may find their influence diminishes as the group becomes more certain and experiences success. In other words, as the group begins to exercise collective leadership the informal leaders who had emerged at the beginning of the process step back to allow room for all to contribute and share the leadership.

Taking Turns. Bower (2006) provides a helpful example of a shift from rigid to more fluid roles through this example of teachers volunteering for role-based leadership:

> For several years at Roosevelt, individuals were almost sentenced to take on leadership
> roles with various groups and committees. People gave in and accepted the roles to allow
> meetings to move on. In the last few years, people moved in and out of leadership roles
> with relative ease. A term of office lasts a year or so, and there is little difficulty in
> finding someone new to take on the role. A sense of support and feeling that "I can do
> this" seem to characterize this new culture (p. 67).

Bower suggests that a cultural shift in how teachers thought about 'leaders' may have contributed to this. Rather than viewing leaders as heroes who solve problems and save the day there was "a growing sense that leadership is about working with others to solve problems" (p. 67) and that teachers can take turns leading. He relates leadership to the phenomenon of emergence and states that "Leaders are not born or made, but they emerge at the juxtaposition of personal and situational events" (p. 68). Lai and Cheung (2014) named informal leadership as "an emergent, collaborative and collective enterprise" (p. 3). We see that leadership can be dynamically shared, with individuals stepping up and stepping back, as events unfold.

Everyone can be a leader. Teacher leadership is the collective capacity to initiate change where "teacher leadership is not for a few; it is for all" (Fullan, 1994, p. 246). Muijs and Harris (2003) observed that teacher leadership's "emphasis on collective action, empowerment, and shared agency are reflected in distributed leadership theory" (p. 439) and are convinced that "all organizational members can lead" (p. 440). While "this does not mean that everyone is a leader or should be … it opens up the possibility for a more democratic and collective form of leadership" (p. 439). This resonates with York-Barr and Duke's synthesis of the change in how leadership is viewed; that "…leadership is not vested in one person who is high up in the hierarchy and assigned to a formal position of power and authority" rather it is "viewed as a potential capacity of both teachers and administrators" (2004, p. 262). All five writers agree; leadership can be exercised by all.

Collective capacity is built through relationship. A theme running throughout the literature about leadership is that, at its core, leadership is about relationships. Teacher leadership's key purpose is to transform schools through collaboration; collaboration which builds capacity and increases teacher's self-confidence to act as leaders (Muijs & Harris, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). This collaboration happens in a community through relationships. We must remember that informal leadership is community-based and that "leadership is separated from a person, role and status and primarily concerned with the relationships and connections among individuals within a school" (Muijs & Harris, 2003, p. 437). York-Barr and Duke note that informal leaders exert influence primarily through relationships and "the ability to establish trusting and collaborative relationships" is one of their key characteristics (2004, p. 272). A teacher leader, drawing on the respect that they have gained from students and colleagues, are able to see an opportunity for improvement and take initiative (Danielson, 2006; Lai & Cheng,

2014). However, teacher leaders don't attempt to address issues alone; they engage others in the change by using invitational language, genuinely respecting their colleagues and clearly conveying an understanding that the best ideas emerge from collective effort (Danielson, 2006).

The Role of the Individual in Collective Teacher Leadership.

We have seen that leadership is a capacity that resides in individuals and in groups and that it is primarily about initiating, implementing, and sustaining meaningful change; change in mindset and change in practice (Danielson, 2006; Halbert & Kaser, 2009; Lai & Cheung, 2014*;* Muijs & Harris, 2003).

The impact of the informal leadership exercised by an individual may be relatively invisible and unnoticed. The presence of key individuals during the stress and anxiety of the change process can provide a calming influence (Friedmann, 2007). Teacher leadership is possible because of individuals who facilitate and support collaboration, who engage colleagues in examining practice and in thoughtful experimentation, who are committed to continuous learning and collegiality, and who support the change process by slipping in and out of leading and following (Danielson, 2006; Krueger, 2013; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). If one looks carefully, one can recognize these leaders by the cumulative effect that their actions, however small or subtle, have on changing their school. They are respected and trusted by their colleagues and exercise leadership, by initiating and supporting collective action, whether they consider themselves leaders or not; their influence comes from the trusting relationship they have with their peers (Covey, 2004; Halbert & Kaser, 2009; Whitaker, 1995; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Effective teacher leaders are characterized by a deep commitment to student learning and a high tolerance for ambiguity (Danielson, 2006; Kaser & Halbert, 2009). Danielson (2006)

describes the dispositions of teacher leaders as a "cluster of traits and ways of looking at the world that tend to reinforce one another. Teacher leaders are confident, open-minded, enthusiastic, optimistic, and flexible. They preserve and are willing to work both hard and smart" (p. 40). Let us consider some of these characteristics and traits of individuals that allow them to support collective teacher leadership.

Be committed to student learning. Effective teacher leaders have the learning needs of students as their primary focus. They know it is unacceptable to "live and work in schools where many students are not learning or at least are not learning to their potential or even close to it" (Danielson, 2006, p. 36). They work hard to "close any gaps in performance and are deeply concerned about the needs of their most vulnerable learners" (Halbert & Kaser, 2009, p. 35). They are driven to promote deep learning by ALL the students in their school and keep students' needs at the centre of their decision-making and actions. This 'intense moral focus' is the engine that animates and the compass that guides effective teacher leaders.

Be tolerant of ambiguity. Change involves uncertainty and teacher leaders need to have a high degree of emotional self-regulation as well as clarity of moral purpose (Friedmann, 2007). The ability to self-regulate during times of change and uncertainty provides the stability the group needs to maintain cohesion and persevere, especially when encountering setbacks and obstacles. Friedmann calls this the "capacity to deal with anxiety" (p. 18). Having a strong moral purpose provides a foundation for building this capacity to navigate the anxious emotional processes of others and oneself (Friedmann, 2007; Halbert & Kaser, 2009). Halbert and Kaser (2013) have referenced the term "Cwelelep" from the Lil'wat language in speaking to this need to embrace uncertainty. The term "suggests being in a place of dissonance and uncertainty in anticipation of new learning" (p. 14). Courageously embracing this discomfort is necessary to

respond to a need or an opportunity (Danielson, 2006). Danielson reminds us that, by its very nature, many important issues of school improvement can "neither be known in advance nor planned for in detail. Therefore, teacher leaders, in convincing colleagues to participate in a project are inviting people to join them on a journey" (p. 39). Effective leaders understand that the journey of shifting a school's emphasis to focus on deep learning and learning for all will require that they work through the stages of discomfort and imbalance (Halbert & Kaser, 2009). Teacher leaders, guided by the needs of their students, don't need a detailed road map to start this journey.

Be aware. Teacher leaders are aware of what is happening in their school and alert to opportunities for improvement. Fromm (1992) defines "being aware" as something beyond "being conscious of" and re-defines "to be aware" as "discovering something that was not quite obvious, or was not even expected" (p. 37). This requires close attention to oneself, to others, and to one's surroundings. It requires curiosity and openness to new learning, particularly in the midst of change, and an expectation of something emergent. Fromm argues that being aware leads one to a more adequate perception of reality. This resonates with the impulses behind inquiry driven professional learning such as advocated by concepts of "reflective inquiry" and its emphasis on scanning (Halbert & Kaser, 2009; 2013). In scanning we set aside our assumptions and carefully observe our school community with the intention of hearing and seeing what is really going on with our students and our colleagues (Halbert & Kaser, 2013). The result is our actions are informed by evidence and address real issues, rather than perceived ones. And by attending to our colleagues, we monitor our collective progress and stay alert to changing conditions and unexpected outcomes (Danielson, 2006).

Be spontaneous. Teacher leadership "is spontaneously exercised by teachers (any teacher) in response to a need or an opportunity through work with colleagues. It emerges organically; no one appoints teacher leaders to their roles" (Danielson, 2006, p. 19). The initiative comes voluntarily from the teacher(s) either in response to a need and/or the encouragement of a peer. This organic emergence of leadership, making visible latent capacity that asserts itself if and when the occasion demands, is represented in much of the literature and particularly by Bower (2006), Danielson (2006), and Lai and Cheung (2014). Halbert and Kaser draw on another Lil'wat term "Celhcelh" to name the responsibility to offer the "knowledge and expertise you have to benefit the communal work being carried out" (2013, p. 15). Regardless of whether one sees oneself as a leader, by identifying a student need and drawing others into a collective response we create the possibility for 'Kamucwkalha'. This Lil'wat term describes "the energy that is generated when individuals become a group with a shared purpose" (Halbert & Kaser, 2013, p. 15). To realize this synergistic action, this collective teacher leadership, an individual needs to recognize and respond without direction from others. In other words, spontaneity is needed.

Be willing to follow. There are times when the individual uses their influence not to initiate change, but to be the follower. Krueger's (2013) literature search considered recent nursing publications and found that leadership was almost always discussed as positions such as "nurse manager" or the "nursing administrator" and only a few used the term "informal leader". She expanded her search to include business literature and noticed that both fields describe a role called "follower" which has some of the attributes of "informal leaders". In her research Krueger found that:

Informal leaders can also be excellent followers. A follower is often thought of as weak,

ineffectual, or prone to failure, but that is usually far from the truth. Followers can easily

move in and out of informal leadership roles by supplying energy, enthusiasm, and

interest." (2013, p. 2)

The dispositions of optimism, energy and enthusiasm are included in Danielson's list; she

immediately follows them with the dispositions of open-mindedness and humility. "Teacher

leaders don't assume that their own idea is the best one or indeed that a proposed course of

action will turn out to be the best approach" (Danielson, 2006, p. 37). Stepping back is as much

an act of leadership, if not more so, than stepping forward.

Summary

We see encouraging trends in the teacher leadership literature. Leadership is frequently

being conceptualized as a potential of both administrators and teachers. Increasingly leadership

is seen as a collective capacity rather than something situated in an individual. The key role of

informal leaders in initiating, and sustaining, transformation and innovation is recognized.

Literature about how to grow informal leadership is becoming more abundant.

Methodology & Method

Researcher Orientation

My aspiration was to provide a framework for understanding teacher culture and how one effects

system change. I suspected that teacher self-identity and teacher leadership have some part to

play in this. It was clear to me that I would have to choose a qualitative methodology. The

question was, which methodology would best allow me to explore the intersection between

teacher identity and teacher leadership?

Methodology

The research for this thesis was conducted using the methodology of narrative inquiry.

This methodology is similar to both auto-ethnography and self-study but is different from them

in a few ways – ways that are significant and important for the purposes of my thesis.

