

A Case of Positive Teacher-Leadership:  
*Positive Deviance in a Canadian High School*

A Thesis Submitted to the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Education in the Department of Educational  
Administration University of Saskatchewan Saskatoon, Canada

By:

Leke Ivo Jingwa

September 2019

## **Permission to Use**

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Postgraduate degree from the University of Saskatchewan, I agree that the Libraries of this University may make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for copying of this thesis in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor or professors who supervised my thesis work or, in their absence, by the Head of the Department or the Dean of the College in which my thesis work was done. It is understood that any copying or publication or use of this thesis or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of Saskatchewan in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis.

Requests for permission to copy or to make other uses of materials in this thesis in whole or part should be addressed to:

Department of Educational Administration  
College of Education  
28 Campus Drive  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon, SK S7N 0X1

Dean  
College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
University of Saskatchewan  
116 Thorvaldson Building, 110 Science Place  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5C9  
Canada

## **Abstract**

Research into positive teacher leadership is relatively new in education. As the school reform movement evolves, the pressure on the principals to be accountable for school improvement and student achievement has increased. The former one-person leadership model which had characterized school structures for many decades left teachers' talents to go largely unexploited (Lambert, 2002). This is a case study which sought to contribute to the notions of Positive Teacher Leadership in schools by identifying elements and practices that constitute Positive Teacher Leadership, including an exploration of the impact of such leadership on school improvement.

The study was rooted in the use of a positive paradigm, involving the use of positive and transformative ideations and approaches to change. The study attempted to explore the concept of teacher leadership from a positive perspective by investigating the positive attributes and components of teacher leadership. The study approached the query from a single case, then used the case in providing a description of positive teacher leadership. Rather than focusing on what is wrong with systems or elements of school life, the positive approach requires researchers to ask affirming questions and encourage participants to focus on what works (Cram, 2010).

The general research design selected to explore the research was qualitative case study design with the use of multiple data collection techniques, including in-depth and casual interviews, observation and focus-group discussions. Data analysis was done manually from a grounded approach—The ground theory pursuit in this study is the “theory of positive teacher-leadership.” This study made use of Cameron (2012) positive leadership theories—practical strategies on how to engage in positive leadership within an organization. The central focus of his work was on positive deviance. The study found out that Positive Teacher- Leadership (PTL) in this case entailed leading through strength building, positive

affirmation and gratitude. These strategies help bring out the best in people by enabling a positive work climate, a positive relationship, positive communication and positive meaning. The study also examined positive teacher-leadership from the perspectives of staff and principal which involved taking a positive approach to leadership. This approach has much to do with focusing on the strength of people, creating a culture of trust, instilling a sense of community, empowering others, and creating opportunities for both students and staff.

From the findings of this study, it is clear that Positive teacher leadership was not a single concept nor was it the use of a single strategy to impact other; but rather positive teacher leadership is represented by a combination of positive traits and values and a dedication to serving others from a positive perspective using different approaches such as strength-based and appreciative approach

## **Acknowledgements**

I want to express my deep and sincere gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Keith Walker for his constant support throughout this research project. His charisma, vision, dynamism, motivation and sincerity have deeply inspired me. His support and mentorship have made me stronger and more confident in my work. My profound gratitude goes to my committee members, Dr. Okoko, Prof. Paul Newton, Prof. Hillis Doug and Dr. Michael Cottrell, for their constructive comments and feedback. I also want to extend my sincere gratitude to the graduate administrator Katrina Hutchence and the entire department of educational administration for the support given to me throughout my studies.

I am incredibly grateful to the Jingwa's family, especially my father Tambo George and mother Stella Njungkeng for their steadfast love, prayers and encouragement. To my dearest brother Awung Brian who continue to assist me in all spheres, I say thank you. I am extending my thanks to Dr. Simplice Asongu for his mentorship and efforts in improving my research capabilities and skills.

I want to say thanks to Mathew Bakken for his genuine support throughout this research work. His sacrifices, energy and optimism played a significant role in the realization of this research work. My gratitude also goes to friends and well-wishers, especially the FI staff who provided rich data for this research work.

## Table of Contents

Permission to Use .....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents .....	v
List of Figures.....	x
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b>	
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Background of Study .....	1
Purpose of the Research.....	4
Problem Statement.....	4
Research Questions.....	6
Significance of the Study .....	6
Definition of Terms for Purposes of this Study .....	8
Limitations of the Study.....	10
Delimitations.....	11
Assumptions.....	12
Thesis Structure .....	12
Chapter One Summary.....	13
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b>	
<b>REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE .....</b>	<b>14</b>
Leadership Approaches and Styles in Schools .....	15
Transformational Teacher-Leadership.....	15
Instructional Teacher Leadership.....	16
Transactional Teacher-Leadership.....	18
Servant Leadership.....	18
Distributed Leadership.....	20
Positive Organizational Concepts .....	20
Positive Psychology .....	21
Appreciative Inquiry (AI) .....	22
Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS).....	23
Positive Deviance.....	24
Positive School Leadership.....	30
Positive Orientation .....	32

Moral Orientation.....	33
Relational Orientation.....	33
Spiritual Stewardship Orientation.....	33
Principles of Positive School Leadership.....	35
The Principles of Asset-Based Approaches.....	35
A Value-Centered Approach.....	35
Virtue-Base Approach.....	36
Transcendent Approach.....	36
Relationally Grounded Approach.....	37
Means-Focused Approach.....	37
Growth-Based Approach.....	37
Authentic Approach.....	38
Service-grounded Approach.....	39
The Virtues of Positive School Leadership.....	39
Show of Compassion and Care.....	39
Inspiring Hope.....	40
Trustworthiness.....	41
Possesses Love for others.....	42
Teacher-Leadership in Schools.....	43
The Benefits of Teacher Leadership.....	48
The Benefit of Teacher Leadership to Student.....	48
The Benefit of Teacher-Leadership to the Institution.....	50
Teacher-Leadership Roles in School.....	52
Challenges and Barriers to Positive Teacher Leadership.....	54
Conceptual Framework.....	56
Summary of the Literature Reviewed.....	58
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b>	
<b>METHODOLOGY</b> .....	61
Case Study Design.....	61
Case Description.....	63
Recruitment of Participants.....	63
The High School Context.....	64
Method and Instruments of Data Collection.....	65
Focus-Group Discussion.....	66
Focus-Group Interview Schedule.....	67

Observation.....	67
Definition of the Observation Unit .....	68
Recording of the Observations.....	69
In-Depth Interviews and Principal Interview .....	69
Recording the Interviews .....	70
Data Analyses .....	70
Establishing Trustworthiness .....	73
Ethical Considerations .....	74
Informed Consent.....	75
Full Disclosure .....	75
Voluntary Participation.....	75
Privacy .....	76
Protecting Participants from Harm .....	76
Summary of Chapter Three.....	77
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b>	
<b>DATA ANALYSES AND FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>78</b>
The Functional Integrated Program (FI program).....	79
FI Program Overview .....	80
Classroom settings .....	82
The Office setting .....	83
Period of Engagement.....	83
Introducing the Study Participants.....	84
Introducing Mr. John. ....	84
Introducing the FI Staff.....	85
Introducing the School Principal.....	86
Findings from Daily Observations.....	86
Encouraging Compassion .....	87
Encouraging Forgiveness.....	90
Encouraging Gratitude .....	91
Foster Positive Energy .....	94
Capitalizing on Strengths.....	96
Use of Supportive Communication.....	98
Enhancing the Meaningfulness of Work.....	99
Sustainable Leadership Initiative Projects .....	102
Transformative Moments.....	102

Gardening Activities and Their Significance in the FI Program.....	103
FI Recycling Initiative .....	105
Daily Coffee Service for Staff Initiative .....	106
Informal and Formal Interview with John .....	107
Positive Leadership.....	109
Positive Leadership as a Process.....	109
Strength Spotting Approach.....	111
Authentic Affirmation/Appreciation Approach .....	114
Gratitude and Celebration Approach .....	120
Staff Focus Group Findings .....	125
Authenticating John’s Leadership Strategies .....	126
Other Leadership Strategies and Principles .....	135
A Culture of Trust.....	135
A Sense of Community .....	138
Teamwork .....	139
Positive environment .....	141
Mindfulness and self-reflection .....	144
Interview Findings with the Principal.....	147
Collaboration and Strength Spotting.....	147
Trustworthiness and Empowering. ....	149
Consistency in Leadership Practice .....	151
Transparency.....	152
The Impact of John’s Leadership on the School Culture.....	152
Summary of Chapter Four .....	153
<b>CHAPTER FIVE</b>	
<b>DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS .....</b>	<b>157</b>
Statements of Findings.....	158
Building through Strength-Based Approach.....	159
Building Through Affirmation and Appreciation .....	160
Building Through Gratitude and Celebration .....	161
Responses to Research Questions One from Observations Focus Groups and Principal. ....	163
Towards an Understanding of Positive Teacher Leadership.....	163
Statement of Findings from Staff Focus Group Discussion.....	164
Statement of Findings from Interview .....	165
Responses to Research Questions two from Observations, Focus Groups and Principal.....	166

Discussion of Findings and Extant Literature.....	166
Case-Based Conceptualization.....	172
The Implications from this Research .....	174
The Implication for Theories .....	174
The Implication for Practice .....	174
The Implication for Teachers and Administration Development.....	175
The Implications for Future research .....	175
Concluding Remarks.....	175
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	177
<b>APPENDICES</b> .....	198
Appendix A: Ethics Course Certificate of Completion.....	199
Appendix B: Certificate of Ethics Approval.....	200
Appendix C: Research Approval School Division .....	201
Appendix D: Participants’ Letter of Introduction.....	202
Appendix E: Focus Group Consent Form.....	204
Appendix F: Observation Consent Form .....	209
Appendix G Interview Consent Form.....	212
Appendix H: Transcript Release Form .....	216
Appendix I: Observation guides .....	217
Appendix J: FI Program Outline.....	220

## List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Leadership Strategies for positive Deviance.....	36
Figure 2.2: Teacher Leadership progression and influence Model .....	57
Figure 2.3: Conceptual Framework for Positive Dimension and Practice .....	66
Figure 2.4: Conceptual Theoretical Framework.....	68
Figure 3.1: An Illustration of the steps in qualitative Data Analysis .....	81
Figure 4.1: Outline of Chapter 4.....	89
Figure 4.2: Interconnected Strength Spotting Model .....	124
Figure 4.3: Affirmation Circle .....	126
Figure 4.4: Positive leading Model Used by Positive Teacher Leader .....	134
Figure 5.1: A Framework for Understanding Positive Teacher Leadership .....	177
Figure 5.2: Case-based Conceptualization of Positive Teacher Leadership.....	183

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Chapter one presents an overview of the study. The chapter contains a background, the purpose of the study, problem statement and the research questions. The chapter also contains the significance of the study, the definitions, limitations, delimitations, assumptions and a summary of chapter one.

### **Background of Study**

Evidence from research has consistently demonstrated the importance of leadership in securing and sustaining organizational improvement (Harris, 2013; Harris, 2004). Effective leaders have an indirect but powerful effect on the effectiveness of the school and students' achievement levels (Harris, 2004; Shava, 2015; Elliott & Clifford, 2014; Hargreaves, 2009). Leithwood and Riehl (2003) stated that “scratch the surface of an excellent school, and you are likely to find an excellent leader, peer into a failing school, and you will find a weak leadership” (p. 1). In essence, one cannot dismiss the significant role that effective and positive leadership plays in the success of the school in general and the students in particular.

Top-down hierarchical leaders' orientations are characteristic of many educational systems through their common suggestion that the thriving of a school is directly linked to the specific skills, mindset, and preferred activities of the school principal. As examined by Sudsberry and Kandel-Cisco (2013), this hierarchical perspective is no longer fashionable. As a result of reforms, which have impacted education for many decades (Harris, 2013), the sector continues to witness a discernable paradigm shift in school leader focus from principal-driven leadership to shared and collective leadership responsibility.

As the school effectiveness, improvement and reform movements evolve, the pressure on the principals to be accountable for school improvement and student achievement has

increased (West et al. 2010). In dealing with this intensified accountability, in the context of systemic change, principals also face the implications of new forms of assessment, the standards movement and altered curriculum frameworks (Flett, & Wallace, 2005). It has become necessary to engage teachers in collaborative dialogue about the implications of these issues for teaching and learning. Thus, there has been an emergence of shared instructional leadership (Marks & Printy, 2003). Researchers, like Sudsberry and Kandel-Cisco (2013), have stated their viewpoint that “school leadership should be framed as a complex activity that occurs through the interaction of school administrators, teachers, and students within the unique social context of specific classrooms, schools, and communities” (p. 185).

It is important that we develop leadership capacity amongst all of the members in the school community rather than merely looking to the principal alone to be the champion of the educational mission (Portin, 2010; Nappi, 2014) the era of principals as the lone school leaders are long gone. It is no longer possible for a single or even a team of school administrators to serve as the sole instructional leaders for an entire school without the support of other educators (Lambert, 2002; Flood 2004).

The one-person-as-leaders model leaves a large amount of teachers’ talent to go unexploited (Lambert, 2002). The growth and health of schools operating under this model are not easily sustainable. Because programs and initiatives in schools are typically coordinated by the school principal (Hernandez, 2016), it is possible that these programs and initiatives are inclined to lose momentum or to collapse when a particular and able principal leaves the school.

Although there is some consensus on the principles and practices of positive school leadership; scholars are yet to agree on the forms of leadership practice that predictably contribute to sustainable school improvement (Harris, 2004). The disagreement emanates from the abundant literature focused on the school principal, who has been the proxy for and

a symbol of school leadership; thereby, ignoring the other kinds of leadership which may be distributed across different functions and roles in the school (Harris, 2003; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins 2008; Harris, 2004). Leaders matters; but as Harris (2013) articulated, we need to know the practices and roles that provide capacity for the transformation and sustainability of schools and student learning. Leithwood et al. (2008) made it clear that school leadership comes second only to classroom teaching as an influence on student learning and achievement. With this claim is the recognition of the role of teacher leadership on student learning outcomes. Teachers have a significant role to play in school improvement efforts. In many instances, these efforts are directed towards improving instruction for student learning, with teacher leaders at the center of this instructional leadership (Harris, 2013; Cherkowski, 2018)

As educational researchers ponder the role of instructional leadership, the concept of shared leadership has become central to leadership approaches (Lindahl, 2008). This focus on shared leadership is based on the recognition that both the teachers and principals generate leadership that, in turn, influences the learning that occurs in schools (Printy & Marks, 2006; Nappi, 2014). Conger and Pearce (2003) described shared leadership as “a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals within groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both” (p. 1). A study conducted by Lambert (2006), in 15 different schools across Canada, revealed that schools that practice shared leadership and foster a professional culture are most likely to record increases in both student and institutional performance. There is more to gain from a shared leadership approach than a one-person leader approach. Nappi (2014) found out that “When principals share leadership responsibilities and allow teachers to take on leadership roles, the type of collaboration that follows results in productive social capital, which in turn increases the scope of the effectiveness of the professional community” (p. 33).

Leadership, in general, have been widely recognized for decades as an essential ingredient for government formations, corporations, and business improvement. It is only in the last 40 years that the spotlight has shifted towards education leadership (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012). This more recent attention is undoubtedly one of the rationales for the increase in educational leadership research around the globe. Governments, too, have increasingly become aware that they have an uphill task of raising the quality of schools and schooling by ensuring exquisite teacher-leadership.

### **Purpose of the Research**

The concept and practice of positive teacher leadership have not received much attention in educational research. The idea of looking at teacher leadership from a positive perspective is only recently exploited (Cherkowski, 2018). The purpose of this research, therefore, was to contribute to notions of Positive Teacher-Leadership in schools by identifying elements and practices that constitute Positive Teacher-Leadership and to describe the perceived impact of this role on school improvement.

### **Problem Statement**

There are potential teacher-leaders in every school, and many teachers have shown extraordinary and perhaps have untapped leadership skills. Unfortunately, their leadership initiatives may have gone unnoticed due to restrictive job descriptions. These limiting descriptions sometimes stipulate what teachers can or cannot do. These restrictions include, but not limited to, the need to prepare students for tests and follow mandatory curricula controlled by regulations and enforced through surveillance (Murphy & Louis, 2018). Fullan (2002) suggested that for there to be sustainability in the positive changes that teachers make in the academic arena, school administrators and policymakers must create an atmosphere that is conducive for change. Although the idea of change through positive leadership has gained momentum in the organizational literature (Gill, 2002); it has not yet made its way

into the literature on schools and educational leadership in any systematic and purposeful way (Murphy & Louis, 2018). According to Murphy and Louis (2018), the idea of positive leadership is undoubtedly appealing and has a lot to offer to schools; especially when it comes to change. However, the concept requires further development and description. In many cases, teachers, who are at the forefront of positive change and development in schools, are invisible and may not have been considered in the scope of discourse about school leadership.

The concept and practices of teacher-leadership are not new to the field of education (Harris, 2003). Although the concept gained momentum in the last two decades, some have described teacher-leadership as a unique form of leadership under the canopy of school leadership. Despite the attention that teachers-leadership has received (Muijs & Harris, 2003), the concept has not been examined from the positive and appreciative perspective, was with this study; thus, the terminology “positive teacher-leadership.” The conceptual combination of positive teacher leadership is confronted with two challenges: (i) there is an assumption that teachers are not leaders (Lieberman & Miller, 2005), (ii) and approaching things from a positive perspective in a society where leaders are more concerned with what is wrong or a problem-solving approach (Louis & Murphey 2018). Over the years, administrators, scholars and researchers have argued by their behavior in favour of a negative perspective; a position which leads to actions to “try to fix” that which is wrong in the workplace or that points to the deficits characterizing employees (Luthans, 2002; Cameron 2012). There is a need for a shift of our attention from the constant desire in addressing “deficit gap” to addressing, instead, the “abundance gap” (Hoffman et al. 2010). This study attempted to explore the concept of teacher leadership from a positive perspective by investigating the positive attributes and components of teacher leadership. The study approached the query from a single case, then used the case in providing a description of positive teacher-leadership.

## **Research Questions**

This study sought to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. As a new and emerging concept, within the framework of school leadership, what does positive teacher-leadership look like?
2. What are the ideations, dynamics and practices that constitute positive-teacher leadership in the case of a selected school setting, from perspective of teacher, associated staff and principal?

## **Significance of the Study**

This study increases our awareness and drives discussions on positive-teacher leadership in high school contexts by providing a deeper understanding of the concepts and practices. Although teachers are increasingly assuming leadership roles (York-Barr & Duke, 2004), there remains a gap in associating those roles to capacities, capabilities, behaviours and ideations of teacher-leadership. Studies have revealed that most teachers involved in leadership roles in schools do not consider those roles within the framework of leadership (Muijs & Harris, 2006). The term teacher-leadership is viewed more as a concept than a practice because of the complexities associated with identifying teachers as school leaders alongside principals. Nevertheless, some have argued that for schools to flourish, more teachers need to be encouraged to function as leaders (Phelps, 2008). This study provides some clarity with respect to how a positive teacher leader, in one case, operated in terms of preferred practice.