All three methodologies are similar in that they qualitatively "privilege self in the

research design, recognizing that addressing the self can contribute to our understanding of

teaching and teacher education" (Hamilton, Smith & Worthington, 2008, p. 17). The self-study

methodology appealed to me because of the emphasis on reflection that results from looking

inward for data. The focus of self-study on improvement has similarities to Action Research and

I considered how it might serve to improve my practice and to share the experience with

colleagues – this dual purpose was intrinsic to my natural inclinations for learning and for

sharing my learning with others. While I am continually innovating in my practice my interest

was for something bigger than particular strategies or teaching approaches. I wanted to get at the

heart of teachers and how we could make systematic change. I felt this had more to do with

teacher culture and identity.

The methodology of auto-ethnography held potential. I considered examining the topics

of teacher leadership and educational change through my experience of educational change at multiple levels such as: change in my knowledge, change in my practice, change in my comfort level, change in my colleagues, change in my school, change at both the district and provincial levels, changes happening in other countries. There were challenges to this that made this a less than ideal methodology. Firstly, the scope of changes I was considering was much too broad. I would have needed to narrow my data to one or two of the levels of change. Secondly, my context was in flux and it would have been difficult to situate myself in a particular cultural context. One of the key elements of this methodology is "the way in which culture is revealed in the text" (Chambers, 2004, p. 23). This may have worked for my research if I had been willing to consider a broader educational context that contained the multiplicity of my contexts however I felt the scope was too broad.

Narrative inquiry "often appeals to teachers and teacher educators who share and learn from one another through exchanges about knowledge, skills, practices, and evolving understandings" (Hamilton, Smith & Worthington, 2008, p. 19) and it was the methodology I chose. "The study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Connelly and Clandinin see the power of stories to "function as arguments in which we learn something essentially human by understanding an actual life or community as lived" (p. 8) and recognize that the "principal attraction of narrative as method is its capacity to render life experiences, both personal and social, in relevant and meaningful ways" (p. 10). Narrative inquiry will allow me to examine my research question of professional identify – the identity of teacher as leader acting to bring system change – without becoming overwhelmed by the cultural demands of auto-ethnography.

Method

My research considered the first two decades of my teaching career spanning from my pre-service practicum in the spring of 1995 to the end of the school year in June 2015. I drew on my personal collection of teacher observation reports, emails, personal journals and notes, blog posts, sketch notes, and writing assignments as well as my recollections of memorable conversations to write stories that captured key points in my teaching career. I am highly reflective by nature and this exercise of writing down the stories that I tell myself, and others have told me about myself, allowed me to track the evolution of my professional identity. I started with my most recent experiences working backwards through time, picking up memories and finding documents that could colour and flesh out what I was recalling. In my writing I sought to describe what I was doing, thinking and feeling – a helpful and therapeutic exercise in it self. These stories formed the data for my research.

There were a few cautionary notes I kept in mind. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) flagged the danger the one could "use the data to tell a deception as easily as a truth" (p.10). Narrative inquiry has specific application to understanding experience from a collection of stories and I needed to always bearing in mind my "contract with the reader to keep the details of those events, places, and others as truthful as possible" (Chambers, 2004, p. 3). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) flagged an additional danger that required my attention. As an autobiographic writer I could have smoothed my narrative by selecting only the pleasant or flattering elements of my stories, or even worse, omit stories that challenge or contradict my assumptions. In my narrative inquiry I focused on the growth in leadership I experienced through attempts at system change – some successful and some not – and critically analyzed the significant stories of my professional learning journey.

Cynthia Chambers (2004) references Heidegger's use of the German word "Kehre" to describe those moments of turning when "we rise above our everyday world and come to see, hear, and understand life and being differently" (p. 10). She acknowledges that even though we do not remain in that state, the memories of those turning points remain and we are never the same after. Our response to living in an imperfect world is to "make peace with the past and the present, and live into the future" (p. 11). She argues that it is logos that rescues us from staying stuck in pathos – it balances pathos and the stories we tell need to balance the two.

Within the stories I wrote, I recognized two common themes. In most stories, an outside voice showed me a picture of myself that significantly changed the way I saw myself. I focused on those moments of Kehre in the analysis and kept those stories which best captured and illustrated the progression from seeing myself as 'just a teacher' through to self-identifying as a teacher leader – the intersection between self-identity and leadership. A common characteristic of the stories is that they represented times when I felt a significant amount of uncertainty and/or frustration. My findings include both the stories and my analysis of each story. The analysis attempts to answer the question "Why was this story critical to my growth and identification as a leader?" by identifying the significant moment of Kehre in it and the change it produced in me. I decided to present each story with a title and then told it using italic font. Each story is followed by my analysis of that story.

Findings

The word leadership is problematic as it implies a hierarchy – rather than a responsibility

its perhaps better to speak of 'taking the lead'. (A colleague, Feb 2015)

It is tricky to unpack the idea of teacher as leader, especially an informal leader. Informal

leadership is based on intangible qualities, often recognized by peers, such as professional

knowledge, teaching experience and on unspoken expectations of peers. Seeing oneself as a

leader involves a high degree self-reflection and self-knowledge to acknowledge what others

recognize. In my experience an egalitarian imperative limits teachers' ability to see themselves

as leaders, much less to present themselves as leaders. It is my opinion that leadership is not

something that you assume or take on but rather something you exercise as part of, and on behalf

of, a community. The mantle of "leading" is something that a community often informally gives

to one or more of its members as the situation and circumstances warrant.

Becoming a Teacher – 3 vignettes

My narrative starts with my long practicum in the teacher education program at a BC

university, two years after graduating with an honours degree in Engineering. During those two

years I found myself drawn more to working with people, particularly young people, than I was

to the work of engineering and design. In education I saw both the satisfaction of caring for and

nurturing others and the joy of sharing my love of mathematics and science.

Ideals Meet Reality: A Bad Fit

During my pre-service training I found myself struggling during my practicum. While I

had done well in my preparatory courses and excelled in the course related to mathematics

curriculum and instruction I found myself unsuccessful in navigating the expectations of my

mathematics sponsor teacher. Near the end of my practicum the professor from that

mathematics course was invited to a crosscheck observation by myself and my faculty advisor.

His comments in the report he wrote after observing me teach a pair of Math 10 lessons include

the following:

> And so it appears that Mr. Martens' has the capacity to do well in the conventional
>
> mathematics classroom, given time enough to develop various competencies. But I must
>
> qualify that remark by stating that I believe it would be profoundly unfortunate if this
>
> were all that we expected of him. To my mind, Mr. Martens is one of those rare and
>
> thoughtful individuals who will never be satisfied with merely replicating existing
>
> practices. It is thus that I sense there is, for him, a particular dissonance between what he
>
> believes to be educationally important (i.e., in terms of the place of mathematics in the
>
> lives of his students) and the constraining conditions of the setting (framed by student
>
> expectations, teacher demands, and a perhaps too rigid interpretation of curriculum
>
> requirements). My impression of the situation was that Mr. Martens was uncomfortable
>
> with the somewhat fragmented approaches to the subject matter and the lesson plan,
>
> unable to reconcile it with more holistic interpretations of teaching and learning. Any
>
> difficulties he might be experiencing in this practicum, then, might be linked to what I
>
> would call a "bad fit". BD, Spring 1995

The practicum ended with the recommendation that I complete a supplemental practicum in the

teaching of Mathematics where I "might feel more philosophical accord". This was very

disappointing but I also felt a profound sense of relief. The external evaluations of me conflicted

with each other and I was extremely fortunate to have the supportive perspective of my

professor. The challenges of trying to accommodate an environment where ideas about teaching

and learning mathematics of an entire department were fixed in conventional approaches had

generated a lot of stress and made me question my fledgling teacher identity. The challenge of

reconciling the 'bad fit' between my conception of the kind of teacher I aspired to be and the

message I was receiving about the kind of teacher I should be was more than I had the capacity

to handle on my own. This impacted my learning as well as the teaching I did with my other

sponsor teacher.

Why was this critical to my growth as a leader? This experience made me question

my competence and my beliefs about teaching. I went into teaching with a flexible inclusive

mindset wanting success for all learners. This had been affirmed during the pre-practicum

courses which presented a constructivist inclusive model that resonated with how I wanted to

engage learners. I wasn't prepared for how strongly and pervasively traditional practices were

embedded in secondary school culture, particularly in mathematics. The focus on direct

instruction and guided practice, with teacher as expert and student as passive recipient of

knowledge clashed with my aspirations of teaching. Ignorant of this, I didn't know how to

navigate it. As my professor noted, what I needed was an environment that would nurture my

'change'/'progressive' impulse, not one that would squash them.

The recommended six week supplemental practicum would not occur until the spring of

the following year. This provided me time to reflect on the experience of the first practicum and

consider if I really wanted to become a teacher, and if so, what kind of teacher I wanted to be. In

particular I had to unravel the various players and contexts that led to my situation. I closely

examined my role and shortcomings as I tried to identify what I could have done differently and

where I needed to grow. Eventually I had to identify which of the criticisms I had received were

warranted and pointed to areas where I needed to grow, and which came from a fixed mindset

blinded by adherence to convention.

A Do-Over

Following the practicum I returned to UBC to complete the final term of course work. With the help of my professors and the education practicum coordinator we identified a suitable sponsor teacher, one who taught both mathematics and science. In her classroom I had the freedom to spread my wings and learn both from her and with her. In the final assessment of my teaching she highlighted that:

> Jacob strongly believes that the classroom should be a safe, respectful, and interesting place to be. His dry sense of humor and animated gestures and stories constantly captured the attention of his students. He often employed different and engaging approaches to teach a topic and the majority of his lessons were learner centred with active participation.

> Along with a curious and enthusiastic attitude about his own learning, Jacob's extensive knowledge of math and science enables him to constantly connect the curriculum with everyday life concepts.

The positive experience and comments affirmed what I brought to teaching. They also helped me to isolate the "bad fit" criticisms of from previous practicum to clarify which pointed to areas where I needed to grow further and which came from profound philosophical differences.

Why was this critical to my growth as a leader? Two key things came out of the supplemental practicum experience. I maintained my curiosity about my students as learners and about what worked for them – particularly those at the margins. My teaching aspirations had been tested and I was clearer about what I believed about teaching and learning. I was still in the infancy of my identify as a teacher and my focus was on how I could exercise my ideals within

the context of existing teacher culture, school cultures, and my student experience of school. It made me look very closely at the teacher I desired to become and the teacher I was.

I also began learning about how to navigate existing structures and find rapprochement with the dominant systems in secondary education. This experience made me aware of my knowledge gaps and where I needed to focus my learning. I recognized that shifting out of a didactic model of teaching required that I learn to navigate it first. To move beyond the expectations of direct instruction and guided practice I needed to learn how to plan thoughtfully and in a holistic way that addressed both the external demands of curriculum and colleagues, and the learning needs of students. Though I wasn't there yet, I knew I would need a more sophisticated model for lesson and unit planning if I wished to create a classroom where students had ownership of and engagement with their own learning. And so, I found myself taking my students' learning more seriously and myself less seriously.