Another significant aspect of this study is that while there is a wealth of research on school leadership, positive teacher leadership had remained unexploited in the literature. This study has created a framework to understand better, define and describe positive teacher leadership. The findings also serve as an opportunity to proffer further research development in the area.

In the extant literature, there was a claim that we live in an era of massive institutional failure (Murphy & Louis, 2018). The daily news is filled with scandalous reports of unethical behaviours and actions on the part of leaders in various institutions, including schools and government institutions (Patterson, 2016). There is a need to identify or establish new ethical standards and promote positive leadership in schools. This study aimed to provide a fulsome description of positive teacher leadership and provides case-specific insights into some positive school leadership practices. The study may serve to inform enabling policy directions in school jurisdictions and educational administration and leadership preparation programs.

Despite the existence of considerable literature on school leadership, most of these studies do not take into consideration construct of teachers as leaders (Harris, 2003; Hunzicker, 2017); the concept and practice of teacher leadership in educational research have not been sufficiently considered. A study carried out by Harris (2003), revealed that there was widespread ignorance about teacher leadership. Most of the teachers in her research attributed leadership to principal and administrators; although they were engaged in some leadership activities. They failed to realize that teacher-driven initiatives and programs of development are a manifestation of such leadership. This research contributes to a re-orientation for educators and researchers and serves to suggest a needful paradigm shift in the conceptualization and practice of school leadership. In other words, the findings of the study aspire to further inform new research and policy directions in educational leadership, with a focus on exemplary teacher-leadership.

Canada, like many other countries, loses a significant number of teachers from the profession, annually. The Fédération Canadienne des Enseignantes et des Enseignants. (2004) put the attrition rate of Canadian teachers at 30% within the first five years of service. Based on this percentage, the obvious question is: why do teachers leave? Thibodeaux et al. (2015)

cited leadership style as a major cause of attrition. They argued that some leadership styles have the potential to trigger staff dissatisfaction and hence, attrition. Alonderiene and Majauskaite (2016), in their research on leadership style and job satisfaction in higher education, reinforced this view and laid out further claims that appreciative leadership styles have a positive effect on job satisfaction and the institution in general. Findings from this study may help to re-orient school leaders and policymakers as they consider a leadership approach that enables a meaningful work environment for teachers. It is true that “when people feel that they are perusing a profound purpose or engaging in work that is personally important, significant positive effects are produced including a reduction in stress, depression, turnover and cynicism” (Cameron 2012, p. 67).

### **Definition of Terms for Purposes of this Study**

The rationale for clearly defining the terminologies in this study is to ensure that readers understand the context in which they are examined in the proposed study.

**Positive Leadership.** Positive leadership draws from many existing leadership theories, but none of the theories offer a clear definition. Youssef and Luthans (2012) attempted a definition of positive leadership, stated as follows:

the systematic and integrated manifestation of leadership traits, processes, intentional behaviours and performance outcomes that are elevating, exceptional and affirmatory of the strengths, capabilities and developmental potential of leaders, their followers and their organizations over time and across cultures. (p. 541)

The study emphasizes three premises in positive leadership; i) Positive leaders often seem to demonstrate positively deviant behaviours (Heckert & Heckert, 2002; Marsh et al., 2004; Cameron, 2012); ii) Positive leaders have an affirmative bias; and iii) Positive leaders

are most concerned with facilitating the best of the human condition (Dutton, Glynn & Spreitzer, 2008; Louis & Murphy 2018).

**Teacher-leadership.** Teacher-leadership has been described as a relatively new concept without a well-established body of literature (Anderson, 2004). The absence of literature may have resulted in a lack in a consensus with respect to a definition of teacher-leadership (Uribe-Flórez 2014). For this research, the term teacher-leadership will tentatively refer to a:

Set of skills demonstrated by teachers who teach but also have an influence that extends beyond the classrooms to others within the school and elsewhere, it entails mobilizing and energizing others with the goal of improving school and elsewhere. It entails critical responsibilities related to teaching and learning. (Danielson, 2006, p. 12)

Sirotnik and Kimball (1996) argued that adding the term “teacher” to leadership does not in any way change its meaning as it remains the exercise of influence by a leader (teacher) over followers (students). Although Sirotnik and Kimball made a solid argument that cannot easily be refuted, Anderson, (2004) is convinced that they may “depend on contextual differences in administrative leadership and teacher leadership” (p 100).

**Positive Deviance.** The term “positive deviance” has increased in popularity in the last decades, resulting in the co-existence of multiple definitions and applications scattered among diverse sources of academic literature (Herington & Fliert, 2018). The following definitions are drawn from theory and practice-based literature. Marsh et al. (2004) defined positive deviance as the “observation that in most settings a few at-risk individuals follow uncommon, beneficial practices and consequently experience better outcomes than their neighbours who share similar risks” (p. 4) According to the authors, these practices are likely to produce a sustainable outcome. The term positive deviance was used in the context of this

study to explain the extraordinary positive outcomes, processes, and attributes of people in schools.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Like any other study, there are limitations to be considered, as this study is considered (Simon & Goes, 2013). The following limitations applied to this study;

The concept of positive teacher-leadership is new in educational research. Literature in the area is limited, and this was a significant impediment to the research. After a thorough search of the literature on positive teacher leadership, only one article by Cherkowski (2018) was found. There was no definitional reference point to either compare or guide this study; so, the stipulative definition above was used.

The finding in this study is limited in terms of generalization. The case under study is unique to a specific school and subject; thus, findings cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, I desire that the findings become visible to teachers and policymakers so that it may influence policy-making and expose some positive teacher leadership practices for others to copy where necessary. Willis (2014) stated that criticism of generalizability is of no significance when the intention is one of particularization.

A third limitation has much to do with self-reporting biases. Generally, data acquired from qualitative research cannot be independently verified, and biases may emerge in the form of selective memory (Morse et al., 2002). For example, there were moments where I was so engaged that I failed to write down my experiences and may have failed to recall some elements, ideations or observations. In other words, important details or valuable information and findings may have been lost.

## **Delimitations**

Delimitation is an essential component of a research study. The delimitation of a study “are those characteristics that arise from limitation in the scope of the study and by the conscious exclusionary and inclusionary decision made during the development of the study plan” (Simon, & Goes, 2013, p. 4). Delimitations have to do with specific choices made by the researcher, and the reason for these choices. It is important to note that the delimitations of this study were within the control of the researcher. The following were delimitation of this study.

The study sought to contribute to a description of practices and conceptualizations of positive teacher leadership in schools. The study investigated ideations, dynamics and practices of positive leadership demonstrated by the teacher in the specific case study: observed and triangulated with teacher perceptions, perceptions of staff members, principal and observer (researcher). The study was delimited to the choice of looking at positive school leadership from an angle of the teacher to expose and bring to light some of the creative and innovative leadership initiative driven by teachers.

Although some of the observations were carried out in the classroom, the attention was placed on the teacher and not the students. The students were observed occasionally in order to better understand the practices of the teacher leader, but these observations were incidental to the focus of the study. The study focused on the positive leadership of the teacher and not the students.

The study designed was purposefully a case study. The decision to consider a single case of a positive teacher-leader was an attempt to exploit the concept in-depth but on a smaller scale, and by doing so to establish a working definition and a framework. Further research into the concept is required from a broader perspective.

Although chapter two of the study explored other leadership approaches and understandings, the study was delimited to work within the framework of positive teacher's leadership. The study undertook a positive and appreciative approach to teacher-leadership.

The study was delimited to a High School called Gateway High School (pseudonym) located in mid-west Canada. The focused was on a high school teacher called John (pseudonym). The data collection period, which lasted for a month, was done through observation, interviews and focus group discussion.

### **Assumptions**

In this study, the following assumptions were made:

- I assumed the participants—John (teacher), staff members (mainly educational assistants) and the principal, honestly answered the interview and focus group questions. I also assumed that the staff members did not hold back or overstate any information or insights pertaining to their experiences.
- I assumed that the case study design and data collection methods selected to address the research questions were most suitable for this study.
- I assumed that the findings from the study had provided a point of reference from which the concept of positive teacher leadership can be exploited further.

### **Thesis Structure**

This thesis consists of four further chapters. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature associated with the study topic. The literature reviewed introduces the different school leadership approaches and presents positive organizational concepts—since the study investigates teacher-leadership from a positive lens. The chapter also considered Cameron's positive leadership model. The chapter generated a conceptualization by combining school leadership and positive organizational scholarship into what is considered "positive teacher leadership." Chapter three briefly discusses the rationale for the choice of a qualitative case

study approach and the methods that guided the research. Introduction of the participant, data collection methods, as well as the analysis procedures, are summarized in chapter three. This chapter concludes with a discussion on the trustworthiness, and the ethical considerations entailed in this study. Chapter four presents the findings that emerged through observations, interviews and focus group discussions. The observation section is aligned with Cameron's (2012) view of positive leadership. The interviews questions were designed capture John's leadership style and his relationship with the rest of the staff. The focus group discussion consisted of the twelve staff (educational assistants). Questions in the focus group were designed to better John's (teacher-leader) leadership strategies and their impact from the perspective the staff. Chapter five summarizes the findings and provides a framework to understand better, define and describe positive teacher-leadership which contributes to answering the two research questions posed for this study. The chapter highlighted theoretical, practical, and future research implications of the study.

### **Chapter One Summary**

Chapter one outlined the research purpose, problem statement, research questions, and the significance of the study. The background section identified an anticipated paradigm shift in school leadership from a one-person leader (principal) model to a more contemporary model of instructional leadership (teacher-mediated), based on shared leadership, empowerment and sustainability.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter is built on literature relevant to the concept of positive teacher leadership (PTL). Leadership is an area that has been widely researched. A simple google search on leadership showed an overwhelming number of items under those words “positive leadership” “teacher leadership,” and “school leadership.” Despite these results on derivations of leadership, the combination “positive-teacher-leadership” was relatively unknown. This means that the capacity to review and compare the different research in this area was limited. After combing through different educational Journals and websites in search of scholarly literature, I found just a single article written on positive teacher leadership by Sabre Cherkowski (2018), a professor at the University of British Columbia, Canada. He is the sole researcher who recently began exploring the concept. In his article titled; *Positive Teacher Leadership: Building Mindsets and Capacities to Grow Wellbeing*, Cherkowski (2018), conceptualized positive teacher leadership based on its potentials for school improvement, wellbeing for self and other.

This chapter provides a framework for understanding positive teacher leadership by drawing from related concepts and theories. The chapter begins with an overview of the different leadership approaches and style in schools, then briefly examines positive psychology, positive organizational scholarship and positive deviant. The study also draws from existing literature on positive school and teacher-leadership. The chapter ended in a conceptual framework and chapter summary.

## **Leadership Approaches and Styles in Schools**

There appears to be a consensus amongst scholars and researcher with respect to the significant role that leadership plays in securing and sustaining school improvement (Harris, 2004). In part, the debate has focused on the type of leadership style that can transform student learning (Harris 2013). There is literature on leadership styles, but this study has examined the most commonly associated with schools.

### **Transformational Teacher-Leadership.**

Most researchers recognize that the relations between principals and teachers, and the impact of their collaboration, is important to ensure the delivery of high-quality teaching geared towards good students' performance. Two leadership approaches, transformational and instructional leadership, take center stage for most scholars. A study conducted by Marks and Printy (2003), with a selected elementary, middle and high schools, disclosed results that showed that transformational leadership was necessary, but that was an insufficient condition for instructional leadership. However, a reasonable achievement was realized when transformational and shared instructional leadership co-existed in an integrated form of leadership. Cemaloğlu et al. (2012) defined transformational leadership as “finding the current energy in followers by creating an interactive environment in the school and mobilizing this energy in the direction of school objectives” (p. 54). Credit was given to the transformational leaders for motivating their followers to realize the goals of the institution through inspirational motivation and individualized consideration. Transformational leadership has the potential to provide intellectual direction with the goal of stimulating innovation within the school through the empowerment and support of teachers as partners in the decision-making process. This type of shared leadership has been seen to involve the active collaboration of principals and teachers on a variety of areas such as curriculum, instruction and assessment (Marks & Printy, 2003).

There has been a wealth of research on the effect of school leadership on student outcome over the last decades with a significant number of researchers making a direct connection between school leadership and student outcome (Elmore, 2000; Marks & Printy 2003). This correlation was clear in Chin's (2007) study where findings seemed to suggest that there was a direct positive effect of transformational leadership on student outcomes, as well as on teacher job satisfaction and school effectiveness. Another interesting study carried out by Jung and Avolio (2000) showed both direct and indirect effects of transformational leadership style on the follower's performance. The result showed that transformational leadership was mediated through value congruence in terms of its impact on performance. This finding is in line with the emphasis placed on the need to build consensus around core values suggested by scholars, who have carried out studies on transformational leadership processes. Podsako et al. (1990) are amongst prominent scholars who have shown the importance of followers' values being congruent with those of their leader's, in terms of mediating the impact of transactional and transformational leadership on performance.

Finally, Jung and Avolio (2000) suggested that transformational leadership style had a strong positive effect on performance quality and a strong negative effect on performance quantity. Transformational leadership is known to have a direct influence on teachers' perceptions of school, teacher and program, and instruction outcomes (Silins, 1994).

### **Instructional Teacher Leadership**

Developed in the 1980s, instructional leadership has treated school principals as the primary source of educational knowledge and experience in schools. Bush and Glover (2003) pointed to the attention of leaders on the growth of student's actions that concentrated on teaching and learning as the core ingredients of instructional leadership. Generally, the leadership style was aimed at student learning, growth and resource mobilization towards the achievement of goals. Leithwood (1994) cast doubt on the adequacy of the instructional

leadership style on the basis that it is mostly focused on classroom activities. Nevertheless, instructional leadership was considered to be important because of the particular attention it had placed on school activities, teaching and learning. On the other hand, the orientation of instructional leadership has been viewed to be too hierarchical (Bush & Glover, 2003), thus limiting school democracy and drawing much criticism.

The most frequently used conceptualization of instructional leadership style was proposed by Hallinger, (2000). This was a model made up of three dimensions of the instructional leadership construct. The first dimension emphasized the need for a school to have a clearly defined goal and mission. The principal's responsibility was to work with the staff to outline measurable goal geared towards students' academic progress. The second dimension dealt with the management of the instructional programs, coordination and control of the curriculum. This dimension is made up of three functions: coordinating the curriculum, supervising and evaluating instruction, and monitoring student progress. In a bigger school, the duty of leading instructional program did not entirely rest on the shoulders of the principal. It was a shared responsibility. The third dimension in the model promoted a positive learning climate. The functions associated with this dimension included promoting professional development, protecting instructional time, maintaining high visibility and providing incentives for teachers and learning. It was the responsibility of the instructional leadership to create a climate that supported teaching and learning and to align the school's standards and practices with its mission (Hallinger, 2003).

Although Transformational leadership has been considered a prerequisite for shared instructional leadership, scholars appear to insist that this relationship can only develop if it is intentionally fostered (Marks, & Printy, 2003). These findings support the observation made by Hallinger and Leithwood (1998) that transformational leadership does not imply that it is the same as instructional leadership.

## **Transactional Teacher-Leadership**

With the transactional leadership, the employees are motivated to work with the help of external motivators such as rewards (Cemaloğlu, Sezgin & Kiliç 2012). Give and take is the characteristic of transactional leadership – it is modelled from a business transaction. A potential drawback is that transactional leaders do not prioritize the personal development of people. Transactional leadership in the school is based on the reciprocal exchange of reward and duty between the teachers and principal that are controlled by the principal (Sahin, 2004). In this leadership, the human, financial and technological resources are administered, and the workers' needs are covered. Nevertheless, Sahin (2004), acknowledged the existence of a relationship between transactional leadership and the educational development dimension of the school culture, although to a lesser depth.

Transactional leadership has shown a direct influence on student outcomes. This leadership practice assists teachers in achieving the desired outcomes including the enhancement of teacher's motivation and confidence (Silins, 1994). Nevertheless, the influence of such practice is on the students' desired outcome and not necessarily on the teacher outcome. Silins (1994) claimed that transactional leadership style might provide the crucial bureaucratic links between transformational leadership and improved school outcomes. In that case, it was suggested that behaviours that mediated transformational leadership needed to be studied carefully. Transactional behaviours turn out to be a more effective mediator for the effects of transformational leadership on student outcomes and cannot be shunned in the quest to understand effective leadership for school reform.

## **Servant Leadership**

At first glance, the words 'servant' and 'leader' seems to be opposed to each other. In the modern era, it was Robert Greenleaf, who first combined these two constructs into what is commonly referred to as a "servant leader." Studies and discourse on servant leadership

shifted the focus from attention on a leader-centric approach to give attention to the people who are being first served, then led. The leader does not seek self-gratification and their interests but rather steps back and supports the interests of the followers. As indicated, the leader is first a servant (Greenleaf, 2002). Guidance, empowerment and a culture of trust are among the unique characteristics of this style of leadership. In his article, entitled *Character and Servant Leadership*, Spears (2010) identified ten characteristics of an effective servant leader. These characteristics include listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people and community building.

Along with other articulations, servant leadership represents a shift from the hierarchical system of leadership that has dominated our educational institutions and programs. Finding from a study carried out by Cerit, (2010) on the ‘effect of servant leadership on teachers’ school commitment revealed three main predictors of teacher’s commitment: valuing people, people development and displaying authenticity. The result of the study showed a positive correlation between servant leadership and organizational commitment. The author also pointed out the similarity that existed in organizational commitment between transformational leadership and servant leadership.

It was argued that servant and transformational leadership are the same theory because both theories are people-oriented, both are in the business of listening and empowering followers, emphasize the need to value people (Tate, 2003). However, servant leadership and transformational leadership have different characteristics; the main difference is the focus (or not) on the leader. Although both leadership approaches focus on the follower, the main focus of the servant leader is service to their follower (Cerit, 2010); while a transformational leadership focused on the accomplishment of the organizational

objectives. Relations with followers was only secondary, and a means to achieve the organizational objectives (Gregory et al., 2004).

### **Distributed Leadership**

Distributed leadership was first introduced in the 1950s. The concept has gained a lot of recognition in the last decade (Harris 2003; Crawford, 2012). The concept of distributed leadership has been popularly used in the field of health care and education. A distributed leadership approach has been credited by policymakers as one of the best leadership frameworks for both student outcomes and school improvement (Wan, Law, & Chan, 2018). Harris (2003) described the distributed leadership theory as a framework for understanding the concept of teacher leadership. She provided three main reasons to substantiate this claim. Firstly, distributed leadership incorporates the different activities and practices of members in the school whose duty is to provide guidance and mobilize the staff towards instructional change. Secondly, distributed leadership is seen as a social distribution in which leadership roles in the school is distributed amongst individuals who accomplish giving tasks by interacting with each other. Lastly, distributed leadership implies the interdependency of members rather than dependency. Harris has also warned that “if we are serious about building professional learning communities within and between schools then we need such a leadership style that support and nourish meaningful collaboration among teachers” (p. 322).

### **Positive Organizational Concepts**

This section considers positive organizational concepts relevant to the study and draws from positive psychology, appreciative inquiry, positive organizational scholarship, and positive deviance concepts; all of which are covered in this section. These concepts are similar as they draw from a positive perspective such as emphasize strengths, rather than the all too common downward drift toward negativity and trying to fix weaknesses (Luthans, 2002).

## **Positive Psychology**

One of the main pillars of positive leadership approach is positive psychology. Cameron (2012), refers to positive leadership as the “application of positive principles arising from the newly emerging field of positive organizations scholarship, positive psychology and positive change” (p. 1). Over the years, researchers have focused on the negative phenomenon in the workplace, thereby ignoring the positives. The reason for this neglect could be attributed to the lack of reliable and valid measurement devices. According to Baumeister et al. (2001), negative events carried more impact on people than positive, and positivity was associated with uncritical science. Positive psychology focuses on positive attributes and on what is right, rather than what is wrong with people. Gable and Haidt (2005) described positive psychology as “the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions” (p. 104). Sheldon and King (2001) aligned positive psychology with the objectives of this study, as they saw positive psychology as “nothing more than the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues,” one that “revisits the average person” with interest in finding out what works, what is right, and what is improving” (p. 216).

The term positive psychology does not imply that the rest of psychology is negative, as some have thought. Rather, positive psychology developed from the recognition of an imbalance in clinical psychology where the focus was on mental illness (Regina, 2015). Because so much research emphasis was placed on the negative, the positive side of psychology had been left unattended for decades. The focus on positive psychology does not imply the dismissal of distress or negative aspects of life; neither is it an effort to see them through rose-coloured glasses. The proponents of positive psychology are fully conscious of institutional dysfunctions, human suffering, and selfishness. However, the aim has been to shift the focus to the other side of the coin — looking at positive feelings, functional aspects

in institutions and on those things that work. In doing so, Positive psychologist seeks to address human experience in a holistic manner (Gable & Haidt, 2005). This sub-discipline of psychology is known to rest on three main pillars: positive experiences (which includes inspiration, happiness, love and joy) positive traits (like compassion, gratitude, forgiveness and trust), and positive institutions (such as democracy, good institutions and healthy families).

### **Appreciative Inquiry (AI)**

My approach to this case study was based on the appreciative inquiry paradigm, which involves the use of a positive and transformative approach to change. AI is considered to be a useful tool for leaders, educators and researchers because its foundation is founded on a social constructionist philosophy which aligns with contemporary leadership and learning theories (Priest et al., 2013). As indicated, rather than focusing on what is wrong, the AI approach requires researchers to ask affirming questions and encourage participants to focus on what works (Cram, 2010). In the words of Hall and Hammond (1998), “AI is a way of thinking, seeing and acting for powerful, purposeful change in an organization” (p. 1). The author further mentioned two underlying assumptions of AI: there is always something that works in every society, organization or group, and what we focus on becomes our reality. The process of inquiry that best defines AI practice is that the approach involves the collection of stories from participants about their best experiences (Bushe & Kassam 2005).

Whitney and Cooperrider (2011), in their book titled *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change*, made a comparison between problem-solving and appreciative inquiry processes and concluded that a positive change is likely to take place in organizations which employ AI as opposed to problem-solving. The authors defined positive change as “any form of organizational change, re-design, or planning that begins with a comprehensive inquiry, analysis and dialogue of an organization’s “positive core,” involving multiple stakeholders,

and then links this knowledge to the organization's strategic change agenda and priorities" (p. 278).

Cooperrider and Srivastava (1987) outlined five principles of Appreciative Inquiry that are considered central to AI's theory-based of change (Fitzgerald et al., 2001). Their principles included: the constructionist principle, simultaneity principle, poetic principle, anticipatory principle and positive principle. These principles emerged from different theories such as social constructionist, image and grounded theory. From social constructionism emerged the narrative that social reality is constructed and maintained through language and communication (Gergen, 1985). From the image, a theory emerged the idea that images inform people's decision of the future (Beach & Mitchell, 1987). Then from the grounded theory emerged the notion that people hold the key to the understanding and interpretation of their cultural reality (Cram, 2010).

### **Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS)**

Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) emerged from researcher concerns that an array of organizational phenomena was being ignored and terms such as "flourishing" or "positive deviance" were not being used to describe outcomes (Regina, 2015 p. 22). Cameron and Caza (2004) described "POS as a new movement in organizational studies that focuses on the dynamics leading to the development of human strength, producing resilience and restoration, fostering vitality, and cultivating extraordinary individual and organizational performance" (p. 3). POS, like positive psychology, deals with both positive and negative phenomenon but places more focus on uncovering what is affirming. POS is concerned with the positive dynamics that lead to positive effects like an exceptional individual and organizational performance (Cameron & Caza, 2004). Bright et al. (2011) stated:

The term positive in this framework refers to three elements. First, it is positive deviance, meaning that this movement is interested in explaining extraordinary

positive outcomes, processes, and attributes of organizations that produce them.

Second, it has an affirmative orientation, meaning that the focus is on understanding strengths, flourishing relationships, positive human potential, and other desirable outcomes. Third, it is concerned with virtuousness and elevating processes such as doing good in addition to doing well. (p. 232)

Dutton et al. (2008), identified three core of POS perspective: a concern for flourishing, a focus on strength development and an emphasis on the dynamics of organizing. First, POS is focused on conditions that foster flourishing at both the individual and workgroup levels in an organization. Although positive psychology is concerned with flourishing (Gable & Haidt, 2005), a “POS perspective focuses on these states and processes as they unfold in and between organizations” (Dutton et al., 2008 p. 1). Flourishing for the individual as a member of an organization may be indicated by growth, resilience, thriving or generativity while for the collectives, it may be indicated by innovation, creativity, growth and resilience. POS focuses on individual strengths development and expression of strengths at multiple levels to understand the sources of excellence or positive deviance performances (Dutton et al., 2008). Cameron and Caza (2004) argued that “the main focus of POS is toward positive deviance; therefore, in that, it investigates extraordinary positive outcomes and the processes that produce them” (p. 4).

### **Positive Deviance**

Positive deviance is a central notion to the POS movement (Cameron, & Dutton 2003). Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2004) argued that by “narrowly conceptualizing deviance as a negative set of behaviours, scholars, unfortunately, overlook how organizations and their members partake in positive behaviours” (p. 829). Galperin (2002) argued that positive deviant behaviours might comprise unusual behaviours that organizations do not endorse, but which helps them to achieve their goals. Thus, positive deviant is likely to be associated with

innovations, noncompliance with dysfunctional directives, and critique of incompetent authorities. Further, Pascale et al. (2010) used the famous adage ‘the faraway stick does not kill a snake’ to demonstrate that positive deviants are everywhere around us but are invisible to plain sight. These are people who thrive among their struggling peers. Using the same amount of resources, and under the same conditions, they thrive over others.

Cameron, (2012), in his book entitled *Positive Leadership: Strategies for Extraordinary Performance*, made a connection between positive deviance and flourishing institutions. He claimed that the way leaders respond to positive deviance tends to foster affirmative orientation in an organization. Cameron used positive leader and positive deviance almost synonymously, claiming that the best way to identify positive leadership was first noticing positive deviance. At a later stage in his work, he proposed a model of leadership strategies for positive deviance. Although there are many enablers of positive deviance performance, this model considers only four of the most important. These strategies include enabling a positive climate (fostering compassion, forgiveness and gratitude), enabling positive relationships (networking and strength reinforcement), encouraging positive communication (using supportive communication, obtain best self-feedback) and enable positive meaning (impacting human well-being highlight the extended impact and build

community)

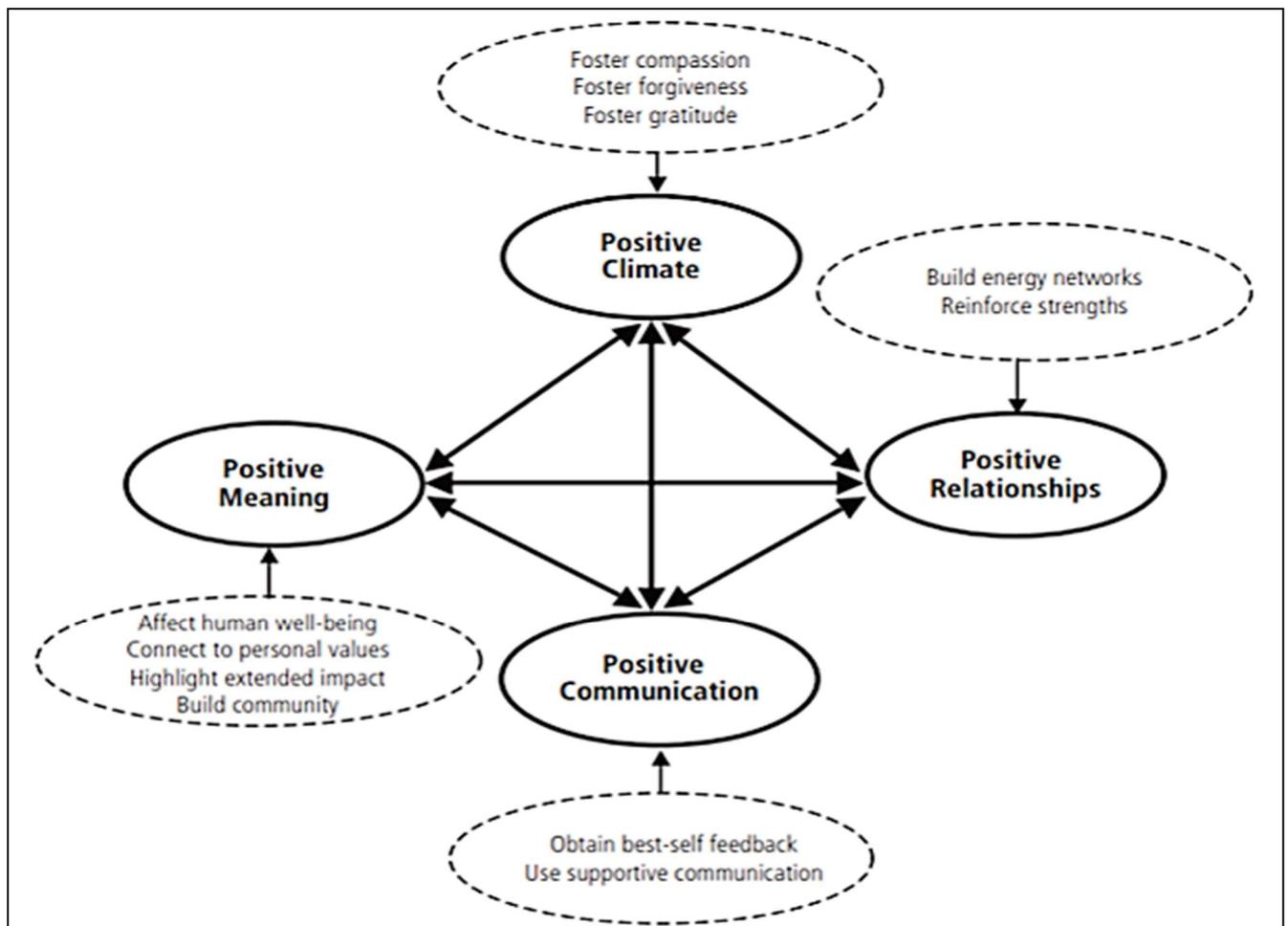


Figure 2.1. Leadership Strategies for Positive Deviance (Cameron, 2012, p. 14)

### **Enabling a Positive Climate.**

Positive climate refers to the “condition’s in which positive emotions predominate over negative emotion in the work environment” (Cameron, 2012, p. 17). In such an environment, there is a significant effort made to foster compassion, forgiveness and gratitude. The expression “is the cup half full or half empty” has many interpretations to it, one of which is used to determine a person’s outlook. A person with an optimistic view considers the glass half full while a pessimist considers the glass half empty. It depends on how a person chose to see things. In a study, Fredrickson (2001) concluded that the capacity to experience positive emotions might be a fundamental human strength that is central to the

study of human flourishing. Cameron (2012) added that “experiencing positive emotions broadens people’s momentary thoughts-actions repertoires and build their” (p.18).

Enabling positive emotions can foster a positive climate that, in turn, leads to optimal functioning and enhanced organizational performance. A positive environment has also been found to enhance, productivity, decision-making, social integration and creativity (Cameron, 2012). Positive leadership is essential to the development of positive organizations that focus on strengths-based approaches (Malinga, Stander & Nell 2019). Cameron (2012) stated that “positive leaders are unusual in that they choose to emphasis the uplifting and flourishing side of organizational life, even in the face of difficulties. In the absence of such an emphasis, negative inclination overwhelms the positive and the negative is the default option” (p. 21). Thus, a deliberate strategy and intervention are needed to enable a positive climate in an organization.

### **Enabling Positive Relationships**

Positive relationships refer to “those that are a generative source of enrichment, vitality, and learning for both individual and organization” (Dutton & Ragins, 2007, cited in Cameron 2012 p. 35). A positive relationship is seen to be an essential component in creating and fostering a positive climate. Fostering positive relationships is most concerned with leaders modelling of positive energy and on encouraging positive relationships in the workplace (Regina, 2015). Cameron (2012) identified positive energy network and strength reinforcement as the two most important activities that have emerged from the search of positively deviant performance.

Positive interactions at the workplace have been shown to improve physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being of employees (Cross et al., 2012), These energizing interactions are also known to increase organizational commitment and innovation and are a crucial determinant of high performers. In the view of Cross et al. (2012), the motivation

needed by employees lies not individual rewards but in relationships. Positive energizers uplift, boost and bring out the best in others. Cameron (2012) claimed that interacting with positive energizers can lead to optimistic, heedful trustworthy and inspiring feelings while negative energizers, on the other hand, drain good feeling and enthusiasm of others. Cameron (2012) added that “leaders affect interpersonal relationships in their organizations by fascinating positive energy—both by modelling positive energy themselves and by diagnosing and building positive-energy networks among others” (p. 44).

The other activity that emerges from the search for positive deviant performance is the promotion of positive relationships based on individual and organizations strengths. It is more beneficial to identify and build peoples strengths rather than focusing on their weakness (Cameron 2012). When discussing strengths, it is essential that we get a clear definition of what it is. Linley et al. (2009) described “strength as a preexisting capacity for a particular way of behaving, thinking, or feeling that is authentic and energizing to the user, and enables optimal functioning, development and performance” (p. 39). Organizations that recognized and promoted workers strengths were one-and-a-half times more likely to see a rise in productivity than typical organizations (Clifton & Harter, 2003, as cited in Cameron, 2012). The authors suggested that this increase in productivity could be a result of how people learned. In their assertion, people are likely to learn better from a positive demonstration than a negative demonstration. In a nutshell, “leaders who enable positive deviance, therefore emphasizes successes, build on strengths and celebrate positive much more than spending time correcting the negative” (Cameron, 2012, p. 47).

### **Encouraging Positive Communication**

Positive relationships are composed of several components, most of which are generated and enhanced through positive communication (Regina, 2015). Positive communication strategy is fundamental to the strategies of fostering positive climate and

positive relationships mentioned above. In the words of Cameron (2012), positive communication occurs in organizations when negative and critical language is substituted for a more affirmative and supportive language. Cameron identified two strategies leaders could use in facilitating positive communication in the organizations: by using supportive communication and the reflected best self-feedback process. The reflected best-self feedback process is based on the effect of positive feedback on individual enhancement (Cameron, 2012). Belschak and Den Hartog (2009) stated that the effect of feedback elicits both cognitive-emotional reactions. The available literature on emotions suggests that providing positive feedback can lead to positive emotions, such as happiness and pride.

On the other hand, negative feedback can result in negative emotions, such as guilt and disappointment. Cameron (2012) added that to “provide feedback on weakness and deficiencies usually leads only to the development of competence whereas a focus on strength can contribute to excellent and positive deviant performance” (p.59). Supportive communication is another way leader enable positive deviance through their feedback, mostly when a corrective or negative message must be made (Cameron 2012). A statistical analysis conducted on two groups of employees by Waldersee and Luthans (1994), on the effect of positive and constructive feedback, improved significantly as compared to the group who receive corrective. Supportive communication can come in the form of a supportive message of interaction. Burlinson (2009) described supportive messages as “specific lines of communicative behavior enacted by one party with the intent of benefiting or helping another” (p. 23). The author added that several aspects of the supportive message are influenced by the outcomes of supportive interactions, including the proverbial features of the message, and nonverbal features of the message, verbal content of the message, non-content features of the verbal message.

## **Enable Positive Meaning**

This strategy of enabling positive meaning aims to foster and provide meaning to those in the workplace. Cohen-Meitar et al. (2009) suggested that an individual's identity is defined mainly by his/her sense of belonging to particular social groups. Therefore, drawing from this assertion, meaningfulness is created by integrating personal identity with membership. The authors added that meaningfulness is not limited to where a person belongs but also what s/he is doing. Regina, (2015) pointed out that a high level of meaningfulness in work was shown to be correlated with positive outcomes, extraordinary individual and organizational development. Cameron (2012) highlighted four attributes in which work becomes meaningful: (i) work is meaningful when it positively affects people well-being, (ii) when the work is associated with personal values or important virtue (iii) when the work has a long-term benefit or creates a ripple effect (iv) when the work fosters supportive relationships and instill a sense of community in employees. Regina claimed that work has a positive meaning if employees benefit from at least one of the highlighted attributes. He concluded by saying, "leaders that enable meaningfulness in work are interested in highlighting the value associated with the organization's outcomes, which extend beyond the personal benefits of individual employees" (p. 79).

## **Positive School Leadership**

A study carried out to by Kirby et al. (1992) to determine a leader's characteristics, and behaviour associated with extraordinary performance in schools revealed that educators associated a leader's effectiveness to their intellectual stimulation and charisma. The study also found that leaders who demonstrated commitments by making extra effort to meet goals and modelling expected behaviour and attitudes were viewed more as positive leaders than their counterpart who never demonstrated such attitude. Based on these findings, a positive leader is one that "places collective need over short-term personal gratification" (Wang et al.,

2005, p. 422 as cited in Louse & Murphy 2018). Louis and Murphy (2018) identified relationship building as an essential component of positive school leadership, thus encouraging leaders to foster positive behaviours such as trust, community involvement, caring and listening skills. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) stated that behind any prosperous and flourishing school is excellent leadership and vice versa. This argument was rooted in the claim that positive leaders play a significant role in the delivery of high-quality education. There is significant evidence of the positive effect school leadership has on student learning (Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010). Leithwood and Riehl (2005) identified four categories of successful and positive school leadership practices. These categories included: developing people, setting directions, managing the instructional program and restructuring the organization.