Paid to Teach

In the summer following the completion of the successful practicum, and graduation from the education program, I applied for and accepted a secondary mathematics and science teaching position at an school on Vancouver's east side. My responsibilities including teaching Science 9, Physics 11, Science and Technology 11, and providing math skills support for students grades 8-10. I started September 1996 and the following spring my principal conducted a series of formal evaluations as was her normal course of action with new teachers. In the summary of her formal "Report on Teacher by Principal" she comments that:

> Jacob has the ability to engage students in learning. He is hardworking and well
> organized and this has paid off in a very successful first year of teaching. He has
> approached his job as a learning experience, always thinking of how successful the

learning is and how he can improve on it next year. His energy, good humour, and love

of teaching have won him the respect and high regard of students and colleagues.

This successful first year of teaching further affirmed the teacher I desired to become.

Why was this critical to my growth as a leader? In my mind I became a legitimate

teacher once I was paid to teach. Up until this point I had seen myself as an amateur but now I

was a professional, much like the distinction between an amateur athlete and a professional one.

I learned that I could successfully work within existing secondary structures. This first

experience as a 'real' teacher confirmed that I was 'on the right track' in terms of what I wanted

to accomplish. My principal's observations were congruent with what I saw and felt about my

practice and echoed the anecdotal feedback coming from my colleagues and my students.

Namely, that I met the expectations of colleagues and students. Her comment about winning the

respect and high regard of colleagues has 'seeds' of leadership in it – that informal leadership

that we acknowledge in each other.

Navigating and Growing -- 4 vignettes

By June 2001 I had been teaching for 5 years and during that time I experienced a

growing disquiet with the disconnects between my students' work, their learning, my grading of

their work, and my reporting of their learning. My observations and conversations with students

did not match my assessments from their written output that I was collecting via labs, quizzes,

and tests. These were the main sources of evidence of learning that I was using at the time – I

had already stopped grading homework at this time.

I was comfortable describing myself as 'just a teacher' whose role and responsibilities

were limited to the students that I taught and coached. I had mastered the basic mechanics of

what the system required of me, found a way to live with its constraints, and now had decades to

polish my lectures and assignments – I felt like I had plateaued.   This was a very depressing place to be and fortunately two significant things happened – I broke my leg and was given a book.

A Break

In the summer of 2001 I broke my leg playing soccer, required surgery to repair it and was away from teaching until December. A novice teacher covered my leave. This experience provided a 'rearview' look at how much I had grown as a teacher and the particular direction that my growth had taken. While recovering from surgery I occasionally visited the school and was an observer of 'my students' and their learning environment. This perspective, and the time to reflect, provided an opportunity to observe a colleague and see elements of my own past and present practices. I saw a classroom where much of the learning was prescribed. Lessons were designed not for understanding but rather for recall of facts and ability to solve textbook problems. Students were successful if they were able to replicate what they were taught or learned through independent reading of the textbook. The classic didactic contract was being negotiated in my class with little room for student ownership of their learning. I was reminded of compromises and behaviours that were part of my early rapprochement with secondary school structures. Coercive compromises like collecting and grading homework or giving grades for effort and attendance. Controlling behaviours such as late quizzes that penalized students who were tardy.   Compromises like relying on the textbook and the teacher to be the sole sources of learning; and not having the knowledge or insight to acknowledge the myriad of other available resources, including the very students in the room. To an extent I had found ways to renegotiate the didactic contract but some things I had held onto, either intentionally because I had not found a way to let them go and some unintentionally because I had become habituated to them.

These included grading practices that relied on labs and unit tests as my sole sources of evidence

of student learning. My classroom had students sitting in four close packed rows of lab benches,

which meant that as I moved about the room I could get close physical proximity to at most half

my students. The absence of any intentional formative assessment strategies meant I had little

knowledge about what my students were learning and how that learning was going. By viewing

MY classroom through the practices of a beginning teacher I saw my practices in relief and had

that Kehre moment of clarity that allowed me to take stock of the changes I needed to make in my

practice as well as those elements that I needed to celebrate and hold onto.

Why was this critical to my growth as a leader? This experience was a turning point

for me because it forced me to pause and look at my practice from an outside perspective.

Observing someone else teaching MY students revealed to me both the challenges ahead as well

as how far I had already come. I knew I wanted my students to be more engaged in their

learning, to learn skills needed for life long learning and to become owners of their own learning.

However, much of what I aspired to do was informed more by my intuition and what seemed

right. My instructional design seemed inadequate for my aspirations and I felt that any of my

innovations were undermined by an institutional grading system that rewarded student

compliance with a shallow summation of task completion. I was uncomfortable with the

frequent mismatch between grades generated by 'pencil & paper' evaluations and my classroom

observations of student discussions and performances. I wondered: How can I accurately capture

the learning of my students? What is it exactly that I aspire for my students to learn? How can I

empower my students to become more independent learners? I had all these questions but not a

lot of answers.

So, once again I found myself bumping up against the status quo, both that of the system

and that of my own practice, and not being comfortable with the fit. The changes I had made so far seemed superficial and I was soon to realize that improving how I assessed learning was fundamental to changing how students learned. Though I didn't realize it at the time, the deeper questions I was asking and changes I sought to initiate in my practice were my first green shoots of leadership.

A Book

In January I returned to work full-time with a cane and new eyes. My questions about students' classroom experience and how I assessed their learning drove an energetic curiosity. I was teaching four sections of Physics and often found myself feeling stressed about what I had and had not 'covered'. I was using a common sequential skeleton lesson for planning and embellishing/improvising where students and/or I made tangential connections to the content. This was engaging for the students, and for me, but by the third repeat of the same lesson I found the skeleton plan was inadequate for holding all that had to be shared, done and learned. In my confusion of what transpired between lessons and between sections I caught myself both re-teaching ideas and re-using examples with some sections for some lessons as well as omitting interesting examples and extensions for other section's lessons. This linear approach of marching through curriculum along a predetermined fixed path conflicted with my desire to teach using an emergent co-learner approach. As it turned out later, the rigidness of the linear approach chafed many of my students as much as it did me. I clearly needed a different model for planning.

Unfortunately, my teacher education program had not prepared me to plan instruction in such a way that allowed students to own their learning. This may have been due to my lack of experience at the time or the fact that it wasn't on offer. I am not sure which was the case but I

do know that there was professional learning I needed to do. Too much of class time was spent with me talking and presenting content and as a result too much time was spent on transmitting knowledge that student would then regurgitate on assessment. I personally found this boring and uninspiring and so did many of my students. To be frank, initially I wasn't paying enough attention to my students to know this but once I saw it in myself I started to see it in them, and name it for them.

In my class we began to talk about the limitations of the existing 3-R paradigm – Read, Remember, Regurgitate. We shifted our focus from content to concepts – modeled by other physics teachers I met through the BCAPT (BC Association of Physics Teachers) and by three memorable instructors I had during my Engineering studies. And so, I found myself changing my practice to teach in a more open-ended way that attempted, and to an extent succeeded, in rising above a set of concepts to be "read, remembered, and regurgitated" and teaching in response to students' readiness and interest. This responsive teaching however was very stressful, as I had no structure for planning this kind of teaching and learning.

My enthusiasm for learning and teaching was noticeable resulting in my principal lending me her copy of Understanding by Design*. Exposed to the thinking of Wiggins & McTighe (1998) and O'Connor (2002), I experienced a mixture of excitement and of shame. I was excited to see a way forward from my disquiet but ashamed that I had been teaching for over five years before becoming aware of strong evidence-based teaching practices. Recognizing the power of formative assessment and 'backward design' I threw myself into learning and growing my practice, particularly around clarifying and sharing learning intentions. I also began to use more formative assessments during instruction and moved away from relying on an 'end of unit' test as my sole source of evidence of learning. This had a huge impact on my teaching, on my*

students' learning and on our collective anxiety. We were all clearer about 'what we were

learning and teaching' and 'how that learning and teaching was going'. But I still had much to

learn and my implementation of this new professional learning was still at an immature stage.

It was at this point that I became aware that I was out of sync with several of my

secondary colleagues. I seemed to be more curious and have more questions, the result of a

keen discomfort with how I was teaching students and how I was assessing their learning. When

I tried to engage colleagues, who had a wide range of teaching experience in conversation about

what I was learning and ask them for advice on how to proceed I was met with strange looks and

non-committal responses I took to mean I was asking 'dumb questions'. I didn't realize how

wrong that assumption was. It took my department head pulling me aside and having a frank

chat where I was advised to 'tone down the enthusiasm' for me to realize I was making my

colleagues uncomfortable.

Why was this critical to my growth as a leader? Learning about Backwards Planning

– being clear about the learning intentions, with students and myself – changed my practice.

This exposed me to a whole new world of educational research and 'evidence-based' practices; a

moment of Kehre that would set the tone for the rest of my career. The enthusiasm with which I

threw myself into this new learning would lead to even more momentous moment of Kehre; one

that revealed to me a first glimpse of myself as a leader. I was asking a lot of questions, both of

myself and of others, and this was a form of leadership, of stepping out. I was taking risks and

pushing the boundaries of my practice, with or without the approval of my colleagues.

Up to this point I had been too self-focused and I learned to look around me and observe

the 'collective' practice/culture – not just the person next door or across the hall. I was driven to

continue growing my practice by a need to find out what I was missing, which pieces I could

learn from my colleagues and which I would have to learn on my own. I was curious to know why and how widely this 'unfamiliarity' with instructional design was spread in my school and also why others didn't share my sense of urgency. Secondary classrooms tend to be quite silo-ed and observing 'my' classroom from outside was the beginning of unpeeling the layers of naivety I had about the general practices of teachers.

What I found particularly difficult to understand is why they didn't feel the urgency that I did. Did they have other priorities? Was I missing something important? Why was I so out-of-sync with my colleagues? So here I was navigating the dominant culture of didactic teaching, particularly in secondary schools, where the control lies with the teacher and students are expected to compliantly surrender ownership of their learning and rely wholly on the teacher for direction, unable to comprehend that I had professional knowledge that my more experienced colleagues didn't (or at least didn't value).

A Year in Scotland

A year after the 'break' and the 'book' I accepted an offer of a teaching exchange in the Scottish Highlands and in August 2003 left Vancouver for a year of teaching in Inverness. In Scotland, much like the rest of Britain, parents who can afford it generally choose to send their children to fee-paying schools also called 'public schools'. The remaining children attend government funded state schools; what we in North America call public schools. In Inverness, I was fortunate to be in urban centre where the majority of children attend state schools and public education was very much alive. This is key to this story because it meant that teachers were, like in British Columbia, accountable to society at large and not the whims of deep-pocketed parents. It also meant that the students I was teaching were representative of the local population.