Being a positive leader requires one to have an ethical perception and standard in school (Kocabaş, & Karakouml, 2009). School leaders must uphold high ethical standards. Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) outlined three pillars upon which the ethics of leadership rests; these included (i) the leader's moral traits, (ii) the morality of the processes of social, ethical choice and action that both leaders and followers collectively pursue, and (iii) the ethical legitimacy of the values found in the leaders' articulation, vision, and programs. Trevino et al. (2000), added two further pillars on which the reputation of ethical leadership rested, in their view: the perception of the leader as a moral person and as a moral manager. In other words, Trevino et al. (2000) believed that positive leaders must first possess some degree of morality as individuals then, as a leader in an organization. This equation has been echoed by many researchers citing morality as a virtue needed to build positive leadership reputation (Zhu et al., 2015).

In this postmodern and multicultural world, the questions of values and virtue are paramount since schooling is fundamentally a process of morals as well as intellectual

development (Louis & Murphy, 2018; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Developing moral and virtue in schools have been embraced since time immemorial, with the goal of supporting the students to understand truth, beauty and goodness. Incorporating values and morals in school curricula is essential in developing students' decision-making ability based on ethics (Althof & Berkowitz 2006). The task to incorporate these virtues in schools requires leadership, which is positive, moral, relational oriented and possess spiritual stewardship. No wonder school leadership is said to be a moral and ethical task (Louis & Murphy 2018).

Using the available literature on positive school leadership, Louise Seashore Lewis and Murphy (2018) were able, to sum up, positive school leadership into four core dimensions, believed to be the pillars on which positive school leadership rest: positive orientation, moral orientation, relational orientation, and spiritual stewardship orientation. These pillars are now examined, in turn.

### **Positive Orientation**

Positive orientation has a significant role to play on both student and institutional development. Louis and Murphy (2018) made it clear that “positive school leadership starts not by looking for the individual and group who are to blame for disappointment but by considering whether there are broader causes that creates an unacceptable outcome” (p. 19). In making this statement, the authors argued that more benefits come from focusing on positive things that are working in the school as opposed to the negatives. The idea of focusing on positives, rather than negatives in people and organizations, is a relatively new concept which emerged from positive psychology (Gable & Haidt 2005). Research into the effect of implementing positive psychology in the workplace has recorded several benefits, including increased happiness, decreased depression, work efficiency, job satisfaction and motivation (Seligman et al., 2005). To ensure school flourishing, Louis and Murphy implore school leaders to have a positive oriented approach towards the school community.

## **Moral Orientation**

This dimension is centred on the virtue and moral compass that makes up a positive leader. Today's organizations are increasingly in need of leaders with good virtues and moral imagination. Louse and Murphy (2018) believed that a positive leader could only achieve the goals of individual and organizational through the practice of civic virtues and moral. There is more to moral leadership than the eyes can see. Greenfield (1999) added that “moral leadership is not mere preaching, or the uttering of pieties, or the insistence on social conformity. Moral leadership emerges from, and always returns to, the fundamental wants and needs, aspirations, and values of the followers” (p. 3).

## **Relational Orientation**

This dimension, from Seashore Lewis and Murphy, emphasized relationship building as an essential part of positive leadership. Trust has come up repeatedly in the literature on relationship building (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018). The issue of trust cannot be ignored in the process of school improvement. It is necessary that leaders make an effort to build a trustworthy relationship with their follower, but also, they must be worthy of trust (Marshall 2000; Louis & Murphy 2018).

## **Spiritual Stewardship Orientation**

It is widely believed that a positive leader is one who provides a moral compass regarding the lives of their followers (Thompson, 2004). Morality and spirituality have become an issue today. Louis and Murphy (2018) stated that “if the term ‘moral’ makes contemporary educational leaders a bit nervous, the idea of spiritual value induces acute anxiety” (p. 20). The authors defended spirituality from the perspective of Fairholm (1996), who presented spirituality, “as not just a religion, but a relationship with something intangible beyond self. It is a source of guidance for personal values and meaning, a way of understanding self and the world as a means of personal and group integration” (p. 25).

Spiritual Stewardship Orientation focuses on the spiritual growth of an individual and everyone in the organization. The whole process is intertwined and can shift to higher levels of controlling human growth, treating others with respect and dignity.

Positive leadership is a concept that emerged from the field of positive psychology, positive organizational scholarship and positive change (Cameron, 2012; Gable & Haidt, 2005). In the words of Cameron, an environment of negativity can directly impact employee output. There is a need to shift from a negative to a positive approach if we must energize and inspire the workforce (Tombaugh, 2005; Seligman et al., 2005). Cameron (2012) defined positive leadership as an “emphasis on what elevates individuals and organization, what does right in organizations, what is life-giving, what is experienced as good, what is extraordinary and what is inspiring” (p. 3). In sum, positive leadership aims to promote and improve outcome such as interpersonal flourishing, positive emotions, virtuous behaviour, work success, and energizing networks. Positive leaders are sometimes considered as positive deviance because of their unique approach and strategies to problem-solving.

In a recent study, Zbierowski and Góra (2014) refuted the old claim that age and work experience have a fateful impact on leadership flourishing, subjective happiness and life satisfaction. Instead, the authors noticed a strong correlation between positive leadership and outcome of positive managerial practices such as life satisfaction, subjective happiness and flourishing. Positive leaders are capable of achieving all these because where others see risk and threads; they see an opportunity, which sometimes allows them to be the first to react, giving them an achieving advantage over others. The study concluded that leadership has a significant influence on followers, organization and leaders themselves (Dees, 2017).

## **Principles of Positive School Leadership**

This section examines and discusses the nine principles of positive leadership, identified by Louis and Murphy (2018), in their book *Positive School Leadership: Building Capacity and Strengthening Relationships*. The primary rationale for the development of these principles was to assist educational leaders to create an enabling environment and school culture that will instill in the student morals and a collective spirit to face life challenges.

### **The Principles of Asset-Based Approaches**

The principle of asset-based approaches, of positive leadership, is one that rally and instills confidence, optimism and support to both individuals and group performance. This principle focuses its attention on assets that stakeholders bring to the school. The effort of leadership in developing these assets is significant to school improvement. Recent approaches to school improvement often focus more on the problems that need solving or deficits in skills rather than designing new futures that are in line with the morals and values that drew most educators to their profession. Therefore, the positive school leader one who focuses on and explores the strengths of people (Dutton, Glynn & Spreitzer, 2008), rather than focusing on their weaknesses or shortcomings.

### **A Value-Centered Approach**

Greater emphasis is placed on value as a guiding principle for positive school leadership. Value, according to Louse and Murphy (2018), was the one thing that distinguished authentic leaders from those simply craving for position and power. As Fry (2003) conveyed, leaders must understand the core values of their followers and get in touch with these values. Podsako et al. (1990) stressed the importance of followers' values being congruent with that of their leader's and vice versa. Values reverberate in a school context through personal relationships developed by positive school leaders. This vital principle in

school leadership has to do with integrity, honesty and humility of the leader. All the values typically deemed to be essential to education cannot be easily listed because there is no commonly agreed terminology or expressions. Nevertheless, when members see their leaders as value-based, they automatically consider the leader to be moral and authentic (Hanna et al., as cited in Louis & Murphy, 2018).

### **Virtue-Base Approach**

Virtues could be described as “what we see when there is consistent value-based action and behaviour and are a clear expression of underlying values” (Hachett & Wang 2012 as cited in Louse & Murphy, 2018, p. 33). There is no generally acceptable definition of virtue, but Louis and Murphy have taken virtue-based leadership to mean the traits or characteristics of a leader who is learned, maintained expressed voluntarily Leaders express virtue, continuously bringing out the best in their followers (Trevino & Brown, 2004, as cited by Louise & Murphy, 2018). In other words, when leaders act consistently in a virtuous manner, they bring out the best in others and contribute to positive school culture. Positively anchored schools then become a source of hope, forgiveness, gratitude and justice.

### **Transcendent Approach**

The meaning of transcendent here is based on the grounded origin of the word and not the religious or philosophical meaning. There are four levels in which transcendence is manifest in positive school leadership. The first level is demonstrating concern for followers or members and putting their needs first (Cardona, 2000, as cited in Louis & Murphy, 2018). Research has indicated that, in many circumstances, leaders who are not willing to put the interest of their followers first are often not successful (Ciulla, 2004). Transcendence, at the second level, is about forging a moral vision (Quinn et al., 2000, as cited in Louis & Murphy 2018). The third level of transcendence is about sacrificing one’s individual interests and vision for a more collective one. It is looking after the common interest of a community

beyond the aggregated interest of individuals (Adler et al., 2008, as cited in Louis and Murphy, 2018) and finally supporting followers to live to see past their individual goal.

### **Relationally Grounded Approach**

The relationally grounded principle places the “development of positive relationships with all the stakeholders at the center of leadership work” (Louse & Murphy, 2018, p. 30). Relationship-based leadership enhances and promotes trust, justice, and a consistent voice in which promotes a common good. Formal relationships between leaders and others have the potential to yield ethically desirable outcomes in schools such as an equitable distribution of resources, and an inclusive environment that breeds positive relationships. A relationship is at the center of leadership (Thompson et al., 2008, as cited in Louis & Murphy, 2018; Cherkowski & Walker 2018).

### **Means-Focused Approach**

The principle of means-focused “recognizes the daily tasks of school leadership as a foundation for positive transformation” (Louis & Murphy, 2018, p.30). The authors’ point is that positive leadership comes as a result of work leaders put in daily. In essence, the priority of a positive school leader is meeting the needs of others (Driscoll & McKee, 2017, as cited in Louis & Murphy, 2018) and inspiring hope (Walker, 2006). A strong and determined commitment to the professional ideal of prioritizing the needs of others (an element of all professional, ethical standards) requires that all leaders (both in the formal and informal positions) model it regularly.

### **Growth-Based Approach**

This principle “emphasizes the importance of personal growth and development for all member of the school” (Louis & Murphy, 2018, p. 30). This principle comes with an additional core idea that is not found in the previous principles. This addition core idea is grounded in the fact that positive school leaders continuously attends both to the individual

and to the collective needs of the adult school members in their quest for growth and development. In essence, a positive leader is one who supports member's growth and development by providing support and mentorship; thereby, boosting the self-confidence of their members. It is a well-documented that people with high self-esteem are more likely to grow and succeed in their careers than those with low self-esteem (Bénabou & Tirole, 2002). Growth-based leadership is much more than promoting professional learning opportunity. It also involves spiritual growth, ethical conduct and self-reflection of the staff and school members. The self-reflection of the school leader serves an example for others to self-reflect (Reave, 2005, as cited in Louis and Murphy 2018).

### **Authentic Approach**

The principle of authentic leadership “requires self-awareness, transparency, balanced consideration and self-regulated behaviour” (Louis & Murphy, 2018, p. 30). In order to ensure a flourishing school, positive school leaders need to first make changes within themselves. The change which needed to propel the school forward flourishing first starts with the individual (Gardner, 2005). This principle emphasizes that leaders be the change they would like to see in schools (Palmer & Louis, 2017, as cited in Louis & Murphy, 2018). Authentic leadership requires the leader to be true to the self. Being true to one's self can only happen when if one has a solid foundation of self-awareness.

Deci (2003), as cited in Louis and Murphy (2018), identified three dimensions of authentic leadership: (i) rational transparency; the author described this as always presenting one's authentic self; (ii) balance process; considering all perspectives before making a decision; and (iii) self-regulation which is based on an internal moral compass. Morality is one of those traits that defines an authentic leader.

## **Service-grounded Approach**

The principle of service-grounded “emphasizes stewardship functions of leadership: conserving and nurturing the humanity of all those serving and served by the school” (Louis & Murphy, 2018 p.30). A service-grounded leader is one who incorporates humane practices to the day-to-day functioning of the school, without which meaningful relationships and trust among others cannot form.

The nine principles outlined by Louse and Murphy (2018), above can help educational leaders generate a school culture that assist students and propel the school towards flourishing. Translating these principles into practice requires committed and positive leadership.

### **The Virtues of Positive School Leadership.**

Cherkowski and Walker (2018), in a recent book *Teacher’s Wellbeing*, identified three professional leadership “hosting virtues” that are at the center of flourishing schools. These virtues were compassion, hope and trust. The authors argued that these professional virtues are the necessary ingredients needed for ethical decision making, positive relationships building and hosting flourishing in schools.

### **Show of Compassion and Care.**

Cherkowski and Walker (2018) described compassion as “the mindful awareness of the interconnectedness of our lives and the impact that our action and thought have on others” (p. 84). Lilius et al. (2012) dove deeper into the impact of compassion in an organization and revealed three interpersonal processes of compassion in which leaders must be conscious of. The first stage in the process is for the leader to be aware of the ongoing suffering in the organization. When the leader is aware of the possible suffering, he/she must then show emphatic concern towards the person(s). The authors described emphatic concern as an emotional feeling that connects a person to the other(s) who are suffering. The final stage in

the process is to be passionate in responding to the suffering. A passionate response has the power to alleviate or lessen the suffering, thus making it bearable (Dutton, 2002). Showing compassion to those who are suffering can affect them in ways that are unimaginable.

A recent study by Eldor and Shoshani (2016), on the effect of compassion in school, revealed that the fundamental needs and experiences of teachers in school such as care, compassionate support and the opportunity to be heard were factors which contributed to the enhancement of positive school outcome and teacher improvement. The research also found evidence for the role compassion plays in coping with the stressful teaching conditions. This finding brings to light the significant role of compassion in the workplace, thus suggest that compassion should be taken seriously by all stakeholders. Also, Cherkowski and Walker (2018) emphasized the critical role compassion plays in hosting, building and sustaining relationships in the school milieu. Compassion is said to be a central facet of teaching. Teachers are, therefore obligated to cultivate in them a caring approach towards every student (Goldstein, & Lake, 2000).

### **Inspiring Hope.**

Hope is a much-needed hosting virtue school leaders needs to instill in the school community. Walker (2006), in an article written on *Fostering Hope*, stated that the primary goal of every school leaders should be to give hope. Researchers have found that the hope level in individuals in the workplace has a direct link on their ability to achieve goals. People with high hopes tend to achieve more and are associated with positive emotions (Marques, Lopez & Pais-Ribeiro, 2011). The importance of instilling hope in school cannot be underrated. In the words of Cherkowski and Walker (2018), “teachers are important actors in awakening hope, and other positive emotions, in themselves and in the community. As teachers purvey hope, they contribute to building with others a common desired future and this we think is at the heart of flourishing as a new school-improvement model” (p. 89).

A study carried out by Marques, et al. (2011) on the effectiveness of the hope-based intervention in a middle school suggested that such interventions can result to psychological benefits, by increasing self-esteem, life satisfaction and hope. Although the researchers failed to make a direct link between the interventions and academic achievement, the findings revealed that hope-based intervention enhanced goal-oriented thinking.

Unlike Marques et al. (2011), other research findings suggested a possible correlation between hope and academic outcome of students. For example, Snyder (2002) found that a higher hope amongst students translated to better academics outcome, physical health, psychotherapy, athletics and psychological stability. According to this author, hope is part of the human strength displayed in capacities to conceptualize goals, strategies on how to achieve the desired goal and the motivation to sustain the desired goals. Luthans and Jensen (2002) further asserted that hope is comprised of both willpower and way power. The authors refuted the old notion of looking at hope as just wishful thinking. In the same study, they took cognizance of our highly evolved societies and reminded us of the need of both the willpower and way power to navigate this complex society.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trust plays a central hosting role in school flourishing and relationship building (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018). In the words of Marshall (2000), “to trust another reflects our confidence in their character, our faith in their capacity, our reliance or even dependence on their taking care of something important to us” (p. 48). She advanced three ways in which trust can be thought: (i) trust should be thought as a life principle informed by our choices; (ii) it should be thought as a measure of our self-esteem. The author further explains that we can easily trust others when our self- esteem is high. The spirit of hope is rekindled in an environment where trust is alive; and finally, (iii) trust comes outward from within a person.

Before we can trust, we must first be trustworthy. Similarly, school leaders who make themselves trustworthy are trusted.

The conclusion drawn by Cherkowski and Walker (2018), from years of research in the area of trust in the school, “confirms the essential nature of trust in a relationship, its fragility, and the importance of restoring broken trust and remediating betrayal where this has occurred” (p. 87). In a nutshell, “trust is thus a state in which a school member is willing to make him or herself vulnerable to others and take risk with confidence that others will respond to the own action in a positive way, that is, with benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty and openness” (Forsyth et al., 2011, pp.19-20, as cited in Van Maele, 2014, p. 6). In addition to the virtues outlined above, other authors have suggested other positive school leadership virtues such as love and creative thinking.

### **Possesses Love for others**

After studying love and leadership for a long time, Cochlan, (2008) was able to combine these words in his book *love leadership: what the world needs now*, forming a new concept known as love leadership. Cochlan opines that “when leadership is accomplished with love, it is simply infinitely better than if done any other way” (p. 21). He identifies over seven attributes of love leadership style. These attributes include: Vulnerability, authenticity, courage, principle-centeredness, good beyond self, fearlessness and mentorship. The authenticity of love leadership gives the leader permission to be themselves. Leaders then become fearless and develop the courage to admit to their mistakes or shortcomings in the workplace. Being vulnerable means understanding how the limits of knowledge can be a weakness, and at the same time, how accepting our ignorance can be a strength, a concept which is known as “intellectual humility” and “intellectual maturity” (Shelley, 2018). According to Cochlan (2008), a loving leader is one who cares and put people first, look for the good in everything, have a clear faith in people and prepare to show his or her feelings.

Using a different analogy, Hoyle, (2001) described love as “a mother’s heart being melted by the hug of her child, and a handmade valentine card with the word ‘I Love You, Mom.’ Love is a university student affairs administrator relentlessly pushing her staff to organize and execute freshmen orientation week and telling them, ‘Thanks, I love each one of you for who you are’” (p. 3). In a nutshell, love is a deep caring for others (Goldstein, & Lake, 2000). The author added that a leader who leads with love uses the heart over the head. Love to him is an ingredient needed to build a high-performing and successful school. The absence of love in school, classroom and workplace, on the contrary, is partly to be blamed for the high-stress rate, teacher turnover and the increased violence we experience today. Hoyle, throughout his work, stressed the need for love in leadership constantly reminding educators that “if you cannot love, then you cannot lead (p.1).