It was interesting how structured the education systems was yet how it also embodied some very strong elements of formative assessment. The staff at the school was very open about their practice. They had to be because at any point Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) could show up at the school. The school would be expected to demonstrate that students were both being taught the content and competencies of the national (Scottish) curriculum and that they were having equal access and equal quality of instruction regardless of who was teaching the lesson. I was advised to follow all the lessons as laid out and as scheduled. Initially I struggled with this until I saw how they were well designed to support the curriculum – it was like being handed the products of lesson studies without having participated in their construction. I realized that my exchange partner was in for a shock when he realized how much more autonomy, and responsibility, he had over lesson design and assessment.

The sweeping power given to HMI was confirmed in conversations I had with teachers at the two other secondary schools in Inverness. This accountability made for very thorough planning (which I inherited and initially balked at) and consistency in both direct instruction (standard notes given as well as examples) and in the hands on activities. I had to make sure my students were given the exact same notes as other teachers teaching the same course at the school. We also gave the same assignments and did the same activities, all at the same pace. Professional learning was taken very seriously to ensure this consistent quality of instruction across the school, and across the entire Scottish education system. Teachers generally unquestioningly delivered course material – emphasis on consistency meant there wasn't much scope for whole-class discussion nor surfacing the knowledge of the class (i.e. using discourse as a strategy for emergence). All assessments were formative and were standardized for subjects in the school. The school determined students' interim grades but their final grades were

determined by an external exam. In effect, all school-based assessments were formative, even end of unit tests. As a matter of fact, students were not permitted to sit the final exam unless they had satisfactorily demonstrated learning on the school-based assessments that in some cases required students revise and re-write.

The vice-principal at the school became a good friend and he told me "You are the most reflective person I've ever met." It was in our conversations that he shared the perspective that at one time Scotland had one of the best education systems in the world but that it no longer did. I would agree with that. Through our conversations my view of education and of educational leadership broadened and deepened. His view, as an administrative leader, of his own system was my first opportunity to have a safe conversation about the questions leaders ask of their system and the role they can play in initiating and supporting change. Conversations with the department head were also helpful for he was also a regional educational leader in the highlands and conversations about providing department level leadership were also new for me. I didn't have these kinds of conversations back at my school in BC – my peers would have viewed me with suspicion for having had extended conversations with an administrator.

Why was this critical to my growth as a leader? What I experienced provided a powerful example of the importance and power of systemic support for professional learning as well as accelerating me in a direction I was already pointed in. The experience exposed me to a system that is much more structured and constrained than the BC system. Since I was an outsider only staying for one year I had license to question and challenge local practices, as well as those I left behind in British Columbia. The constraints impose a high degree of consistency, at least within schools, but at the cost of teacher innovation. Any changes made by a teacher at a school have to be accepted and incorporated by all the other teachers teaching the same course

and have to meet the external demands of HMI. This means change is slow and I left inspired to learn how one could raise quality and consistency without imposing it.

This experience allowed me to have conversations with administrative leaders without having to navigate the us-them paradigm that existed in my school in BC. I've always felt comfortable around principals and vice-principals but in my context one is viewed with suspicion by colleagues if you are "too friendly" with any administrator. The judgment-free access I had in Scotland allowed me to interrogate the Scottish system and learn from multiple perspectives. Through friendship with an administrative leader I was also mentored in the leadership challenges of administrative leaders. This would change the way I looked at administrative leaders when I returned to Canada and would change the questions I would be asking them. And it changed how I viewed leadership and how I viewed myself.

My moment of Kehre was realizing that the formative assessment practices deeply embedded throughout the Scottish system were the product of a rigid accountability structure. With this dawning realization I recognized the limitation of imposing change (i.e. conformity and stasis) and the challenge, and potential, which I faced of inspiring change back in BC. I left inspired to embed formative assessment more deeply into my own practice and to find critical friends to do that with.

Consolidating Learning with Critical Friends

I returned from Scotland during the summer of 2004 and confidently set about making changes in my classroom all the while seeking to engage colleagues in conversations about our practice. I had made peace with being 'out of sync' and became better able to articulate what I was trying to achieve. I taught with my eyes and ears open as I sought to better understand my school culture and ways in which I could exercise the insights from my time in Scotland.

During the next five years my professional learning focused on deepening my understanding of formative assessment and implementing changes in my instructional design. At that time the administrators at our school were forward looking educators who made responded positively to dialogue about the challenges of providing school-based educational leadership time and provided encouragement of the initiatives I was taking in transforming my practice. My leadership oriented stance, though I wouldn't have called it that at the time, led them to provide opportunities for me to attend numerous workshops and conferences. They saw me as an emerging leader and every administrator I worked with during these years encouraged me to consider applying for an administrative leadership position. Though I did not go on to apply for this leadership role, I did come to realize how essential school-based leaders are facilitating system change, and the importance of their support growing the leadership, formal and informal, of teachers. The composite of the strengths I saw in these leaders formed a large part of my mental image of an effective administrative leader and changed my expectations of school administrators.

During this five-year period I became professional friends with three school colleagues who until then had merely been acquaintances. A shared interest in assessment for learning and student ownership of learning brought us together. One colleague worked in the resource centre and directly saw the impact on students' learning. She affirmed the benefit of clarifying and sharing learning intentions with students when she said, "This is awesome! They come in. They know what they are expected to be learning. I know what they are expected to be learning. And so I am able to help them." Students were clear about where they needed to focus their efforts and she had clarity about where to focus her support of the student and was able to do more than supervise students completing assigned work. This affirmed the power of what I was doing in my

classes. A second colleague in the Socials department was experiencing the same 'instructional angst' that I had been experiencing and we became critical friends, supporting each other in deepening our learning and changing our instructional design – particularly how we shared learning intentions and how we formatively assessed student learning.

The third colleague, a history teacher turned teacher-librarian, sat on the district assessment committee and encouraged me to join the committee with the clear advice, "There are very smart people on the committee. You are there to listen and learn." She saw the benefit to me of listening in on a district level discussion – something I would not have volunteered for and which I resisted until her persistence wore me down. And she was correct, the committee members representing all stakeholder groups were very knowledgeable and thoughtful people and I learned much about the process of decision-making at a district level and the limitations of the impact that those decisions have on schools and classrooms. It also provided a broader perspective and connections to leaders in other schools and at the board office. Our shared love of books, libraries and learning led to many conversations about assessment, disciplinary literacy and inquiry-based learning – conversations that continued when we later both found ourselves working in formal district leadership roles.

Why was this critical to my growth as a leader? Finding professional friends to learn with and from reduced the feeling of isolation I had felt before leaving for Scotland. Together we were able to process and improve our practices as well as navigate the constraints of the embedded practices of the school culture that we were surrounded by. One moment of Kehre during this five-year period was recognizing that change requires a team and that effective leadership is exercised together, not by one person.

The support of administrative leaders, who were also educational leaders, allowed me to

grow in ways that I would have been able to otherwise. Their strategic support allowed me to

deepen my knowledge of evidence-based practices. Their encouragement gave me the

confidence to take risks that my colleagues would have discouraged me from taking. And their

suggestion that administrative leadership was a career option prompted me to reflect on the

responsibilities that would come with such a formal leadership role. This was also a moment of

Kehre as I convinced myself I wasn't drawn to be a power-over position but I was drawn to

serving.

My conversation with my teacher-librarian colleague encouraging me to sit on the district

assessment committee was another moment of Kehre. She saw the leadership potential in me

and thus the benefit I would gain from sitting on the committee. This allowed me to see myself

as someone who had something to contribute not just outside of my classroom but also outside of

my school. The perspective I gained sitting on that committee gave me a window into the nature

of district level leadership, both what it can do and what it can't, and in particular how a

committee functions in initiating and supporting change at the district scale.

Formal Leadership – 4 vignettes

The following four stories represent a small sample of the many moments of Kehre that I

experienced during the five-year period from September 2009 to June 2014. These years are

significant because they represent the portion of my teaching career when I held positions of

formal teacher leadership. While these titled positions represented an explicit acknowledgement

of me as a leader, it took several years before I acknowledged that I now carried a 'mantle' of

leadership; a responsibility to serve by taking initiative on behalf of others. This weight did not

sit comfortably on my shoulders and it took most of the five years for me to make peace with it.

Half in, Half Out: Testing the Waters

By the spring of 2009 I had a small but growing network of colleagues, in the school and the district, who provided support, encouragement, and inspiration. One colleague was an experienced intermediate teacher at the end of a three-year term as Vancouver's Adolescent Literacy Consultant. We had a shared understanding of the many ways students can access, process, and share new learning and; something the Universal Design for Learning framework speaks to comprehensively. I recognized that empowering students as owners of their learning included them being able to read and write like a mathematician and a scientist. From our collaborative work developing my students' disciplinary literacy she identified leadership potential in me and encouraged me to apply for a part-time Adolescent Literacy Mentor position that was being created to replace her full-time consultant position. As I recall, she said words to the effect of "You'd be great at it. You understand the need for kids to be able to read in science and math. No one else is doing what you are doing." I know she had struggled to make connections with secondary teachers, particularly those who taught mathematics and science. In me I believe she saw a secondary mathematics and science teacher who cared about literacy, apparently a very rare creature, to whom she could pass the baton and who might have success in high schools.

I was hesitant to apply as I felt I was inadequately prepared for the responsibilities that the role entailed. I had a conversation with an English teacher who was already in a part-time literacy position and was aware of my work with disciplinary literacy. She also encouraged me to apply but I wondered whether I had sufficient knowledge and skills to provide district level support and asked her more about the position. As she described her work I demurred saying I didn't feel sufficiently qualified but she assured me that "you don't need to know everything;

there is a lot that you learn on the job". In the end, she convinced me to apply and I was offered

the position. The next two years I served the district as a high school content area literacy

mentor, splitting my time between my classroom and district level support of colleagues

throughout the district.

The mentor position was a formal part-time leadership position. My days alternated

between a full day of teaching at Gladstone and a day working out of the district office. It

allowed me to apply new learning with my own students while learning with and from colleagues

around the district. It also involved membership in the Adolescent Literacy Network (my first

network), which was comprised of literacy specialists from various Lower Mainland school

districts. Our meeting topics included how to support colleagues in our formal teacher

leadership roles and exposed me to educational leaders whose influence extended around the

province and beyond, opening my eyes to a much wider world. The combination of inter-district,

intra-district, school and classroom perspectives provided helpful triangulation for making sense

of the challenges and opportunities of educational leadership.

A side benefit of the position was the access it gave me to the Associate Superintendent

responsible for learning services, who incidentally chaired the district assessment committee,

and access to additional professional learning opportunities. Her support of my learning

included encouraging my regular participation in Assessment for Learning sessions with Judy

Halbert and Linda Kaser. Meeting them, and receiving affirming feedback and encouragement

from these respected and knowledgeable thinkers gave my learning and my class-based work

both a focus and a framework. What initially caught their eye was newsletter-like Unit Plans I

had created, inspired by the work of an English teacher from West Vancouver, to clarify and

share learning intentions for my students. I don't recall their exact words but the message I

received was that "These are awesome. We need to show these to other educators." At the next

session they made a point of having copies of my work on every table. This was high praise. It

was inevitable that the Networks of Innovation and Inquiry would become a key group of

educators in my professional life.

Why was this critical to my growth as a leader? A significant moment of Kehre in this

experience was the voice of the English teacher, who incidentally taught at a different school

than me, letting me know I didn't have to have all the answers; that my learning disposition

would allow me to grow into the role. This was an eye-opening concept for me. Though I was

daily becoming the teacher I aspired to be, I didn't equate that same "becoming" with formal

leadership. In my uncritical view, people who took on leadership roles did so with all the

requisite expertise. This moment that changed the way I looked at formal leadership and allowed

me to later consider leadership opportunities for which I also felt "unqualified".

This experience of leadership-lite allowed me to teach every second day and so maintain

my identity of 'teacher' – someone who works daily with children in schools. And yet I had

responsibly for engaging colleagues across the district in conversations about how they were

building their students' disciplinary literacy. My perspective of myself didn't change -- I still

saw myself as 'just a teacher'. However, what did change for me was learning what it felt like to

be indirectly affecting students as well as being directly engaged in students' learning. Judy and

Linda's praise for my work represented one of many micro-moments of Kehre that occurred

during this two year period. Each explicit expression of appreciation or praise for something I

had done shifted my self-image; incrementally I began to see myself as someone having valuable

and unique contributions to make to our profession.

Saying Yes to Full-time Formal Leadership

By the spring of 2011 I had been teaching for 15 years, the last two spent with my focus alternating between my school-based classroom and providing district-wide literacy support. I found the divided focus exhausting and I made plans to return full-time to the classroom. But I didn't. In 2008 the school district and local teachers association had jointly created four Peer-to-Peer consultant positions that collectively provided confidential non-evaluative support for K-12 teachers and educational assistants. These were three-year term positions and the incumbents were preparing to vacate the positions at the same time I was deciding to return to the classroom.

During the previous two years my work had overlapped with that of the incumbent P2P consultants. One in particular and she saw in me the capacity provide the kind of supports that the P2P position required. She told me, "You should seriously consider applying for it. You have a lot to offer people." She pointed to my ability to respectfully engage with teachers in professional conversations, my passion for making positive change for students, and my broadening knowledge of strong practices as strengths that would allow me to thrive in the role. Over a period of weeks she repeatedly encouraged me to apply and, though I felt insufficiently qualified, I applied. Interestingly, after I was offered and accepted the position, many of colleagues at my school were not surprised by my decision and seemed to have thought it was inevitable that I would be moving on to something new. One in particular made a point of telling me how she had observed me for the past few years and thought this new role was a perfect fit for me. And yet for me I viewed this as walking through an open door of opportunity for new learning and not as a way to exercise teacher leadership.

Based on my experience as a literacy mentor I anticipated much new learning in the peer

mentor role; this was a large part of its appeal to me. However, I also had a feeling of

inadequacy coming into this fulltime formal leadership role in spite of the encouragements I had

received from several colleagues, particularly once I learned who else had applied for the

positions – colleagues who I respected and admired. In my previous I role I had still been able

to see my self as "just a teacher". In this new role that identity was stripped away and I had to

accept that, with the title of Peer-to-Peer Consultant, I was formally now a 'leader'. In some

ways it felt like my first year of teaching – I had a vision for what I would prioritize and many

positive encouraging voices in my head but I had yet to see what I was actually capable of doing.

Why was this critical to my growth as a leader? When I initially applied for this

formal role I was aware that I was atypical in some ways but I still saw myself on a parallel plane

to that of my colleagues. If you had asked me about teacher leaders I would have thought of

department heads primarily performing administrative roles in exchange for a small stipend and

a title. A common joke was that they would make more money collecting aluminum cans for

recycling than they did for the hours they put in as department heads. I suppose the I also saw

the Pro D rep and the staff rep as leaders but these generally were not positions anyone competed

for and as such didn't have much status.

The encouragement from one of the P2P incumbents resulted in me choosing to apply for

the position and I acknowledged the strengths she named. However, if I allowed myself to

compare myself to some of my colleagues, I didn't see myself as being exceptional. Like the

corollary of the Dunning-Kruger effect, I underestimated my relative competence and

erroneously assumed that what was easy for me was also easy for others.

It was only after my acceptance of the P2P position became public that I became aware of

both my new status – both in the way colleagues now viewed me and in what a number of them

chose to share with me. This was a significant moment of Kehre and I realized that I now **had to** see myself as a leader. This was a key time of transition from seeing myself as 'just a teacher' to graciously owning the responsibilities that came with the knowledge, experience and opportunities that I had been given. I named it a "mantle" and it sat uncomfortably on my shoulders – it felt heavy and awkward. I had much work to do grappling with the imposter syndrome, the egalitarian imperative of teacher culture, and the suspicion that teachers who take on formal leadership roles are aspiring for administrative leadership.

At the same time, it made me begin to realize how important my role was, that I had influence and that what I said and did mattered. It was this realization, which came over the three-year period that lead me to see myself as a leader, and to recognize the responsibilities that came not just with the formal position I held but also with this new way of seeing myself.

The Listener: Synthesizing and Safekeeping

As I grew into the P2P role I became increasingly aware of the extent teachers were struggling in isolation to manage the demands of their work. The day-to-day work of teachers is demanding and making changes, even small ones, can often seem overwhelming. If found my role was to sincerely ask the everyday question "How's it going?" and then to listen. This was new for me because my self-image was that I talked too much. This focus on listening served multiple purposes. It reduced the pressure and unrealistic expectations to perform that I would otherwise have been tempted to put on myself. It exposed me to teachers' personal stories of success and challenge. Instead of yielding to the counter-productive temptation of forcing change, I attended to both what was being said, and what was not being said. By paraphrasing what I was hearing I was able to acknowledge and validate what was working in their practice, and what they self-identified as needing attention.

The following statements came from two different colleagues and made me increasingly aware of my competence at giving others space to speak and then synthesizing with insight. The first shared this comment after a 30-minute phone conversation: "You concisely stated what I was taking a lot of words to say". The second shared this after a two hour planning and sharing session: "You crystalized the ideas of the group. It was so helpful to end with that." Both conversations were representative of the thoughtful listening I was learning to do and the value of holding my voice back so that others could contribute. Focusing on listening to, and learning from, the person I was interacting with, along with my growing clarity about what I have to share and confidence in my ability to do so, allowed me to be an unintimidating co-learner and collaborator with my peers.

A key part of my role was building a reputation as a safe place for teachers to voice their frustrations, particularly those that require they be vulnerable. Teachers, even those relatively new to the profession, are generally uncomfortable talking about their practice, particularly about aspects of their practice that they themselves know are not going well. They need compassion not criticism. And they don't need to be told there is "a right way" with its implication that they have been "doing it wrong'. They don't need a 'fixer'. Fortunately my job description clearly specified that I was to be non-evaluative and confidential resource. Recognizing that everyone has a story and that people are where they are for a reason allowed me to remain compassionate and attend to the emotional dimensions of teaching. One teacher whom I was supporting in having his students' questions direct the learning in Biology asked me about my work and my response was effectively what I've just told you in this story. "You're like a vault", he said. My response was "I guess so. I never thought about it that way before." He expanded on the vault metaphor by pointing out that people could 'deposit' their stories with me

and I would keep them safe. This was a profound insight on his part and made me realize I had

been a story keeper for many years, and that was why I had had so much encouragement to

apply for the P2P position.

Why was this critical to my growth as a leader? Over time I became more confident

that I had something to offer my colleagues: ideas, advice, but most importantly a listening ear.

The mentoring role was driven largely by requests from teachers and I used the maxim "my job

is to reduce teacher stress" as a helpful guide for listening. The title and responsibilities of the

position conferred some expertise but learning to listen and be thoughtful about when and how I

spoke represented a growing capacity for leadership. Receiving the specific feedback on my

contributions of synthesizing and summarizing made this act of leadership visible to me. It freed

me to be more intentional in my listening and consciously thoughtful of others when sharing.

Being described as a vault was a significant moment of Kehre. In that moment an

ephemeral aspect of my identity became material and I saw myself in a completely different

light. I had clarity about my role and responsibility as story-keeper and the sacred trust others

put in me to hold their stories and keep them safe. Intuitively I knew that people need a safe

authentic place to share their frustrations, to own their limitations, to ask their questions, and to

have what their strengths acknowledged and validated. They want compassion not criticism. I

had learned to work through the tension of listening and speaking and learned that listening is

more important than speaking. I just hadn't fully realized that the extent to which others trusted

me to hold and protect their stories.

Facilitating Professional Learning: Protect the Process

In early 2013 I accepted an invitation from a secondary school in Nanaimo to lead two

half-day professional learning sessions addressing the topic of formative assessment – an

invitation extended by the principal on the recommendation of the NOII leaders. It was my first

ever large group workshop and I was very nervous about whether I would be successful or

whether I would let my mentors down. I had become quite knowledgeable about formative

assessment but didn't know if I would be able to connect what I knew to what the teachers

wanted and needed. Thanks to mentoring from an out-of-district professional friend who taught

me the importance of "protecting the process" I was able to design a session that was safe and

respectful, inquiry oriented and drew on both outside expertise and the group's expertise.

Feedback I collected after the session included "I got manageable real examples of things I can

practice to improve my teaching. A great introduction to the true meaning and purpose of FA. I

can see a real benefit to employing FA to make learning better for all." Another teacher

commented, "I was reminded and re-inspired to continue implementing formative assessment in

my practice." and added that "you managed our mixed ability group well and some hackles that

can normally go up didn't". One teacher was very succinct with their comment that "I got

inspired. The session was empowering." Numerous teachers commented that they were looking

at changing the way they taught as a result of the morning.

This experience made me confident to accept requests from high school professional

development representatives to facilitate half-day sessions with their whole staff around the topic

of Formative Assessment. Based on the success of the sessions with Dover Bay I led several

whole school sessions with Vancouver secondary schools.   These were powerful experiences for

me as I saw that I had the skills and knowledge to lead professional learning for my colleagues.

The conversations that teachers had with each other, created through informed design and my

facilitation, made the key ideas of formative assessment accessible to a diverse group of

teachers. The feedback from each session mirrored that of my first one in Nanaimo. This was

encouraging evidence of my personal growth, both my knowledge of formative assessment and

my ability to facilitate the learning of others.