### **Teacher-Leadership in Schools**

There exist a considerable body of literature on teacher leadership (Harris, 2003); but first, it is best to define the concept. The most common, and perhaps the most used, definition found is advanced by Katzenmeyer and Moller, (2001). They defined teacher-leadership as: “teachers leaders are those who lead within and beyond the classroom, those who identify with and contribute to a community of teacher-learners, and those who influence others towards an improved educational practice” (p. 7). Katzenmeyer and Moller suggested the following leadership roles of a teacher-leader. These roles include; (i) leadership in dealing with students and the teacher. Here, the teacher serves as a coach, trainer, mentor, master of the curriculum, and an organizer (ii) fostering partnerships and exercises decision-making. The teacher is expected to be actively involved in the school committee, create a positive relationship with parents and the community; (iii) Finally, leadership by operation task. The teacher-leader is expected to be a visionary, taking into consideration the goals of the school; he/she is expected to be organized.

The concept and practices of teacher-leadership are not new to the field of education (Harris, 2003). Although the concept gained momentum in the last two decades, some have described it as a unique form of leadership under the canopy of school leadership (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Despite its popularity, teacher-leadership is often dismissed as a mere concept or sometimes rejected because of the complexity of seeing teachers as leaders within a system of hierarchy where the principal seats at the top with well-defined roles (Harris, 2003). Therefore, the concept of shared leadership in schools represents a paradigm shift that sees teachers as having a practical understanding of their school communities (and what those communities need), as well as having intellectual capital and skills to help students learn. These assets are then considered important to involve in the school decision-making process (Nappi, 2014).

Classroom teaching is one of those school activities where leadership is most needed (Lieberman & Miller, 2005). Teachers require opportunities for active engagement in their professional learning; instead of chains of commands that dictate what they are to do and whom to follow. Lieberman and Miller acknowledged the existence of various approaches to school leadership for different audiences, and developed strategies to inspire success. The teachers are guided by their consciences to inquire into their practice and become articulate about learning, and teaching. An environment for learning is usually created when teachers can lead. In turn, this influences the school community and affects both students and teachers.

Further, Lieberman and Miller (2005) revealed that teacher leaders strive to influence more teachers and students by going public; while also making connections between classroom events and real practice. The leaders lead practical communities to promote collegiality and risk-taking through experimentation. Cultural sensitivity and other population variations are considered by these teachers while discharging their duties by

giving the right context of communication hence when they lead; they create an environment which has potential influence throughout the school community.

Like any other organizations, schools have a constant dependence on leadership throughout their operations to improve performance (Elmore, 2000). The school principals attempt to broaden the leadership capacity through sustained dialogue and decision making on educational matters; these are remained pivotal to school success. Marks and Printy (2003) pointed to the relations and collaborations between principals and teachers to enhance the quality of teaching and student performance. Their analysis was based on the transformational and instructional styles of leadership with the former providing intellectual direction while the latter involving the active collaboration of principals and teachers on curriculum, instruction and assessment. There is a collective responsibility for staff and curricular development and the supervision of instructional tasks.

A firm conviction is conveyed by Stein (2016), who pointed out the need for strong hands-on leadership from the top since the schools cannot operate by consensus. The challenge articulated was getting the right people to lead the schools in an unyielding and uncompromising way; although such a proposition might be counteracted by selecting and training institutional and instructional leaders. The author's vision of a leader was one who was a mentor, coach, motivator and team player, among other desirable qualities. He criticized the idea of having schools run by committees who are mere managers rather than *bona fide* visionaries. His major concern was directed towards effective and successful school leaders who ought to focus on the institutional missions and visions. In his definition of a real school leader, he stated that the individual should be able to develop personal relationships and to positively influence the local community, staff, students and their parents.

Liethwood and Riehl (2003), in their research on teachers' leadership, declared that for learning to be exciting, teachers must ensure a high-quality instruction method well-defined curriculum. They provide evidence of schools that perform exceptionally well, owing to a detailed portrait of leadership. The leaders of the school are observed to stimulate efforts around set goals influencing learning while supporting teachers to help students succeed. These authors identified three main categories that they deemed necessary for school leadership and in any other organization: Setting direction, developing people and developing the organization.

Finally, successful school leaders show timely responses to challenges and opportunities in the context in which they work, such as educating a diverse group of students. A practical and successful leadership is focused on teaching and learning, which are further supplemented by a balance between the managerial and the leadership roles of the principals.

Studies have shown that most teachers do not consider themselves as leaders even when they demonstrate acts of leadership. Also, another challenge that comes with the concept and practice of teacher leadership is attempting to understand how the transition is made from teacher to teacher leader. Using a visual model Hunzicker (2017), conceptualized the progression from teacher to teacher leadership by presenting the process as a gradual and a recursive one, usually lasting for months or years (see Figure 2.3).

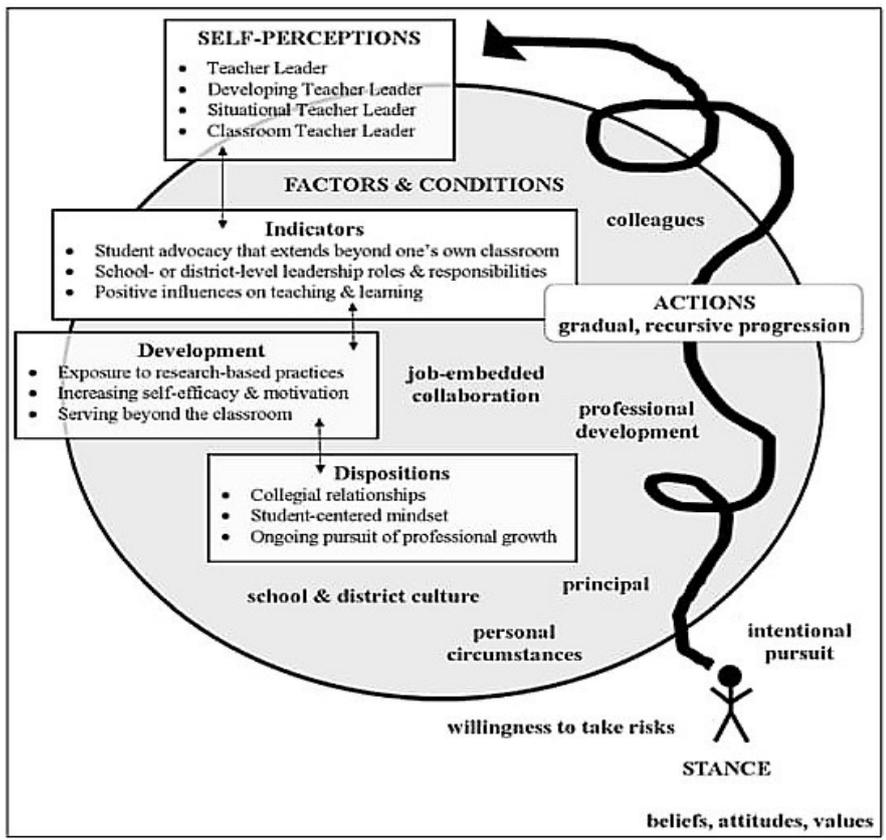


Figure 2.2 Teacher Leader Progression and Influences Model (Hunzicker, 2017 p.17)

Figure 2.2 model is an outcome of Hunzicker studies involving eight teachers' self-reported leadership experience and self-perception. The model shows a progression beginning with their stance and navigating through the factors that developed their leadership skills and self-perceptions over time. The model shows that, although each teacher consciously pursued acts of leadership such as making the students the priority, professional development, job-embedded collaboration, and initiating school-level leadership opportunities, their progress nevertheless remained gradual and recursive. The recursive and gradual process of transition coupled with other challenges made it practically difficult for the teachers to sometime view as leaders.

## **The Benefits of Teacher Leadership**

Teacher leadership has increasingly gained recognition as a necessary force for school improvement and renewal (Muijs & Harris, 2006; Whitaker, 1995). In this section, the benefits of teacher leadership are examined in relation to the student and the school.

### **The Benefit of Teacher Leadership to Student**

Most research on school leadership does not focus on the actual student outcomes, but instead on the results of the principal's practices (Nettles & Herrington, 2007) which have a direct relationship with student achievement. The authors added that, principals contribute a lot towards building teachers and students' capacities in school. Many studies support the fact that the leadership of a school has a critical role to play on the educational development of learners (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018; Shava, 2015). The many roles are increasingly creating pressure on school heads, thereby preventing them from successfully meeting their objectives. Further arguments presented by Shava (2015) pointed out that managing and leading schools is composed of complex and interrelated tasks which can only be achieved if the school heads empower the teacher leaders to practice good initiatives. Evidence across the world has a plea for effective leaders in an attempt to provide the best possible education for learners. Increasing recognition of teacher motivation to maximize the achievement of goals has become a norm in many schools, although personal abilities have a stake in the overall results.

In practice, effective leadership can be equated to improved school performance, although the process is complicated and unpredictable (Shava, 2015). A correlation between effective leadership and school performance exists, according to this author, although little research has been conducted to provide support on leadership styles and performance. It is clear from the study that professional school leadership should be nurtured to enhance the

achievement of goals through empowerment while teaching, learning and using the goals of schools as a yardstick.

There is sufficient literature that points to the fact that teacher-leadership plays a pivotal role in positive changes at the classroom level as well as at the school level in general (Kilinc, 2014; Hunzicker, 2018; Smylie & Eckert, 2018; Tran, Hallinger & Truong, 2018). This view was made earlier by Hargreaves (2009) who claimed that outstanding school leadership has the potential to improve the academic achievement of even the most disadvantaged student. After exploring two decades of research findings, York-Barr and Duke (2004) proposed a conceptual framework which suggests an avenue through which teacher leadership influences student learning and school improvement. This framework was made up of seven components explained in three phases. The first three components (characteristics of teachers, the type of work they engage in and the conditions that make it possible) are the foundation of teacher leadership. The next three (means of leadership influence, their targeted influence, and the intermediary outcomes of changes in teaching and learning practices) suggest a path through which teachers influence can improve learning. The last component of the framework is student learning, which happens to be the outcome of the six components. When the power of leadership is understood to lie in the strength of relationships, schools grow and flourish (DeMatthews, 2014); thus, strong leadership was seen as a result of the participation of many people with different opinions who hold power to improve student learning.

A research study conducted by Robinson (2007), which compared the effects of transformational and instructional leadership on student outcomes, indicated that the effects of the latter are more significant than the former. Other leadership dimensions such as goal establishment and expectations; promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; strategic resourcing; planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and

curriculum; and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment have moderate to significant effects — further analysis by the author presented facts which supported the substance of leadership on student outcomes. From the study, it was evident that student outcomes were likely to be significantly influenced when the leaders focused their influence, learning and relationships with teachers in activities of teaching. Given her findings, the instructional leadership makes a more significant impact on students because of the intense focus on the quality of teachers and teaching. The focus on transformational leadership theory in its application to schools has been more directed to a leader-follower relation instead of to the work of improving learning and teaching; this naturally causes a weaker effect to be measured on student outcomes.

### **The Benefit of Teacher-Leadership to the Institution**

The effects of teacher-leadership on both the student and the school are enormous Shava (2015), indicated that effective leadership is a requirement in providing learning opportunities for learners owing to emerging evidence of significant improvements and learning outcomes where there is quality leadership. High failure rates have been associated to some extent, with poor school leadership, because school leadership is second to classroom teaching. The desired leadership establishes continued organizational learning and improvement even in schools; this ensures that the set goals of the educational institutions are achieved with minimal effort.

A study carried out in Michigan by Herrera (2010) on the extent of the principal's engagement in six critical areas of leadership practices found that principals perceived themselves to be highly engaged in all. With the roles of ensuring discipline, order, resources availability, among other duties, they were convinced that the success of their schools is secured if these accountability measures are met. The majority of principals in this study reported that they were more supportive of managerial leadership practices over instructional

leadership practices. In the same study, teachers were asked if they perceive the principals to be supportive and less than 25% reported that their principal was supportive in the areas of leadership responsibility and resources. The gap between the principal's perception of their leadership style and the teacher's perception of the principal's leadership style may be attributed to miscommunication. The study revealed that a principal's ability to communicate was a crucial factor to his/her effectiveness in propelling the school towards success.

According to Hardman (2011), the principal's leadership styles can drive critical decisions and has the potential to develop school capacity and affect schools' improvement. Hardman made a significant finding which reinforced the claim put forward by Herrera (2010) earlier. His findings showed that the teachers' perception of their leaders had the power to influence the culture of the school and may have had an impact on their performance. Their study showed that transactional and transformational leadership styles were significant in terms of forecasting the performance of the schools.

A number of studies have indicated that where teachers have been tasked to promote school development and change, their work has typically had a significant impact on school improvement. Muijs and Harris (2006) opined that teacher-leadership could serve as an opportunity for top school management to tap into a larger pool of ideas and solutions to problems there by contributing positively to school improvement. In the same study, the authors identified ten factors that promote and maintains school leadership and are known to enhance the development of teachers. These factors include supportive culture and structure, strong leadership, commitment to action, innovative forms of professional development, coordinated improvement effort, teacher participation and involvement, collective creativity, shared professional practices, recognition and reward.

Research conducted by Muijs, and Harris (2006) reinforced the consensus amongst researchers on the influence of teacher leader on school improvement. Findings from the

study carried out in the UK reveals the improvement made to the school by teacher leaders through the empowerment of their colleagues. The teachers in this study empowered each other through the spread of positive practices and initiatives. The authors cautioned that for teacher leadership thrive, the school must promote a culture of trust and support for each other. According to Senge et al. (1999), schools rely on leadership to shape a productive future and achieve their goals through a process of self-renewal. To increase the school leadership capacity and improve academic outcome, some principles now involve teachers in dialogue and decision making. The principals view teachers as equal partners in while capitalizing on their skills and knowledge and acknowledging their professionalism. At the same time, they remain positioned as a central agent of change (Marks & Printy, 2003).

### **Teacher-Leadership Roles in School**

Teacher leadership roles are increasingly coming up in different forms than many thought possible. There are the formal roles which are the easiest to create, but the rather informal and emergent role may be far more significant in changing the way teachers lead. The importance of the formal role is that it institutionalizes a new set of roles for teachers, which automatically becomes entrenched in their day to day activities. Thus, instilling leadership. Informal roles, on the other hand, informal roles could emerge as teachers interact with each other. The informal role has the power to change the culture of the school significantly (Lieberman, 1992). Lieberman and Miller's views were reinforced by Leithwood, & Riehl, (2003), in their book, *What We Know about Successful School Leadership*. They claimed that teachers and administrator provide most of the leadership in schools. The authors classified teacher leadership roles as formal and informal. Formal leadership roles teachers are involved in include; coordinator of special program, department head and teacher mentor. Effective educational leadership has the potential to help the school develops a vision that captures the best teachings and learning.

When we talk about teacher leadership roles, most often people's attentions are drawn to the formal roles (Hallinger & Richardson, 1988), such as department chairs, members of advisory commissions (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Whitaker (1995) warned that looking at teacher leadership roles from just a formal perspective is like looking at the school as a "peer pressure factory" with teachers having defined roles and a single authority who sets the tone for the building. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the principal to identify key teacher leaders, including those engaged in an informal leadership role and make use of their skills to instill change. Whitaker reiterated that the task of bringing change or growth in school could not be successful without the leader input of the informal teacher leaders. "One challenge facing a principal who would like to invoke change in a school is how to get all staff members to support the concept" (p. 79). In conclusion, he cautioned principals to be watchful and keep in mind that for there to be a sustainable change, this change must be supported by all or most.

Smylie and Denny (1990), in an exploratory study of the leadership role in metropolitan K-8 districts in the United States, noticed that teacher leaders described their roles in terms of the help and support they show towards their colleagues. The authors identified two areas from which such help and support could emerge; from everyday help and support provided to classroom teachers—In an interview, these teachers mentioned leadership roles they play, such as providing emotional support to other teachers and, acts as facilitators for colleagues seeking to improve their classrooms. The second area is help and support vested toward the improvement of classroom practice—they "considered their positions as opportunities to provide knowledge and new ideas about the practice to other teachers. They stated further that they could be a catalyst for improving individual teachers' classroom practice" (p. 244). These survey findings revealed that nearly all the participants had the same definition of a teacher-leadership role. The conclusion drawn from this study is

that teacher leadership role is not fixed. The roles are shaped and influenced by the organizational contexts in which they operate.

### **Challenges and Barriers to Positive Teacher Leadership**

Although there is a strong argument that supports the positive benefits gained for schools and students as a result of positive teacher-leadership, it is important to note that some challenges are encountered by these teachers. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) pointed out that the challenges faced by teacher-leaders exist both in principle and in practice.

First, the bureaucracy associated with the school system and the attitude of some policymakers could negatively affect the effort of teachers in bringing change (Wynne, 2001). Wynne listed barriers that could hamper the effectiveness of teachers as an agent of change in schools. These include rigid school schedule, insufficient support of peers and administration, the need to prepare students for mandated state testing and little time to reflect on day work.

Another challenge that teacher-leaders faced were encountered dealing with the changing nature of relationships; when they assumed leadership roles or responsibilities. The new responsibilities may affect relationships with colleagues resulting in distancing, a fall in trust levels, resentment, and possible conflicts (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). A study by Smylie (1992) explored the relationship between teacher and teacher leaders and found that “teachers’ relationships with teacher leaders may differ substantially from their relationships with teachers who do not hold these positions” (p. 87). The egalitarian values that existed amongst teachers acted against those claiming leadership role (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Frost and Durrant (2003), in a similar study, mentioned multiple initiatives as a significant problem faced by teacher leaders. The authors claimed that teachers who assume leadership roles suffered from divided and fragmented attention due to the different roles they were regularly engaged in. He added that it was the responsibility of the principal who would

know both the internal and external plans and priorities to protect the teachers from conflict of multiple initiatives. The principal was able to help these teacher leaders reconcile personal and school priorities. In their conclusion, they emphasized the crucial role principals must play in mentoring and guiding teachers who want to lead.

In one of their studies, Muijs and Harris (2003), mentioned the top-bottom management structure in schools as one of the impediments to teacher leadership development. In such systems, the management tries to impose roles on teachers who may not be as effective as those whose roles are taken up willfully. Marks and Printy (2003), reiterated the need for teachers to be included in decision making, especially on matters that concern them. In order for teacher-leadership to flourish, Muijs and Harris (2003) cautioned institutions to dismantle the traditional top-bottom leadership style and replace it with a more democratic and shared decision-making process.

Muijs and Harris (2007) carried out a case study in three schools in the UK on barriers to teacher leadership and made the following discoveries; they identified the lack of time as the main barrier perceived by teachers who were interviewed. According to the respondents, time impeded staff from taking up the initiative or getting involved in additional roles. The authors also identified school culture as an impediment to teacher leadership. The lack of a shared vision and collaborative school culture could serve, they observed, as a setback to those willing to lead. Shared vision appears to lie at the center of teacher leadership development. In their conclusion, they stated that for teacher leadership to be successful, there needed to be a fundamental cultural shift in the values and vision of the school and that teachers needed to be baptized into this culture.