Why was this critical to my growth as a leader? Key to this experience is saying, "YES" and finding out what I am capable of – in this case, being able to lead a school staff in professional learning. Saying "YES" has led me to most of my experiences of Kehre. In this experience it was a very specific moment mid-way through the morning of my first day with the Nanaimo secondary school staff. The energy and engagement in the room that resulted from my instructional design and my focus on protecting their learning revealed educational leadership competency that I wasn't sure existed. I had turned the tables on the system since my first practicum – instead of the dominant culture seeking compliance from me, I was asking it to innovate.

The confidence I gained made me bold enough to work with several secondary schools in Vancouver and broaden my reputation with my peers.   I recognized that I had sufficient depth of knowledge of evidence based assessment practices to speak with authority. I also had sufficient skills to facilitate a large group of teachers talking to each other about their practice. It is an art to facilitate a group so that one's voice prompts but does not drive the conversation and as evidenced way back in my first practicum. I did not want to rely only on a didactic/telling model for sharing knowledge and supporting learners. It became clear to me from multiple sessions that providing, and protecting, a safe place for teachers to talk openly to each other about their practice is key to supporting change in practice. The advice I received on 'protecting the process' was a constant reminder that I am most effective professionally when I prepare, and engage, with the needs of others in mind and do not seek a personal need for affirmation.

Transitions – 3 vignettes

From May 2014 to October 2014 public school teachers in British Columbia found themselves in a labour dispute with the provincial government. During these six months three significant events led to deep focused learning about leadership. I read From Teacher to Teacher Educator (Beynon, Wideen, & Grout, 2004) and learned about the experiences of teachers seconded to SFU as faculty advisors for teacher candidates. Second, I accepted a grade 6/7 teaching position at Norma Rose Point rather than returning to the familiarity of a high school classroom. Lastly, I spent the month of July in Nanaimo in course work as part of a Masters in Educational Leadership. Little did I know how much I would interrogate my identity during this period: both my self-identify and my professional identity.

The Problem with the Stories We Tell Ourselves

As the summer began I set aside the formal leadership identity I had worn for three years and began imagining myself as an informal leader. The July term of my Masters coursework required that I learn in close quarters with a cohort of 24 educators while living away from my family for weeks at a time. The members of the cohort knew each other from the previous year but I had no shared history with them; and I had no status, reputation, or title. Being 'a face in the crowd' with a group that already knew each other was humbling and challenging socially, and made me question my imagined informal leader identity. I quickly discovered that being the 'new kid' surfaced the same insecurities in my forties as it did in my teens and this led me to consider the "stories" we tell ourselves, and the ones that repeat. More specifically, it led me to re-experience feelings of fitting in, and not fitting in.

One of our courses involved working collaboratively on a leadership case study and presenting it to a larger audience.   Before beginning to work on the task our case study team

took time to establish protocols for giving and receiving feedback to each other, for starting and

ending meetings with formal check ins and check outs, and documenting and clarifying assigned

tasks before dispersing. All three of these were important. Clarifying individual preferences for

receiving and giving feedback allowed us to be more sensitive and thoughtful in how we spoke.

Starting and ending protocols ensured we didn't overlook how others were feeling and doing,

and that we were clear and accountable with each other regarding tasks and responsibilities.

This attention to "how we were going to be together" was key to our success as a group, both in

the case study task and the learning that it was designed to facilitate. It also provided a context

to build sufficient relational trust for us to be vulnerable with one another.

Though I identify as an introvert, I present as an extrovert. I enjoy the stimulation that

comes from spending time with others but find the cognitive effort of social engagement leaves

me tired. I also have a tendency to replay and critique mental videos of my social interactions.

This 'extroverted introvert' is an awkward character who I saw repeated in stories throughout

my life. His traits include enthusiasm and passion, desire to make meaningful connection, and a

tendency to over-think and over-reflect. The enthusiasm and passion for engaging in learning

and connecting can overwhelm others; something that the reflections often dwell on.

That this character is not just one of my own imagining is evidenced by feedback from my

case study team to "slow down, take a breath." That I am "witty, funny, smart, and

knowledgeable but too fast" and that "in your new school take it slow and build relationships

first." It was clear to me that knowing I was doing this did not make it much easier to not do it.

In my journal I wrote that frequently "I feel very different from others" and I found

myself working to "better understand myself particularly in the ways in which I am profoundly

different than others." The desire to make deep connections led me, like it had in the past, to feel

that I was too intense and as a result, socially awkward. The relational trust that we had built in our group freed me to name that feeling. Sharing how hard I found the work of navigating social dynamics revealed to the group, and to me, the problematic extent of my over-analyzing.

After completing the leadership case study the feedback from the team was "ease up on the mental replay", to "sometimes take a break from self-reflection" and to "give yourself more credit". As part of our final checkout at the conclusion of the case study, we took turns being in the "hot seat". For each person we went around the circle two times: the first time around we named a significant strength we saw in the person and second time around, we gave the person one "take away". My classmates had this to say:

> "A little Jacob goes a long way… probably no need to say that in the future. You are well on your voyage to emotional/social capital."
>
> "I know you criticize your social sense but you have many great attributes: you are creative, interesting, and unpredictable. Don't lose those."
>
> "What I noticed is your strength in self-awareness. You've always expressed and shared your own goals around active listening and you made a conscious deliberate effort to strengthen your skills in 'self' which gave you strength in 'team'."

I was over-whelmed. Over the two weeks we had worked together daily and I had trusted them with my story; a story that I had been telling myself long enough to believe it was true. And they told me it wasn't.

Why was this critical to my growth as a leader? The "hot seat" feedback revealed the distorted self-image I had created and made me realize the impact that years of "mis-fits" had had on my self-perception. The years leading up to this moment had me flitting in and out of schools and classrooms; in and out of the lives of others. It had been relatively easy to be other

focused because that was what the role asked of me. It was much harder to be in the daily company of peers where my role was to work collaboratively on a shared task.

My moment of Kehre came during the feedback. I realized that I had indulged in a season of intense self-reflection. The feedback from my colleagues was affirming and kind but in the moments after I heard a warning: *Your over-thinking makes you too self-focused.* In that moment I realized that leadership required not only my strengths; it also required that I accept my imperfections. The advice to "ease up on the mental replay" encouraged me to be both kinder to myself and to spend less time thinking about myself. Which is a bit ironic now that I think about it – this entire chapter of the thesis has been me thinking about myself.

There and Back Again: Intentional Informal Leadership

If you are still reading I need to thank you and to warn you. The next story was the hardest to write. I entered the fall of 2014 with high expectations for myself, and with high expectations of the colleagues I would be working with. I also started that fall with the recent learning from the summer still fresh in my mind. My written advice to myself was to "*Attend to the individual. When the team is focused around the task, take time to look around and check that everyone is included in ways that they are comfortable with.*" I'm still not sure whether that was good advice or not; it seemed so at the time. But, before we can get to that we need some context.

Backstory. *When my term in the P2P position was coming to a close I made a point of reading Chapter 5: And Back Again: Reconciling Professional Identity of Beynon et al's (2004) book From Teacher to Teacher Educator. It draws on case studies of teacher educators transitioning back to schools after serving as SFU faculty, similar to the move I was soon to make. The authors found the teachers' colleagues viewed them with suspicion for the time they*

spent away from classroom and that they had to re-earn their credibility as classroom teachers.

The teachers had new professional identities that differed from their colleagues because of their

experiences as teacher leaders and that this required "not only seeing yourself differently, but

also seeing into the world of others" (p. 97). I realized that I was going to have to be very

thoughtful about the process of adjusting back into a school; I was returning to the role of

classroom teacher but no longer saw myself as 'just a teacher'.

For several years I had watched the planning and designs for Norma Rose Point, a new

public school on the UBC campus that contained a middle school. My P2P years exposed me to

elementary classrooms and I had a growing desire to teach in a more holistic way than I had

been able to when teaching in a secondary school. The opportunity to teach "the whole child"

rather than push against the constraints of disciplinary silos appealed to me. It wasn't an easy

decision and the option to return to a familiar context was on offer at two VSB secondary

schools. It took a combination of "encouragements" to bring me to the brink of change. These

included my partner who reminded me how I had chafed at the constraints of the secondary

structures, mentors who named what I had to offer and what I had to learn, the opportunity to

work and learn in a explicitly collaborative environment, a brand new building, and an interview

that left me confident that I would be able to stretch my pedagogical wings alongside like-

minded educators.

The school principal maintains an active school blog and in it describes the school I

chose to join as a place where:

> Students are organized in learning communities taught by a team of teachers who plan
>
> and design interdisciplinary units together. This highly collaborative environment for
>
> both students and staff emphasizes the four Cs (creativity and innovation, critical

thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration) which are as important

as the three Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) (Fazio, 2014).

This context required significant changes in practice and presented many opportunities for

growth, both at the individual and school level. I joined one of two teams of teachers teaching

90 grade 6/7 students. All but one of the teachers was new to the school.

I knew enough about the pedagogy, culture, and curriculum to know that there was much

I needed to learn. However, I soon realized I brought sufficient knowledge, skills and adaptive

expertise to rise to the teaching challenges at hand. I also began to realize that teaching

collaboratively with my colleagues would provide the greater challenge, and provoke deeper

learning, than teaching my young students. Feedback from the two-week summer case study

included this advice: "In your new school, take it slow. Build relationships first." I took this

advice to heart and held back during the first few months in my new school. Though initially

helpful this proved to be problematic later.

Visitors. *Our team made the mistake of attempting to achieve the school's vision of a*

learning community "taught by a team of teachers who plan and design interdisciplinary units

together" without first allowing for time to establish ourselves in the new school. Our attempts

to teach collaboratively often reduced our practice to the lowest common denominator and I

often felt more like we were "tied together" rather than working together. In deliberately

holding back I found myself constrained by the decisions of others; this led to frustration that I

wasn't free to create the kind of classroom culture and relationships with students that I aspired

to. Having said that, one TOC who spent some time in our community did comment that, "Your

class is the first to settle and the most focused", *something that he wouldn't allow me to credit to*

my students. I was realizing some of my aspirations but there were many aspects of my practice

that I felt had regressed due the limitations of teaching "collaboratively". As in the past, I

wondered how much of the mis-fit was due to me and how much resulted from the context I was

trying to fit into. So, late that fall I invited a handful of close mentors to come and visit my

classroom to give me their perspectives and advise me on both on my adjustment to teaching

Grade 6/7 and on the dynamics of our team.

My first visitor provided helpful feedback on the pedagogical approaches I was taking to

teaching and affirmed my approach to teaching upper intermediate students. She brought with

her two curriculum advisors from a neighbouring school district, both professional friends of

mine, who provided helpful feedback and encouragement on the state of my practice. On a follow

up visit we went for a walk during my preparation time and she pointed out to me the

significance of one's tolerance for ambiguity, that I was being overly cautious in holding back

for the sake of others, and that there were people outside the school who would be using me to

make their judgments about the school. In the journal I was keeping at the time I wrote the

following quote, shared with me by a source I cannot recall, by Marilyn Ferguson:

> It's not so much that we're afraid of change or so in love with old ways, but it's that place
>
> in between we fear… it's like being between trapezes. It's Linus when his blanket is in
>
> the dryer. There's nothing to hold onto.

It was helpful to me to recognize that for some colleagues change was a frightening experience

and yet, holding back simply because it made others uncomfortable was not fair to my students

nor myself nor to those external observers who were watching us. I was left feeling that I needed

to be more assertive and establish professional boundaries that would give me more

independence in our "collaborative" practice.

My second visitor provided additional feedback similar to my first visitors. More

importantly, after she left I asked her what she had found most interesting about the visit to the

classroom and to our school. She said that:

> What interested me most were the big questions around how teachers can best collaborate
>
> and the best ways to have 90 students mix and work. There is a kind of 'collaboration is
>
> good' thing out there that doesn't acknowledge these questions.

She went on to explain that:

> There tends to be a fairly narrow operational definition of collaboration when we are
>
> talking about students collaborating on their learning; often a group project with a group
>
> product. This narrow view of collaboration has been automatically assumed when we are
>
> talking about teacher collaboration. In reality, collaboration could involve an individual
>
> working with peer support and producing an individual product (like an essay) or a
>
> collective product (like an anthology). In many cultures, definitely in Aboriginal ones,
>
> there is the notion that you must learn what the elders know first, a sort of generational
>
> collaboration over time. This is why individual science greats who had individual
>
> accomplishments have acknowledged "the shoulders of giants".

I realized that our team had enthusiastically embraced the idea of "collaboration" and fallen

into the trap of collaborating simply for the sake of collaborating, without anyone of us having a

clear understanding of what we meant by "collaboration". We increased our workload without

necessarily benefiting students and, perhaps even at the expense of student learning.

The net effect of my visitors was that I became more confident in my abilities and

perspective, and clearer about how I desired to collaborate. However, mostly I was frustrated.

How could we achieve this in our community? I was disappointed with my colleagues and had

expected the challenge would be keeping up with them as we pushed the boundaries of our

practice. Instead, my challenge was finding opportunities to spread my teaching wings with our current context of "collaborative teaching". It was through a focused writing assignment that the leadership challenge I faced was revealed.

Ethics Paper: *An ethical problem assignment was given for my fall graduate course in education ethics. The paper I wrote focused on resolving the challenges for teachers attempting to teach collaboratively (i.e. as a group). Through the writing process two areas of decision-making quickly surfaced as sources of challenge. The first was deciding "what" to teach especially when you are implementing a new curriculum where curricular competencies have equal emphasis as curricular concepts. I realized it was important to have clarity about what will be taught or else we risked focusing on the "student experience" rather student learning. This is what I felt was happening in our context. The second was deciding "how" we taught. This was also challenging because of pressure I felt to design lessons that could be taught the same way by both my colleagues, and in turn, to teach my colleagues' lesson the same way they taught them. This reminded me of my experience in Scotland and had the effect of hindering innovation.*

Our team had different areas of expertise, different levels of experience, a range of familiarity with the old and new curricula, and different teaching backgrounds. Quoting one of my visitors:

Collaboration is tricky. And misunderstood. There seems to be a general assumption in the field that inquiry and collaboration go hand in hand; a case of assuming that all the new trendy things must go together. This is another example of ways we have narrowed the possibilities.

Through the writing process I realized that it was our misunderstanding of what is meant by

"collaboration" that led to conflicting expectations and to frustration about "what " and "how"

we would be teaching.

    Overall, I was disappointed. I assumed my colleagues had greater familiarity with the

curriculum as well as with strategies for formative assessment, for differentiating instruction and

for supporting inquiry-based learning. A critical friend reviewed a draft of my ethics paper and

gave me this as advice:

> How were your team members picked? I would be happy if my colleagues were each
>
> strong in one of those areas. To expect all three from both is over-reaching, perhaps.
>
> Even amongst our Masters cohort, myself included, it would be challenging to find such
>
> individuals who have all three – especially the inquiry-based learning.

And so I sat there, having named my unmet expectations and voiced the emotions I was feeling,

wondering what to do. I came up with three possible responses: isolate myself and my students

from the team, quietly play along but carve out my own firm boundaries, or engage in the

difficult conversation of re-defining collaboration. The first response was effectively admitting

failure and would have repercussions across the school and outside the school: it was a non-

option. The second response did not have the same destructive potential of the first but because

of its passive aggressive nature would have exacerbated existing conflicts and created an

extremely toxic community environment. The third response of engagement was the only one

that I could in good conscience consider. As Cynthia Chambers advises, in a moment of Kehre I

need to rise above emotions but also trust them, as they are a powerful indicator.

    Fortuitously in the midst of all this, our principal asked all the school staff to consider

the following question: "How are the diverse needs of students being met through your

collaborative practice?" *This provided a third point for us to initiate honest discussions within*

our team about our understanding of collaboration and what forms of collaboration are best

suited for our team – all with the aim of better addressing student needs.

The process of writing revealed that my conscious choice to step back and let my

colleagues have space to lead played a key role in the frustrations I was experiencing. I

recognized I had a lot to learn and was looking forward to learning from my colleagues. What I

failed to realize was that my colleagues had similar expectations from me. This process revealed

how poorly I had judged my role in the team. The gap between how we could be planning and

teaching, and the state of our current collective practice that had me so uncomfortable and

frustrated were a result of the knowledge and experience I was holding back thinking it was

unwelcome.   I realized that I had failed in my responsibilities to the team. My colleagues

expected me to provide more leadership in deciding the "what" and the "how" of teaching.

What I had perceived as thoughtful leadership in stepping back needed to be re-evaluated and in

some areas I needed to, and was expected to, actively step forward.

Why was this critical to my growth as a leader? The experience of my year teaching

at Norma Rose Point was critical. It was a test of whether I could realize my teaching and

leading aspirations from the learning and experiences gained from the years in district teacher

roles. The knowledge gained from the feedback I received from my VIU classmates guided me

as I found myself once again negotiating the tension between what I believed and what my

context required of me. There were two key sets of events that led to an extended multiple

'moments of Kehre' –occurring during a two-month period from late October to the December

winter break.

Inviting several mentors to visit, observe, and consult was a key decision. Recognizing

the need for external assessment and initiating it was a leadership action in itself. The multiple

voices acknowledging the challenges of my context and advising me on my next steps gave me the confidence and clarity to identify where the sources of 'misfit' originated – which ones were a result of the context and which one I brought to it. What I was attempting to achieve in my context was validated, what I needed to continue doing in my classroom was encouraged, and the work of identifying positive contributions to the situation had begun. One key moment of Kehre was the walk with a mentor during her visit. Recognizing that my reputation was such that some would judge the feasibility of a "program" using my success or failure as the metric again reminded me that I was not "just a teacher". That conversation awoke in me the responsibility I had to support change in our learning community and in our school, but also in the broader education system. This planted the seed for a decision I would make six months later.

The response of another mentor to my query about what she found most interesting about her daylong visit to our community was another moment of Kehre. What had not been obvious was now crystal clear; we didn't have a common accurate understanding of 'collaboration'. That this was the most interesting take away for her made me realize that it was crucial that we, our team and the school staff in general, address this in our professional learning.

The ethical problem paper, and the external feedback I received from two external reviewers, provided a mechanism for me to reflect on my situation. In his response, my professor for the ethics course shared his opinion that,

> we are nearing a point where this idea is becoming 'gospel', one of those things that every teacher claims is good....this in itself isn't a bad thing but when terms become so ubiquitous and so unquestioned, they start to mean anything to anyone...and ultimately, become essentially meaningless (November 2014).

Writing the paper made it clear that our confused understanding of what was meant by

'collaboration' was a key source of our challenge. The writing allowed me to surface what I was

thinking and feeling, and allowed me to process both the 'logos' and the 'pathos' of the first four

months in this new school and new role. Recognizing that the third response was my only real

option was a significant moment of Kehre. It was also a conscious leadership decision – it set

aside ego and prioritized the needs of students. Owning this responsibility to act with intention

on behalf of both students and colleagues was a significant shift in how I viewed myself as a

leader.

Considering a Return to Formal Leadership

This is not my last story but for you my reader it is the last one on these pages. It is a hot

day in the middle of May 2015 and I am a passenger with two of my mentors enroute to a NOII

meeting hosted by the Delta School District. My mentors tell me of a district teacher position

coming up that I should apply for. This was flattering but not something I took seriously. The

thought of leaving the school district where I had worked for two decades seemed a bit dramatic

and applying for a district position seemed like over-reach. However, I considered it and at the

meeting asked a professional friend who worked in a district role in Delta about the role and the

district. Her words to me were "You'd be great at it. This is a super district to work in. We

learn with and from each other. You'd love it here." On the car ride back to Vancouver with my

mentors I raised all the reasons why I shouldn't apply – a whole new possibility for stretching

seemed to be presenting itself and so I began 'pressure-testing' it.

That evening I told my spouse about the position and the conversations I had had at the

meeting and travelling to and from it. The initial response was "You can't do that. It's too far.

And it's one more new thing". This was true. Instead of being able to cycle or bus to school I

would have to purchase a second car and be driving at least 50 km each day. Over the next few

weeks two interesting things happened. Her perspective softened and she began encouraging me to apply. Meanwhile, my school was in the midst of hiring new teachers for the following year and reorganizing communities in anticipation of increasing enrollment. This increased my investment and ownership in the school making me re-consider the thought of leaving.

Two more exchanges came into play before I made my decision. I emailed a colleague who was in a role similar to the one I was considering applying for. I asked him "based on what you know of me, do you think I'd be able to handle the role of district math coordinator in a district other than VSB? Or would it be over reach?" The reply was short and to the point. The email response was "I think you could do - no doubt in my mind." With that endorsement I contacted a mentor who had provided leadership both in Delta and Vancouver to ask for their perspective on the dilemma of choosing between continuing to build a collaborative culture at my school or leave that to return to a district teacher role. The response included an affirmation of my suitability for the role and one key piece of advice: "Neither of your choices is a bad choice. However, if you apply, and they offer you the position, you have to be prepared to say yes. It would not be good if they offer you the job and you reject them." And so, I decided to leave it to fate to decide. I let my principal know of the opportunity and how torn I was in even considering leaving the school. Though saddened by the possibility of my leaving she understood what the opportunity represented for me – a opportunity to take what we had learned about working and learning collaboratively at the school level to make school level change and join a district team working to make district level change.

This story doesn't end and continues to include learning who my new teams might be, both at the school and in the Delta position. It includes a Skype interview full of technical glitches. It includes a confidant and colleague telling me that I was "taking the easy route". *It*

includes me struggling to know whom else to tell about my application. It includes beginning a

new chapter in my learning and leadership journey when I was offered the position and accepted

it. It includes me not being able to say a proper goodbye to my students.