## Conceptual Framework

The positive perspective to research is just recently been explore (Luthans, 2002) especially in educational research. Positive psychology was examined in the literature, and how its application to the workplace emphasis the importance of positive approach. Figure 2.3 presents a framework for Positive dimensions and Practices.

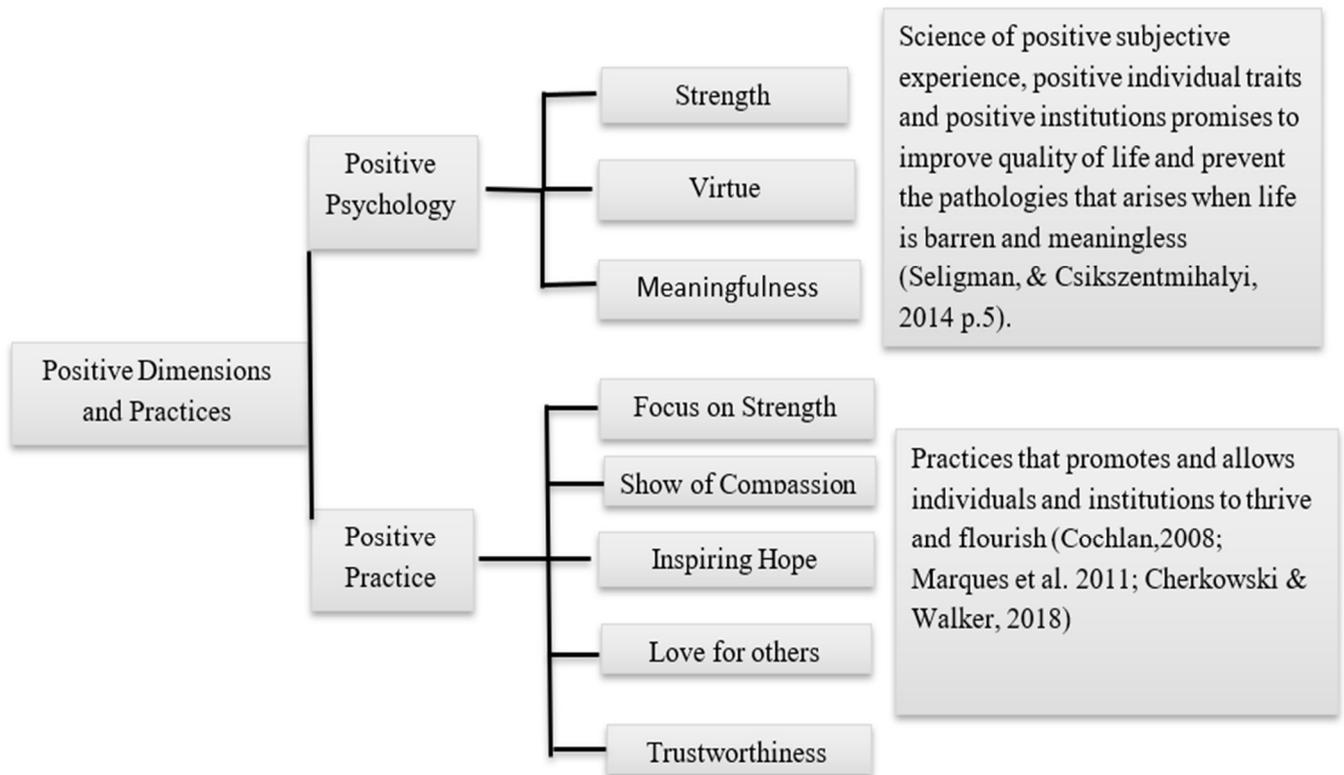


Figure 2.3: Conceptual Framework for Positive Dimensions and Practices

The conceptual framework presented in this section synthesizes the concepts that are relevant in explaining the research topic. The concept and practice of positive teacher leadership have not been exploited nor expositied because of silence in the literature; however, given that the research on positive teacher-leadership is limited, this study examined teacher-leadership from a positive perspective paying attention to appreciative, and positive concepts in schools. Included in the framework are elements of positive school leadership—virtues, values and principles, and the benefits of paying attention to the

contributions of teacher-leaders. The focus of this research study was on the positive principles, dynamics and descriptions of influences by a case of positive teacher-leadership. The positive principle “states that momentum and sustainable change require positive affect and social bonding” (Bushe & Kassam, 2005, p. 167). Fitzgerald et al. (2001) added that this principle inspires hope, excitement, inspiration, caring, and joy that comes from creating meaningful with others.

Amongst the appreciative and positive concepts examined are positive psychology, positive organizational scholarship, positive deviance and appreciative enquiry. In part, the rationale for looking into studies of affirmative, elevating and uplifting, processes and outcomes was due to the neglects or limited attention this area receives. The norm in research has always been geared towards negativity and problem-solving approach. There has been a wealth of scholarly literature on non-positive topics. Combining the positive and appreciative approach with teacher leadership was considered quite promising. The intention behind this framing was to shed light on the benefits and potential of looking at positive teacher leadership practices from a positive perspective

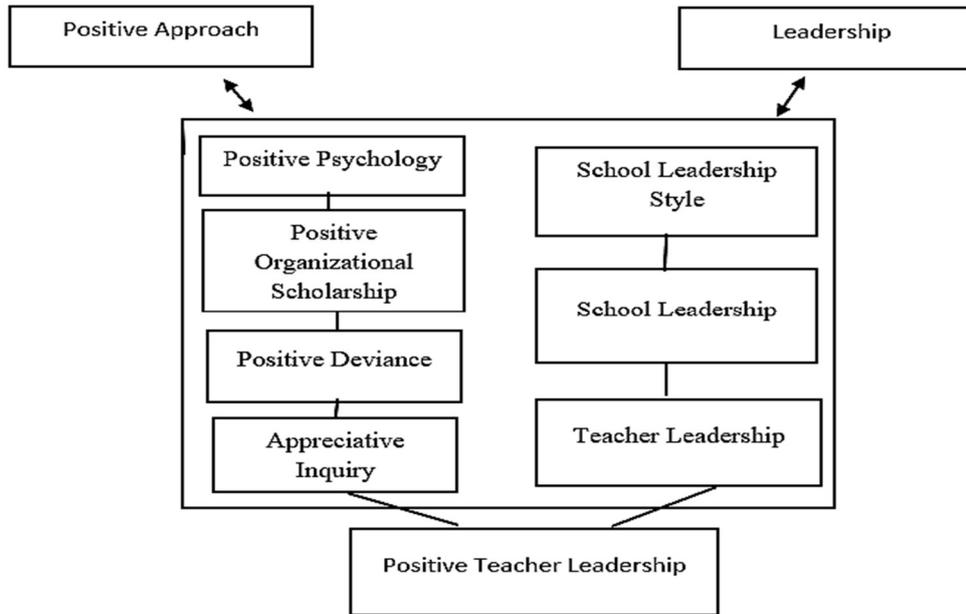


Figure 2.4 Conceptual Theoretical Framework

### Summary of the Literature Reviewed

The criteria used for selecting literature for review in the study were based on prior research relating to the connotations and constructs of positive organizational scholarship. I started with an overview of some of the most popular leadership styles or approaches in schools. Five main school leadership styles were identified amongst which are transformative school leadership, Instructional, transactional, servant and distributed leadership approach. The merits and demerits of each approach were highlighted. Although researchers and scholars differ in the kind of school leadership that can deliver satisfactory outcomes, they all seemed to agree that effective leadership is required to propel the school towards flourishing. All the leadership approaches are valuable depending on the circumstances and context they are being used.

The chapter then shifted from leadership approaches to examine positive organizational concepts. Since the current focus on teacher-leadership from a positive angle, it was necessary to consider concepts such as positive psychology, positive organizational

scholarship, positive deviance and appreciative inquiry. One of the pillars of the positive leadership approach is positive psychology (Regina, 2015). Positive deviance is also seen as an effect of positive organization. This section briefly introduced Cameron's (2012) positive leadership model, which provided the part of the framework for this research.

Next, this chapter explored positive school leadership by considering Seashore Lewis and Murphy's (2018), school leadership dimensions. Louise and Murphy summed four dimensions believed to be central to positive school leadership. The first dimension, which is a positive orientation considers that leaders pay more attention to the things that are working in schools rather than focus on the negative things. The second dimension is the moral orientation, which is centred around the virtues and morals compass that makes up a positive leader. The third dimension is the relational orientation, which emphasizes relationship building as an essential part of positive school leadership. Finally, the authors talked about spiritual stewardship orientation, which is more of an intangible relationship with others beyond self. This section also considered the principles of positive school leadership developed by Louise and Murphey (2018) to assist school leaders create an enabling environment and school culture that would instill a moral and collective spirit in the students.

The chapter also explored the work of Cherkowski and Walker (2018), on the leadership hosting virtues centred around flourishing schools: Compassion and care, hope, trust and love were amongst virtues identified with positive school leadership. In this section of the chapter, school leadership and teacher-leadership were examined separately as different entities. School leadership included principal's leadership, teacher/staff leadership, auxiliary staff and even student while teacher leadership deals explicitly with the teachers. It is essential to make this distinction. Finally, the literature on teacher leadership highlighted the critical role that teachers play in working with their colleagues to improve instruction and learning.

In summary, the concept of teacher-leadership has not been defined clearly or consistently. While it is a unique form of leadership not necessarily vested in a formal hierarchy or role description; teacher-leadership is legitimately grounded within the sphere of other leadership theories. Teacher leadership reflects teacher agency through the breaking down of barriers, creating relationships, and mobilizing resources throughout the school in order to improve students' educational experiences and outcomes (York-Barr, & Duke, 2004). This study intends to explicitly define the roles of teacher leaders from a positive perspective, thereby creating a framework to understand Positive teacher-leadership.

The following chapter discusses the methodological framework under which the study is confined.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a qualitative framework to address the research questions. Bryman (2012) described qualitative research strategy as research “that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data” (p. 380). Even though qualitative research tends to assume that each researcher brings a different and unique perspective to the study, there are still design, and procedures for researchers follow (Lune, & Berg, 2016). The following is a standard set of design and procedures components: formulation of research questions, selection the relevant subjects, collection of relevant data, analyses and interpretation of data, development of conceptual and theoretical frameworks, with insights and implications, writing up of findings and conclusions (Bryman, 2012). This study followed a similar set of design and processes.

#### **Case Study Design**

The general research design selected to explore the research questions was a qualitative case study design. Over the years, several prominent researchers have contributed to methodological developments, leading to an increase in the use of case study approaches across disciplines (Dooley, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The case study design is widely used in educational research and is considered more varied than other research designs (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). In the words of Eisenhardt (1989), “case study is a research strategy that focuses on understanding the dynamics present within a setting” (p. 534). Dooley (2002) expanded on this definition by adding that a case study is a research approach that aims at bringing an understanding of a more complex issue and can add strength to what might already be known from the existing literature. Case study research focuses on the detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of conditions or events and their relationships (George, 2019).

Johnson and Christensen (2008) defined case study research simply as “research that provides a detailed account and analysis of one or more cases” (p. 434). These authors further claimed that case study research has a degree of flexibility that far exceed those offered by other qualitative approaches, such as phenomenology or grounded theory. Stake (1995) identified three different kinds of case studies, namely: intrinsic case study, collective case study and instrumental case study. These case studies are described below.

An intrinsic case study is undertaken in order to understand and learn from a specific case (Johnson, & Christensen, 2008). This classic single-case design is common in educational research. The intrinsic case study is commonly used in exploratory research; wherein the researcher aims to learn about a little-known phenomenon by studying a single case in detail. An instrumental case study is designed to understand something other than a particular case. Unlike intrinsic case study, the goal of an instrumental case study research is to learn about a general phenomenon (Baxter, & Jack, 2008). Although the researcher focuses on a single case, the intention is for a general understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, the case is seen as a means to an end.

One the other hand, the collective case study is entirely different from intrinsic and instrumental in that it studies multiple cases in a single research study. One of the arguments that have been advanced for this approach is the idea that a researcher can gain greater insight from multiple case investigations as opposed to just a single case. The collective case study is also referred to as a multiple-case design (Zach, 2006). Although critics of case study research method continue to cast doubts on the rigour of the approach, there have been a growing number of research findings in the past two decades which have demonstrated that case study method can be used successfully for a detailed and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Zach, 2006). The type of case study selected for this study is the instrumental case study design. This design is necessary for this kind of study because the instrumental

design promises to provide an in-depth set of understandings and insights on the phenomenon of positive teacher-leadership.

### **Case Description**

This study was conducted in a high school, which has been named “Gateway High School,” located in Western Canada. The study specifically targeted a special need teacher who oversaw the special education program at Gateway High School as an assumed case of a positive teacher leader. The special education program was referred to as the Functional Integrated Program and was established to serve students with varied learning needs and medical diagnoses. The special needs teacher has been named “John,” and so John is the main subject in the study. He was designated as a person who would serve as a case of positive teacher leadership. John’s staff and the principal of the high school were also considered to be part of this study. These persons provided observational, interview and focus group data, along with contextual, relational, and experiential understandings. The design idea behind including these participants was to get a deeper understanding of how John’s leadership had influenced them, others (students, families, rest of school) and the general work environment.

### **Recruitment of Participants**

Preliminary observations and discussions I had with John revealed fascinating teaching and learning methods together with some promising hints of able and positive leadership skills in his professional work. He strongly believed that students must come first and communicated a sense of clear expectation and relentless determination to provide a safe space and a sense of community so that students felt more included, and parents felt welcome. For these initial reasons, he was selected as the main subject for this study. John was a Special Education Teacher with twelve adult Educational Assistants. These Educational Assistants were directly assigned to work under his supervision and direction.

The 12 educational assistants and the high school principal were also recruited for a focus group discussion and interviews. The staff members and principal were selected to take part in this study to better understand the impact of John's leadership on the Functional integrated program and the Gateway high school in general.

I first encountered John on a visit, with my supervisor to the high school where he taught. As a new arrival in Canada, I was interested to learn how the schools in Canada functioned. To satisfy my curiosity, my supervisor organized a brief tour of the school, which brought me in contact with John. I could not help but notice his classroom creativity, charisma and positive energy. We were given an opportunity to talk with John during his break, and the discussion revealed an even more exciting set of teaching philosophies and methods, together with what seemed like rare leadership skills. I wanted to explore further how a teacher in a high school context like occupied by John might contribute to the increased capacity of positive teacher-leadership. Immediately after the visit, my supervisor and I started discussing my interest. We contacted the school to request yet another visit. During that visit, I expressed my aspirations and sought the counsel of the principal as to how to go about a case study at the school. Fortunately, John was a part of that meeting, and he informally accepted the possibility to participate in the study, provided that all the required formalities were met.

### **The High School Context**

The high school institution was founded in 1963 with just grade nine. At the time it began, there was only grade nine and classes took place in borrowed classrooms at a neighbouring elementary school. In 1964, the following year, the first wing of the building was constructed to accommodate grade nine and ten. Grade eleven was added the following year and then grade twelve the year after. The institution sent out its first grade 12 graduates in June 1967. The institution had prided itself as a Catholic high school with a mission to assist parents

with the development of their children's academic, spiritual and social life. At the core of their mission was the emphasis placed on the spiritual growth of a child. This high school had made a strong commitment to educating their students within the Catholic tradition, which was characterized by gospel values and prayers. For the sake of anonymity, the original name of this school has been concealed and replaced with a fictional name: "Gateway High School." The rest of the study uses this name when referring to the high school in the study.

### **Method and Instruments of Data Collection**

Many have advocated the use of multiple methods and data sources when it comes to case study research methodology (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Proponents of this method have recommended the use of data collection methods such as observation, focus group, and secondary data (i.e., documents, questionnaires, test and interviews). This study made use of multiple data collection methods in what is called triangulation to address the research questions. These methods include a focus group, observation and interviews. In analyzing the research questions from multiple perspectives, I can establish a high degree of validity or qualitative research trustworthiness. Triangulation in qualitative research is used to develop a compressive understanding of events or phenomenon under study (Carter et al., 2014). This approach taps into different perspectives and dimensions of the same problem; thereby increasing knowledge of the phenomenon (Breitmayer, 1991)

Many have argued that this approach is likely to reveal inconsistencies in the data (Mathison, 1988; Morse, 1991), which according to Patton, (2002) should be an opportunity to uncover more profound meaning in the data. Also, one method can compensate for the weakness or validate the other. For example, interview reports obtained were validated and compared with the actual participant behaviour on the ground through observation. The interviews conducted with John were also compared with the staff member responses to the

focus group questions. In this case, there was a high degree of consistency and harmony in data collected through different sources.

### **Focus-Group Discussion**

A focus group discussion is a type of data collection method in which a moderator moderates a small group with the aim to understand the views of members regarding a specific topic. The name 'focused' is derived because the moderator keeps the group focused on the topic under investigation (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). The moderator acts as a facilitator of the group to guide the conversation and occasionally make interventions to put the group on track. A focus group is important because it serves to provide a general background of the topic, generate new idea and concepts, reveal peoples' feelings about the topic under discussion, and generate a new hypothesis (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1998). The average number of focus group participants is usually between six to twelve members (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1998). For this study, twelve participants took part in the focus group discussion. The participants were all educational assistants. The focus group discussions extended for several hours in a two-day period (two sessions) and were conducted a few days after the students had left for the summer vacation.

As Gill et al. (2008), rightly expressed, "moderating a focus group looks easy when done well but requires a complex set of skills" (p. 294). As a moderator, I made efforts to meet some of the skill requirements listed by Johnson and Christensen (2000), to ensure that the focus-group session was successful. These skills included:

- i) Excellent interpersonal skill and knowledge in facilitating group discussion. I made efforts to get everyone on board and discussing the question.
- ii) I also cultivated the temperament necessary to resolve conflict during the discussion.

## **Focus-Group Interview Schedule**

To have a focus-group interview schedule written down was important for ensuring consistency and maintaining focus on the research objectives. The focus group interview procedure in this study followed the five stages proposed by Breen (2006). These stages include:

- (i) A welcome statement,
- (ii) An overview of the research topic
- (iii) A statement of the ground rules of the focus group, and assurance of confidentiality
- (iv) The discussion questions
- (v) Lastly, the obtaining of background information (gender, age.)

All the questions in this focus group were open-ended in nature. They were all aligned with the research questions and study purposes.

## **Observation**

the observation method was interesting because it was a form of data collection that many of us do on a daily basis. John and Christensen (2008) defined observation as “the watching of behavioural patterns of people in certain situations to obtain information about the phenomenon of interest” (p. 236). Observation has been highly recommended as a reliable method of data collection in educational research because people are sometimes not aware of their actions. An observer looks past the individuals’ egos, which help to make information obtained from this method uncontaminated.

In this study, I took the role of a direct and overt, though inconspicuous and unobtrusive, observer. Direct observation, also known as an observational study, is a “method of collecting evaluative information in which the evaluator watches the subject in his or her usual environment without altering that environment” (Holmes, 2013, p. 39). An observation

is overt when the subjects or individual under observation are aware of the purposes of the study. The participants in this study were provided with a consent form which stated an overview of the study objectives and benefits. A rationale for the use of this type of observation was that I could attempt to detach myself emotionally from the scene (Takyi, 2015). Detachment for this study is an advantage because the subject under observation teaches students with a disability.

### **Definition of the Observation Unit**

Johnson and Christensen (2008) opined that it was important for a researcher to provide information regarding the specifically targeted behaviour when using observation procedure. Similarly, Nachmias and Nachmias (1987) pointed out that for one's findings to be successfully incorporated into the growing body of scientific knowledge, one's observation must go through three essential queries. These include: what to observe, where and when to observe, and how much to infer when recording the observation. An observer can either make a high or low- inference judgment depending on what is being observed and the circumstances. In a high inference observation, the observer is judgmental, which is usually as a result of participant behaviour in the field. On the other hand, a low inference observation requires the observer to record specific behaviour without making any judgment (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). As stated above, the first stage of observation was to define more precisely what and whom to observe in relation to the research questions. Most of the observation targeted John and the environment that he had created as a coordinator of the Functional Integrated Program. I also focused my observations on the relationship dynamics that appeared to exist between John as a leader, his staff and the students. In this study, the first query 'what to observe' had been clearly articulated (See Appendix I). In part, observation of the participants was guided by the tools of positive leadership strategies laid out by Cameron (2012, p. 108; and was expanded to include work by Seashore Lewis &

Murphy and Cherkowski & Walker). These strategies were adapted to frame the study and address the research questions. Making a direct observation required the use of a formal observational instrument. The instrument allowed the observational evidence to be reported in both narrative and tabular forms (Yin, 2012). In this study, I continuously recorded the observational evidence under the categories specified in the observer guide (Appendix I). The conclusion for each theme was based on the frequency with which they had occurred.

### **Recording of the Observations**

In recording the observation in this study, I followed the five procedures laid by Johnson and Christensen (2000); duration recording, frequency-count recording, interval recording, continuous observation and time sampling. The type of observation recording selected in this study was an interval recording. An interval recording is done when an observer observes a singular subject for a period and then records the behaviour that emerged. There were laid down themes—a tool to foster and identify positive leadership (Cameron 2012). The tool served as what to observe. With the use of the guide or tool, I could determine clearly if the participants met the criteria, which included a demonstration of positive leadership in the school, as outlined in Cameron’s (2012) strategies for extraordinary performance.

### **In-Depth Interviews and Principal Interview**

Not all information can be collected through observation. It was necessary for the researcher to pause occasionally in order to inquire about the key participant’s (John’s) experience of the phenomenon under investigation. Some interviews took the form of casual discussions; while others were more planned and formal. This study made use of face-to-face interviews and the interview types selected included both informal or casual conversations and a standardized open-ended or structured interview. John and the principal were the participants for the interviews. Since John was the main subject in the study, we had both

casual conversations and structured interviewed. On the other hand, the interview with the principal was structured.

John's interview questions centred around his leadership practices and the perceived impact on his staff and for the rest of the school. Some questions were semi-structured. Although a semi-structured interview is predetermined, it does not have answers an interviewee can choose from. This technique of data collection was selected because of the size of this study. The case study was conducted in a single school with a selected teacher and educational assistants. The semi-structured interview is known to produce useful data in small sample size studies (Alvarez & Urla, 2002). The unstructured questions were those chosen because of their relevance in this study. This approach afforded a flexible format that allowed the respondent (John) to express himself freely and revealed detail insights to his views. Questions under this category emerged in the course of observations and during activities (Johnson & Christensen, 2000).

### **Recording the Interviews**

Recording can either be done through a digital recorder or by writing (Wiens, 2017). Although the digital recording is considered to be practical and more useful than taking notes, especially when it comes to open-ended questions, researchers have claimed that the interview may be disrupted due to the activity of recording (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). In this study, I used both a digital recording device and note-taking. There were moments when I recorded our casual conversations so that I could later extra valuable point to build up a case. A transcript of our conversations was regularly served for the teacher leader for him to read and make corrections where necessary.

### **Data Analyses**

Unlike quantitative data analysis process, which comes after data collection, qualitative data analysis is done during as well as after all data have been collected. Data

collection and analysis in this study were done simultaneously. Qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process involving the organization of data into different categories and identifying relationships and patterns amongst the categories (Thomas, 2006; Johnson & Christensen, 2000). An Inductive analysis can be described as the “process through which qualitative researchers synthesize and make meaning from the data, starting with specific data and ending with categories and patterns” (Johnson and Christensen, 2000, p. 367) Hillway (1969) reminded educational researchers about the need to classify all data by category, analyze for preciseness and credibility, and to ensure that the correct meaning is interpreted (p. 6). Researchers have concluded that there is no universal or standard procedure for analyzing qualitative data. Making sense of data depends entirely on a researcher’s intellectual rigour and tentativeness of interpretation until the analysis is complete (Johnson & Turner 2003). In this study, the data analysis was followed for the procedures proposed by Johnson and Christensen (2000).

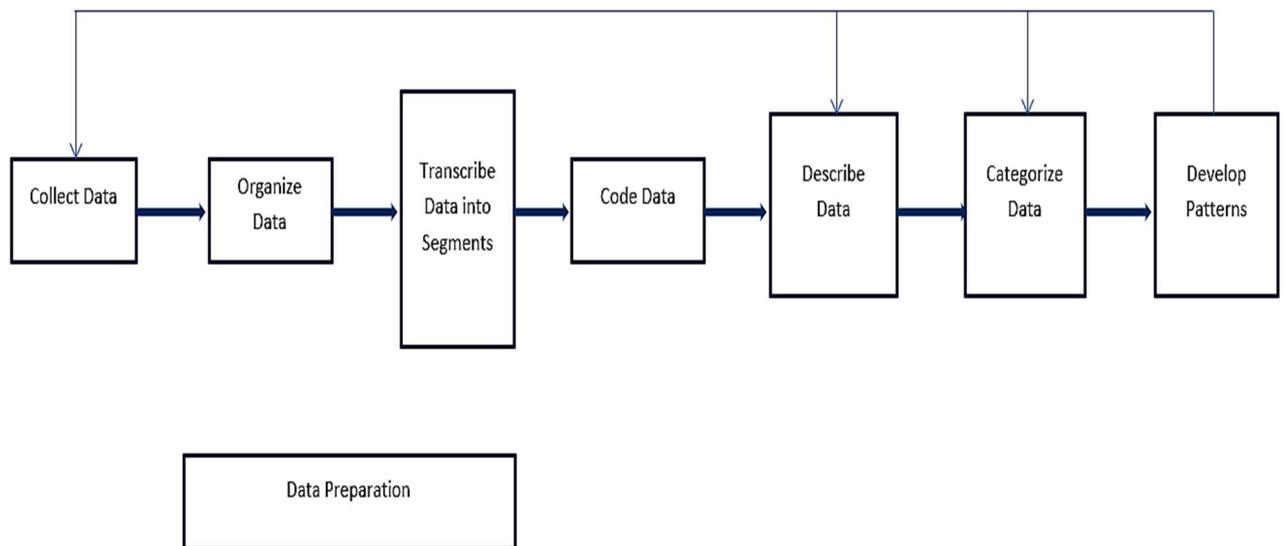


Figure 3.1. An Illustration of the Steps in Qualitative Data Analysis. (Johnson & Christensen, 2000).

The data that were collected were immediately read and transcribed (notetaking from observation and recorded interviews). The data were collected in a manner that facilitated analysis. The generation of themes and categories were done manually. There were already categories laid out by Cameron (2012) in his leadership strategies which facilitated the analysis phase. Cameron used an assessment instrument or tool provided in highlighting attributes of a positive leader. These instruments serve as a checklist of what positive leaders should be focusing on in the workplace. Encouraging compassion, forgiveness, gratitude, foster positive energy, capitalize on other's strength, provide best feedback, use supportive communication, and enhance the meaningfulness of the work. These instruments can either be used to identify or promote positive leadership in workplace. I was looking to identify these themes in John's and others in leadership style.

Data obtained from the formal and informal conversation with John was analyzed manually. John's leadership strategy was established over time from regular interviews and conversation. John and I co-constructed a leadership model based on his three leadership strategies; strength spotting, authentic affirmation and appreciation, gratitude and celebration. Questions for the focus group discussion were then modelled from these strategies. The purpose was to understand and establish the impact of the strategies on both the staff, students and the school in general. In the second part of the focus group, a subset of the three strategies/principles were established from the perspective of the staff members. These emerging principles formed the themes for the second part in the focus group discussion section in this thesis. Data obtained from the different data sources went through continuous cleaning and refinement including member checking as outlined in the consent forms (See Appendix E, F, G). Data were cleaned to eliminate obscene languages and to enhance readers understandings.

## **Establishing Trustworthiness**

Many researchers have suggested that qualitative research should be judged using different criteria from those of quantitative research (Krefting, 1991). Birt et al. (2016) reminded educational researchers that “the trustworthiness of results is the bedrock of high-quality qualitative research” (p. 2). In evaluating and assessing the quality of qualitative validity and research, Lincoln and Guba (1985), proposed an alternative to validity and reliability, which commonly used in quantitative research. They proposed that trustworthiness and authenticity were the two alternatives to assessing the qualitative study. Trustworthiness has been divided into four criteria each of which has an equivalent in quantitative research: credibility (which parallels internal validity); transferability (external validity); dependability (reliability) and confirmability (objectivity).

This study employed a triangulation technique and used respondent validation to ensure credible findings. The rationale behind the use of triangulation was that no single data collection method was selected to wholly solve the problem of rival explanations (Patton, 1999). Because each method reveals a different aspect of empirical reality, multiple data collection methods and analysis provided a more convincing argument for research validity (Bryman, 2012). There is no doubt that studies that focus on a single method of data collection are more vulnerable to errors than studies with multiple data collection method (Jick, 1979). Multiple data collections methods allow for data validity check, which is a hallmark of research credibility (Patton, 1999). Respondent validation is another technique for exploring the credibility of research results (Birt et al., 2016). To ensure respondent validity, the transcript release form (Appendix H) was made available to participants to check for accuracy, then signed and returned.

Transferability is another trustworthy criteria the current study seeks to establish. Transferability refers to the extent to which the result findings obtained from qualitative

research can be generalized or replicated in different settings or context (Burchett et al., 2011). For transferability to be successful, a detailed description of the methods and procedures of the study must be documented. Geertz (2008), terms this ‘thick description.’ Lincoln and Guba (1994) argued that a thick description provides researchers with what they refer to as a database for making judgments about the possible transferability of research findings to other areas. This study provided a rich description of the participant's experiences (John's), together with observations, focus group with educational assistants and then an interview with principal. This research provided a clear research procedure to allowing for future replicability. Because we all perceive phenomenon differently, there was no guarantee that the finding would be the same in the event of replicability, but it was certain that the finding from this study had high potential to influence teacher leadership. In conclusion, Burchett et al. (2011) argued that transferability was primarily the responsibility of the one doing the generalizing. He/she decides if the findings fit his/her context.

Confirmability is another trustworthy criterion in qualitative research which is an equivalent of objectivity in the quantitative research (Bryman, 2012). Confirmability is the degree to which the findings could be confirmed or corroborated by others. To enhance confirmability in this study, I created a log—where I documented my daily activities, and a habit of checking and rechecking data collected.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Of course, it is important to understand the ethical and legal responsibility involved in research especially those studies that involve human being. Research ethics deal with what is morally proper and improper when dealing with research participants (Schumacher & Mcmillan, 2006). In conducting this study, I adhered to the ethical principles and guidelines requirements articulated by the Behavioral Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) at the University

of Saskatchewan. After assessing the potential risk this research might have on the participant, I came to the conclusion that the study was low-risk.

### **Informed Consent**

Consent is considered to be one of the core principles of social research. It is necessary to get the consent of the participants involved in the study. Under this principle, detailed information about the study was communicated to the participant (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). A consent form authorized by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board (REB) was issued to the participants to read and sign; stating they had given consent to participate in the study. The right of the participant to withdraw from the studies was enshrined on the consent form (Appendix E, F,G), which was issued to them.

### **Full Disclosure**

The principle of full disclosure states that the researcher must communicate the purpose of the research to the participants with all honesty and openness. There are some research studies where the principle of full disclosure may be applicable. Nevertheless, it is justified providing partial disclosure in studies where full disclosure may affect the validity of the results, such as research on student racial attitude (Schumacher & Mcmillan, 2006). The purpose of this study was fully disclosed in the consent (Appendix E, F, G), and the letter of introduction (Appendix D).

### **Voluntary Participation**

It is essential that the participant is not forced to participate in a study. Schumacher & Mcmillan (2006) pointed out that in the case of observation, the participant must volunteer to be observed. All the participants in this study gave their consents willingly. Their rights to withdraw or even deny from taking part in the study was enshrined in the consent form. Also, they were constantly reminded of this right.

## **Privacy**

The research must make sure that the privacy of his/her participant(s) is protected (Kaye, 2012). In other words, the researcher must see to it that the participant(s) responses, characteristics, behaviour and other data gathered are kept safe. Schumacher & Mcmillan, (2006) outlined three primary practices through which this participant privacy is ensured: (i) anonymity, ii) confidentiality and iii) appropriate data storage. Anonymity means keeping the participant(s) identity unknown to everyone. Ritchie et al. (2013) claimed that anonymity may be compromised in cases where research participants are organized by the third party. The authors went further to explain that in cases where absolute anonymity cannot be guaranteed, the participant should be made aware of who is allowed to know of their participation. Johnson and Christensen (2000) reiterated that strict anonymity is not possible when it comes to data collection methods such as face-face interview and observation. Because the current research is a case study, full anonymity could not be guaranteed, but I brought to the attention of the participant all information of those who will know of their participation (Ritchie et al., 2013). Secondly, I took the liberty to use fictional names to conceal the identity of the participants and the institution, as recommended by most research scholars (Wong & Anderson, 2010). The fictional name assigned to the main subject in the case was “John,” and the name assigned to the institution was “Gateway High school.” assigning a pseudonym was an effort towards ensuring confidentiality. The notes and recordings taken during the observation’s and interview sessions were transcribed and safely stored at a secure cabinet at university for five years after the end of the project, then destroyed

## **Protecting Participants from Harm**

The researcher must ensure that participants are protected from harm be it physical or mental, harm or injury, discomfort and even the disclosure of information that may lead to harassment or danger to the home, school and friends (Eriksson, &

Helgesson, 2005). Although participants are rarely exposed to harm in education research, it is essential for the researcher to be on a lookout (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). The participant could also be exposed to risk in the way data is analyzed and reported. In addressing this concern, participants in this study were given a clear and detailed explanation of the issues in the study that will be addressed in an introduction letter (Appendix D) before being asked to take part. Also, the potential participant risk that may be associated with the current study was well articulated on the consent form. Participants read and understood the risks before giving their approval.

### **Summary of Chapter Three**

In this chapter, I outlined the procedures and addressed several components of the data collection process in the current study under the framework of a qualitative methodology. The research design adopted to tackle the research questions was an instrumental case study design. The research techniques used in data collection were; observation, interview and a focus group discussion. Data analysis was done manually from a grounded approach—The ground theory pursuit in this study is the “theory of positive teacher-leadership.” The entire process from data collection to the findings was done within the confines of ethical principles in human research outlined by the University of Saskatchewan research ethics board

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA ANALYSES AND FINDINGS**

This chapter focuses on the review of the data from the qualitative case study that I conducted to provide an overview of participants' insight into positive teacher leadership. In this section, data were generated from observations, interviews and a focus group discussion. As indicated in earlier chapters, the findings are based on data collected at a high school in Western Canada, called Gateway High School (pseudonym), where the primary focus was on Mr. John (pseudonym). Mr. John was purposefully selected and designated as an assumed positive teacher leader and the subject of this case study. John was a teacher of special education who managed the Functional Integrated (FI) program (a program for students with special needs) at Gateway high school. The outline of the chapter is as follows; the context of the study including participants are introduced at the beginning of the chapter. Next, is presentation of the findings from observation, followed by findings from the formal and informal conversation with John. The chapter then presented findings from the focus group discussion with the staff members and the interview with the principal of the Gateway high school. the chapter ended with a summary of all the findings. The outline of chapter 4 is

represented in the figure 4.1 below:

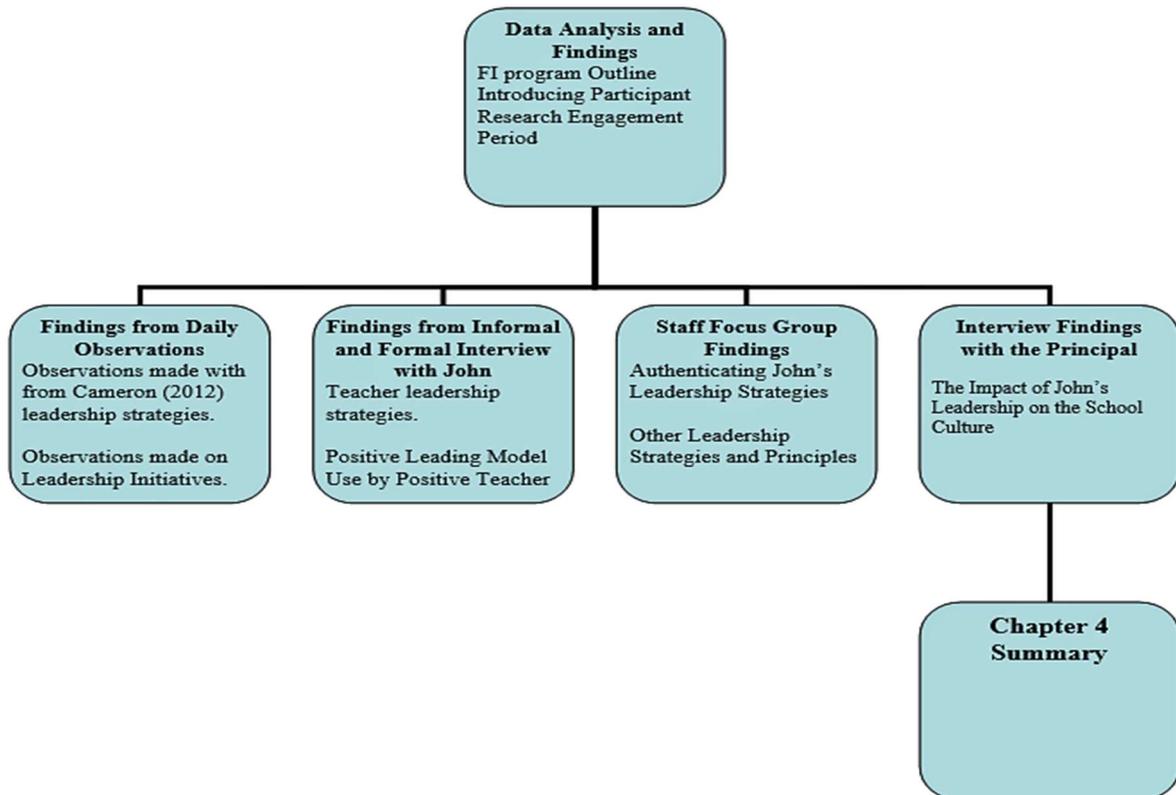


Figure 4.1: Outline of Chapter 4

### **The Functional Integrated Program (FI program).**

The FI program was designed for students with intellectual and physical disability and involves inclusion in mainstream classes, community and world experience, as well as tutorial, life skills and social skills programs. This program served 16 students and was supported by 12 Educational Assistants and one Special Education Teacher. The FI Program operated as a department within the Gateway High School. As indicated Gateway High School was founded in the early 1960s and served grades nine to twelve students, with a population of about 1200 students, at the time of this study.