Why was this critical to my growth as a leader? Each exchange in this story

represents a moment of Kehre. Though I had long stopped seeing myself as "just a teacher" I

had not grasped the extent of my growth nor did I fully appreciate the depth of my knowledge,

and experience, of strong educational practices. Even writing this reflection is a challenge

because of my impulse to keep myself small. A critical friend who I was in contact with during

the past year wrote to me "You have a very strong perch from which to view curriculum. This is

a bonus. It also means you are light years ahead of most teachers, and this can be intimidating

for some people." I have a hard time acknowledging, much less accepting, this description. I

have intentionally kept myself small, to reduce the temptation of ego and self, to avoid

intimidating or offending colleagues, to focus both on what I can learn from others and with

others, to contribute without needing credit or attention.

This story allowed me to see myself through the eyes of several people for whom I have a

great deal of respect. It allowed me see that others also have a great deal of respect for me. I am

a teacher leader. I do not need a title or position to be a leader. And I understand that teacher

leadership is not just about seeing myself as a leader; more importantly, it is about the

collectively capacity of teachers to make decisions and take initiation. It is a collective capacity

that I have a responsibility for building.

Considerations

Reflecting on the stories that I re-membered during this research process, I wondered about the path I might have taken had it not been for the influence of key individuals along my professional learning journey. I looked at the stories and in each one saw individuals who were agents of my moment of Kehre, either through direct action or by encouraging action on my part, particularly in those times when I felt significant mis-fit. Without their presence, those circumstances could easily have been the breaking of me rather than the making of me. I would not have remained in teaching if it had not been for the unfailing support and endorsement of my mathematics instructor who provided the practicum crosscheck. The hospitality and support provided by the teacher who sponsored my 'do-over' was essential for my confidence to recover from its 'stress test' in the first practicum.

All along the journey there were people that affirmed and encouraged what I believed about education. They provided the boost that I needed to take the 'next step' in my learning journey. Their impact nurtured a self-confidence that allowed me to see myself as more than 'just a teacher'. Their interventions when I was frustrated and despairing helped me to see that I was only a part of the 'problem' and that I had an important role to play in the solution.

The Power of Stories

From my perspective, the stories I wrote are all positive stories. It may be that I have chosen to accentuate the positive and downplay the negative elements of each story. There were no shortage of hard stories: both the first story of A Bad Fit and the story of There and Back Again were filled with angst, stress, and frustration. However, in re-membering my experiences through writing them as narratives I was able to see the positive in them. By recording my emotions and experiences in text I was able to expose them to the light of day and in doing so,

balance their 'pathos' with a healthy dose of 'logos'. Examining my narratives allowed me to distinguish between my role in each story, the role of others in the story, and role of the cultural context on the story. Clearly seeing my part in each situation was extremely helpful for my actions were the one thing that I had agency over. This clarity of my part in each story brought into relief the areas where I needed to grow and revealed how much I had grown.

Who I am. The revelations of self in each story represented moments of Kehre; turning points that changed the way I saw myself. Looking back on Chapter 1 and my description of 'Who I am' I can see how writing my stories answered questions that my inner voice was asking. Yes, it is true that "I am better able to accept change, embrace it, and not require it on my terms". I came to this place of being "willing to shoulder responsibility" by accepting what others saw in me. Yes the story I tell myself about my desire for connectedness is true – it describes the person I am and the person I am becoming.

What I believe. When I consider the statements of 'What I believe' I see that the common theme in my stories is a passion for participating in educational change – change that benefits all students not just those in my direct care. This passion has informed and fueled my engagement with colleagues. 'What I believe' acknowledges the challenge of change and in several of my stories I saw the realities of my context push up against my belief that "we can all do better; that we can change our practices, our system, and our educational culture so that more students are more successful." I am still left wondering why change in education is so hard. I suspect it has much to do with the high degree to which our identity is tied up with our practices – any questioning, internally or externally, of our practice is perceived as an assault on one's competence and value.

I found it only partially to be true that "(T)the imposter syndrome gets worse not better as

one ages." The stories revealed, especially the four Formal Leadership stories, the insight that

my growth in leadership could be equated with way "I was daily becoming the teacher I aspired

to be" – that I did not need to be a fully formed leader before I could provide leadership. The

continuum of stories revealed the progression of my growth and permits me a glimpse into my

future.

Affirmation

In writing and analyzing my stories I noticed a parallel trajectory between my personal

understanding of teacher leadership and how educational culture (in North America and much of

the Commonwealth) understands it. My early career stories did not see leadership as a capacity

for teachers. Like Muijs and Harris (2003) I equated leadership with a position of status and

authority "largely premised upon individual endeavor rather than collective action … equating

leadership with headship" (p.437). My early stories focused on the agency I had within my own

classroom but did not include exercising influence out into my school. Bower (2006) recognized

that, while teachers may not set a direction for an entire school district, they do have personal

power. "Teachers often exercise their personal power behind the closed doors of classrooms" (p.

70). My story mirrored one common to teachers – power and autonomy in their classrooms and

deference to hierarchal power outside of their classroom.

Fledging Leader Revealed. The stories re-membered from the second half of my first

decade of teaching revealed my initial exercising of leadership. Writing about the perspectives

that came with breaking my leg and the first exposure to evidence-based practices in the book

Understanding by Design permitted me to identify how I was beginning to exercise leadership

simply through asking questions. Writing revealed that I had "the ability to establish trusting

and collaborative relationships" (York-Barr & Duke 2004, p. 272). It revealed that I was

exercising teacher leadership when I drew on the respect that I had gained from students and

colleagues and was able to see an opportunity for improvement and take initiative (Danielson,

2006; Lai & Cheng, 2014). However, I didn't attempt to address issues alone; I engaged others

in the using invitational language, genuinely respecting my colleagues (Danielson, 2006).

     Atypical Formal Leadership. Writing the stories of the years when I held formal

leadership positions revealed that I was not a typical formal leader. By focusing on meeting the

needs of colleagues, and wearing that as a mantle of responsibility, I was able to minimize the

risk of conflict and ostracization that would occur if I failed to be sufficiently self-deprecating in

how I exercised leadership (Muijs & Harris, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Even though the

formal leadership positions were created by, and I was expected work within, existing

hierarchical structures I did not seek to gain legitimacy through my title. Formal teacher leaders

responsibilities are often focused "predominantly on administrative activities and managerial

functions" with a focus on efficiently maintaining the school's systems and structures. System

change is not part of the job description (Lai & Cheung, 2014). But in my stories it comes out

clear that I saw system change a part of my personal job description, regardless of what my job

was, and I was definitely not focused in maintaining current systems and structures. I knew it is

unacceptable to "live and work in schools where many students are not learning or at least are

not learning to their potential or even close to it" (Danielson, 2006, p. 36). Effective leaders

"close any gaps in performance and are deeply concerned about the needs of their most

vulnerable learners" (Halbert & Kaser, 2009, p. 35). My stories revealed a passion to support

growth, for others and for myself, which would ultimately benefit all our learners.

     Attempting Informal Leadership. Writing and selecting the stories that capture twelve

months between leaving a formal leadership role in Vancouver and accepting a formal leadership

role in Delta was extremely hard. I generated pages and pages of story as I tried to process what

had happened during that calendar year. I saw myself as a leader, having had several years in a

formal leadership role, and in short order cycled through two different contexts. What the

writing revealed to me was that, because I had this newfound identity as leader, in both contexts

I expected myself to be a leader. What the writing also revealed was that I did not have a deep

understanding of teacher leadership. That came from researching and writing this paper's

literature review.

Reflecting on the story of 'The Problem with the Stories we Tell Ourselves' I realized I

had yet to learn that there are times when one uses their influence not to initiate change, but to be

the follower (Danielson, 2006; Krueger, 2013). The same story revealed the danger of becoming

too self-aware and the importance of attending to our colleagues, to monitor our collective

progress and stay alert to changing conditions and unexpected outcomes (Danielson, 2006).

Writing this story also revealed to me that I possessed many of the dispositions of a teacher

leader; that I had that "cluster of traits and ways of looking at the world that tend to reinforce one

another" (p. 40) such as being "open-minded, enthusiastic, optimistic, and flexible" and "willing

to work both hard and smart" (Danielson, 2006, p. 40).

In the story 'There and Back Again' I discovered how high my expectations had been of

myself and of others. My lack of understanding of both 'teacher leadership' and 'collaboration'

caused me no end of challenge. Writing and analyzing that story drew attention to the collective

nature of teacher leadership. It is not necessary that all teachers demonstrate leadership in the

same way nor in the same domains (Lai & Cheung, 2014; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), rather what

is important is that "teacher leadership reclaims school leadership from the individual to the

collective, from the singular to the plural and offers the real possibility of distributed leadership

in action" (Muijs & Harris, 2003, p. 445).   The story revealed the challenges of exercising shared leadership.

Implications

While this research has allowed me to better understand my story of accepting the identity of teacher-leader, the intent of the study is to facilitate others in recognizing, and exercising, their individual and collective capacities for teacher leadership. For me, the insights gained from this study will allow me to project my story forward.

Implications for me pertain to my new role with a focus on finding my way and my fit in my new context. As I start into this new role in a new place I am asking myself:

- How will I build relationship with the members of the district learning services team?
- How will I cultivate a reputation that allows me to 'lead' based on the respect of my colleagues rather than by my new title?
- How will I build collective leadership within schools and across the district?
- Who will be my outside eyes to give me perspective and insight?

Implications for my readers are unique to each of their contexts. However, I would humbly propose that there questions that are universal to teachers examining their identity as leaders. Whether you identify as a leader or not, I ask you my reader to consider:

- What is going on with the learners in my context? What are their needs?
- What are ways in which I could take action or exercise initiative?
- Who do I see as leaders in my context? Why do I see them as leaders?
- Do I see myself as a leader? Why or why not?
- Who are the critical friends that provide me with outside perspectives that allow me to see myself more fully and more accurately?
- In my context, does an individual or a group hold leadership? Why?

It is my hope that what you have read is helpful in answering the questions I have presented and leads you to many more questions of your own.

Conclusion

I suspect that I will always see myself as less than what others see. I have come to realize that I need the perspectives of others to know myself. I find Johari's window (Luft, 1969) with its four quadrants showing the intersections between what we know and don't about ourselves and what others know and don't know about us helpful.

Our blind spots, those things that are known to others but not known to self, require the perspectives of others if we wish to become aware of them. Dan Siegel (2011) speaks extensively about 'theory of mind' and that to have a mind requires engagement between two people. We need others to know ourselves. Others reflect back – still waters reflect – listening.

Johari's window (Luft, 1969) is also helpful with regard to the unknown; those things that are unknown both to others and to our self. It is in saying "YES" to opportunities, in taking risks and trusting that we can grow to become what we need to be, that we come to learn about, and know, ourselves better.

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