Teaching in the FI program entailed a focus on implementing individualized learning plans for each student, as well as creating an environment wherein students could learn as a group. This approach provided for numerous challenges. Unlike mainstream classrooms the

FI environment is chaotic because students have different need and challenges. There have been moments where student fought, insulted each other, refused to participate in activities and even attacked the staff. I experienced, firsthand, the challenges that came with teaching students with diverse learning needs and came to realize that it takes leadership to coordinate staff and student schedules, to develop and teach strategies that serve a multitude of student needs and to create an environment that values at its core, inclusivity. The main goal of this program was to empower and teach students the necessary skills needed to increase their varying levels of independence. The ultimate goal was that each student, relative to their own diverse set of needs, would leave the school having learned how to be lifelong learner, a self-advocate and, ultimately become a valued and contributing member of their community. To reach this goal, a set of philosophical principles were used to guide a combination of group, and individualized tutorials, interventions, community focuses, and a variety of educational practices were creating an inclusive learning model is weaved throughout all areas a student's educational experience. The students' individualized education plan was designed through an inclusive model; focusing on how inclusive education can guide each student's family, peer relationships, and community involvement, as well as enrich the school climate. This inclusive approach required strong leadership skills to implement. John works in collaboration with staff members, to ensure that each student learned the skills needed to make a successful transition from life at school, where they have been heavily supported to a life after school where the support is limited.

### **FI Program Overview**

The FI program follows a general but flexible routine (see Appendix F). There are generally five periods in a day. These periods could be classified into academic tutorials and physical education and life skills.

## **Academic Tutorial**

These classes were designed to help foster friendship, build confidence, strengthen self-regulatory behavior and give students an opportunity to increase their leadership skills. The tutorial lessons took place on the first period of each day, lasting for 65 minutes. The first 45 minutes of the tutorial work was on calendar skills, group work, group conversation and activities geared at providing leadership opportunities for students to lead the class and teach their classmates about each other. For the remaining 20 minutes, students were split into two group. During this time, they practiced their numeracy skills by doing money math skills booklets and calculator skills. The student also used language-building tools called the Expanding Expression Tool (EET) to build vocabulary, improve oral reading skills as well as increase speech articulation and conversation skills. Some students worked on personal identification skills, writing their names and address, identifying shapes letters and numbers.

## **Physical Education and Life Skills**

There were multiple activities which were undertaken under the physical education and life skill periods. There were social-based electives classes, which included art, drama, cooking and sewing. The students also have educational placements in different organizations and centers such as food bank, amazing stories, Cosmo Industries, Sask Abilities, Value Village, and a care home facility. Teaching these students life skills was an essential component in the FI program. They were taught cooking, shopping, recycling, laundry, mopping, sweeping, tables and dishes cleaning and how to take the bus. The FI program placed a strong emphasis on creating opportunities for FI Students to meet new students in similar programs within other Gateways sister schools in and around the city. This was done through different social projects. The intention was to foster friendships in social environments that are ideal places for friends to hang out with one another. Some social

projects included dances, river walks, gymnastics, aerial gymnastics, mall visits, talent shows, swimming, and bowling.

There were also some school and community-based entrepreneurial projects where students and staff worked together to enhance life skills. The projects included button making, food cart coffee cart, concessions and recycling are discussed subsequently in details.

### **Classroom settings**

The FI program had two classrooms located next to each other at the end of the hallway. The classrooms facilities included the life skill classroom and a more traditional classroom.

#### **The Life Skills Classroom.**

Features of this classroom included a full-service kitchen, washer and dryer for laundry, comfortable styles of furniture (couches and chair). Two additional spaces included a Break Room and a Padded Room. Access to multiple computers and Smartboard. The classroom was configured in a manner that encouraged group collaboration and communication with the primary tables arranged in a manner that promoted group engagement. This classroom acted as the primary room for life skills-based intervention, as well as the space created for larger group projects. Examples included cooking classes, laundry and cleaning skill development, work education or vocational projects.

#### **The More Traditional Classroom.**

Features of this classroom included two additional Spaces. (Sensory Room and Padded Room). Access to multiple computers and smartboard. This classroom was the primary room for academic intervention, large group lessons, and project-based lessons.

## **The Office setting**

The FI program had a single office which served as a space for administrative work such as programming, scheduling, collaborative meetings between staff and students, parent meetings and individualized intervention. The office was located along the hallway just a few meters from the FI classrooms. The first thing that caught my eye from the door was a desk with a computer on it. Above the desk was a double shelf containing files, books and Lego. Contained in the files were students and staff records, official reports, and a record of staff yearly reflection exercise. The titles of the books on the shelf ranged from children books to psychology books. Adjacent to the desk was a table and chairs where students, staff and visitors sit when they were in the office. The office was quite narrow, allowing for proximity during interactions. Students and staff were welcome to walk into the office at any time. Some students came around to play with the Lego found on the shelf; while others stopped by for a chat.

## **Period of Engagement.**

The period of engagement at the school allowed for intensive data collection within a four-week timeframe. During the four weeks, I was present every day at the school from 9:00 AM to 2:45 PM and I took part in daily FI program activities like any other staff involved—gardening, conversations, field trips, games, walking the students and sharing meals. Through these involvements, I established relationships that enriched my knowledge and perspectives. One of the positive outcomes of this engagement was an excellent turnout for the focus group discussion; in fact, all the educational assistants were present for the focus group activity.

Mr. John was a strong supporter of the study. He took time to explain, where needed, and answered all my questions to the best of his ability. He also made resources available to facilitate my understanding of the Functional Integrated Program and how it was structured. John did not stay in his office, but instead, he was mostly present in class with the other staff.

There he would engage them in activities or participate in those activities himself. He spent most of his time with the students. As well, the students were free to stop by his office at any time for a chat.

John and I developed a road map for the data collection process on my first day at the school. We agreed that I would observe and engage in activities during the day, and that he would be available to answer any questions at the end of the day. I was also invited to follow him around and work with him. After a few days, we decided not to wait till the end of the day to discuss my observations or questions; so, our pattern was that we would go into his office during in-between breaks for our discussions.

To ensure nothing got lost, I recorded the interviews and then transcribed these to text, without editing the content. Direct quotations of forty or more words are presented in block paragraphs while quotations with fewer than forty words are indicated with quotation marks.

### **Introducing the Study Participants**

The participants in the study were divided into three main categories; the FI Special Education Teacher (John), the FI Programs Educational Assistants (twelve staff), and the Principal of the High School. This study focused on John as a case of positive teacher leadership (PTL). It was necessary to include his staff members and the principal of the High School in order to gain a broader understanding of the influence of his practical and philosophical ideologies related to positive leading.

#### **Introducing Mr. John.**

John had been an FI Special Education Teacher (SET) at Gateway High School for three years. He was the only SET in the program, with a support staff made up of twelve Educational Assistants (EA's). His job seemed daunting and appeared to require that he manage every aspect of the program. John's functions included teaching, program planning,

creating advocacy networks, and building community supports for the students and their families. Within each of the listed areas above, his role was to create, foster and implement individualized educational plans through the *Inclusion and Intervention Plan (IIP) document* as a learning guide for each student as a means to reach their learning goals. This was done through collaborative planning. A large part of his function was to help families create advocacy networks and build community supports for their children. The nature of these efforts required that he work collaboratively with government agencies, educational institutions, advocacy groups or other forms of support networks. The intention was to help families navigate through a variety of support networks that can help or supports the needs of their children.

John's desire was also to reduce or challenge the stigmatic disposition surrounding those with intellectual and physical disabilities within the mainstream population. One way he did this was by entering into a partnership with academic institutions such as the College of Nursing, the College of Education, and SaskPolytech programs; this was mainly through practicum training. Another was by teaching the students how to be engaging patrons of their local community businesses or resource centers. Since the FI program operated as part of a mainstream school (Gateway High School), John and his staff taught and showed the strengths of their students to the mainstream population; the strategic intention of this was that by teaching others that being different does not mean being incapable.

### **Introducing the FI Staff**

The FI staff was comprised of Educational Assistants. There were 12 staff with work experience ranging from one to 20 years. Their primary role was to provide support for students within the F.I. Program in the following areas of educational planning: independence, transition, behavioral regulation, personal hygiene, medical or health-related difficulties, career and work education, communication, physical wellbeing, mental health

and self-advocacy. The staff members, including John, worked in collaboration with students and their parents, to create IIP goals that represented the learning needs of each student, based on their cognitive, physical, emotional and behavioral needs. From there, John and staff then began to create a team-oriented framework centered on how they might plan to help each of these students reach their goals.

### **Introducing the School Principal**

The high school was managed by a single principal who also oversaw the FI program. She appeared to have had a close relationship with all the school staff including those in the FI program. John's relationship with the principal was rooted in trust and open communication. They spoke openly about challenges with students, staff, staffing allocations, student supports and additional forms of advocacy for the students. The principal, in this relationship helped to advocate on behalf of the student needs, based on their conversations, but recognized that John's role had additional leadership responsibilities. She trusted that John could lead the staff and students and worked in support of the needs of the program instead of micromanaging the program.

### **Findings from Daily Observations**

Data were collected through observation. The observations were conducted throughout the one-month engagement period during which I would often observe, take down note and discuss questions that came up with John at the end of each day. As indicated, though the initial plan was for me to get in and quietly observe, the experience became so exciting that I ended up getting involved in activities. These activities turned out to be great way to build relationships that were based on trust. Also, it is hard to be in the FI group as an observer and not participate or get involved in some way. The students always showed interest and would interact with anybody who was in their space. The students were always excited and thrilled to spend time with others and to connect.

The data in this section are presented in two parts. In the first part, the observation was done using a tool or guide suggested by Cameron (2012) aimed at identifying positive leadership by noticing positive deviant behaviours in the organization. In the second part, findings emanated from ongoing leadership initiatives and their observed impact on the FI program.

As indicated in Chapter Two, Cameron (2012) developed a list of positive leadership behaviours that he believed produced and manifest as extraordinary performance, both at the individual and organizational levels. The list served as a guide for my observations and included but was not limited to acts aimed at encouraging compassion, forgiveness, gratitude, positive energy, capitalization on other strengths, the use of supportive communication and meaningfulness of work. These acts were precursors of the four positive leadership strategies referred to in Chapter Two: positive climate, positive relationship, positive communication and positive meaning. The factors outlined in the list are indicators of what should be considered when trying to determine or enhance positive leadership practices. In this observation, I was keen to look for acts, activities and behaviours that indicated the presence of the themes.

In the second part of this section, I discuss transformative moments that I witnessed through the various observed initiatives.

### **Encouraging Compassion**

When you live in an environment where the culture encourages giving and compassion, surely you will adopt these cultures sooner than later. John and his staff demonstrated compassion frequently, especially during conversations. They communicated with body language and facial expressions. During activities, I noted that the staff engaged the students directly with facial expressions and other gestures. This was an indication to me that the staff had a good understanding and that they were willing to listen. I noticed that the

staff often listened compassionately and actively to the students; regularly making eye contact, nodding, smiling and responding in ways that assured the students that they were being listened to. During my observations, I was initially under the impression that the staff actions were coming from a place of sympathy alone but later realized that other factors like compassion and empathy were involved. I recall an incident where a student walked into John's office and demanded money. He did not dismiss the student's request or show him the door but instead listened attentively to understand why the student needed money. From his posture and facial expression, I could tell that he was fully engaged in the conversation. By keeping calm and listening all the way, he was able to figure out that the student was merely hungry and needed the money to buy food. He was so kind as to offer to buy something for the student to eat at the school cafeteria. This was an act of compassion.

In another instance, I observed a student who, noticing that a staff member was not in a good mood, walked up to her and tried to sympathize by patting her on the shoulders and saying, "people should not be sad." In a regular classroom or program, such actions would be considered ordinary but seeing it come from the FI student was something special which got me reflecting. The perception that an act of compassion necessarily needs to be big enough was not necessarily accurate. These small acts of compassion and kindness can have a substantial and significant impact on people. When I narrated my observations to John, he had this to say:

Your observation is what reciprocal means. It is not about power or hierarchical relationships; it is about being in the moment together and being able to realize there is more to life than just doing what we are told. Part of it is how we learn from each other. Empathy is arguably the hardest skill for most people and to see these students practicing it is interesting.

These experiences were powerful and inspiring to me and, in my view, underlined the importance of recognizing and appreciating the role of compassion in leadership.

Another compassionate act that I observed occurred at a park on a sweltering hot day. The idea was to walk the students to the riverbanks located at the other end of the park. Almost all the students were present, along with a couple of staff members. There was a student who was not willing to walk with the rest of the group; he decided to stay back under a tree to shade himself from the sun. After everyone had left, a staff member stayed back and tried persuading him to join the rest of the group. I stayed behind watching and hoping to see how she was going to convince him. What was surprising was that the staff member sat there with the student under the tree, discussing and encouraging him until he could sum up the courage to join the rest of the group. Sitting down with the student and listening compassionately required patience, and she showed that she was willing to go all the way to stimulate and motivate him. She could have asked the student to get back on the bus and return to school, but she kept his company and tried to connect and relate to him so as to understand what he was going through. This scenario reminded me of the biblical story of the good shepherd where the shepherd left ninety-nine of his sheep in search of one lost sheep. Paying attention to people's needs and concerns was a show of compassion. This is a value that I found to be deeply entrenched in the culture of the FI program.

Listening attentively as a person shares their pain or suffering has the potential to alleviate the pain. There is an adage "a problem shared is a problem half solved." During breaks and free periods, the staff members typically gathered together in the lunchroom, and while having lunch, they would discuss personal issues going on in their lives. In one particular instance, a staff member shared his frustration and disapproval of the lifestyle of a sibling. I remembered the silence in the room with everyone listening attentively as the staff painfully shared the story. I could see that they were not just listening to respond or offer

solutions but rather feeling his pain. The looks on their faces said, “We hear and understand what you are going through, and we are here for you.” After sharing, he was patted on the back, and I could see a sense of relief on his face. Later that day, I talked to a staff member who had been part of the conversation, and she told me about the emotional support she had received from her co-workers in her darkest moments. Something went wrong with her brother, but after sharing the situation with her co-workers, she received overwhelming support. She recounted the following to me: “I was grateful when individuals took an interest in my personal life and showed compassion by inquiring about my brother.”

I consider compassion to be an expression of love that softens the heart, allowing us to feel deeply for others who are hurting.

### **Encouraging Forgiveness**

When working with people from different backgrounds in a small environment, like a school, conflicts are inevitable. Anger, vexation, displeasure, annoyance, irritation are all common when working in teams. The point is not whether establishments can stay conflict-free but rather how conflicts and displeasure are managed. There is an adage “to err is human, to forgive divine,” indicating that everyone makes mistakes, and we must forgive. The challenge then is how leaders can create an environment where forgiveness thrives. There were several instances where I thought John showed an excellent example of forgiveness. I witnessed a situation where on seeing John, a student rushed up to him and in that excitement tore up one of his side pockets. The student cribbed him on his left pocket and did not let go despite his calls for the student to take off her hands. In situations like that, most people will react instantly, but John remained calm and spoke softly. When I asked what was going through his mind at that moment, he took the opportunity and recounted a similar event with another student where he sustained an injury on his finger. I was curious to know more about how John punishes or disciplines students for these actions; so, I asked him to explain to me

his feelings. He started his explanation by acknowledging the harm that has been caused then quickly switched his focus on the intention behind the student's action. Concerning the student who tore up his pocket, he forgave her because the intention was not to damage his clothes but was an outcome of excitement. It is important to reiterate that these students did not know how to express what they felt, which was partly why John did not take offence. As concerned the other student who had injured him, John took responsibility by claiming that he had invaded the student's personal space, which resulted in student biting and injuring his finger. It is important to note that these behaviours are not justified under any circumstances but considering the nature of students and the circumstances that provoked the actions was something that warranted forgiveness. When we are compassionate, we are more likely to relate to others and at the same time empathize with their suffering. In such a state, it becomes easy to let go of any anger and hurt we may have against others. The moment we reached deep down and tapped into our compassion; we are automatically prepared to forgive. Hence, compassion is a precursor to forgiveness. John forgave because he was compassionate.

### **Encouraging Gratitude**

Gratitude was one of the core leadership principles of the FI program. In the course of my discussions with the staff, I noticed that they were grateful for many things in the FI program and were always ready to express and share this gratitude and appreciation. When I asked a staff member what she was grateful for she said to me, "I am grateful for the opportunity to be with professionals who care and support each other." Another staff added "I feel blessed to work with these wonderful students whom I have learned from and who have helped me become a better person." I interpreted these as a sincere expression of gratitude from people whose job had given them a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

The FI students were also seen to show gratitude and kindness to one another. They were always encouraged to use words such as “thank you.” Even though the words to them might not carry the same authenticity as it may have if from a regular stream student; but, nevertheless, this formed a base from which these students could start appreciating and internalizing the feelings that had come from being grateful. There was a student who always came to me and asked questions about a picture of a cat she saw on my phone. She seemed to like cats, which was why she requested that I send her the pictures of the cat to her phone. This happened on one of the trips we took to a park. Throughout the trip, she kept on thanking me for showing her the pictures and accepting her request to forward the pictures to her. She came to me regularly and said, “thank you for accepting to send the pictures.” Unfortunately, I could not send the pictures because it was not allowed by the school rules; but I was quite amazed and impressed that she was thankful even though she had not received the pictures.

I experienced another instance of gratitude during the end of year banquet organized by John. The banquet, which was funded partly from the initiatives that the student had undertaken in the year and which were aimed to raise funds and to instill life skills. The banquet brought together students, staff, parent’s friend and people of goodwill in the community. John organized this event to show his appreciation to the parents who have trusted him with the development of their children, to friends and family who continue to support their effort and to express his gratitude to his staff for a job well done. The issue of trust was seen as important when dealing with such a vulnerable population. During the engagement period, I would often go in the morning to watch parents drop off their children and come back later in the evening to see them picking up their children. When I saw parents leaving these vulnerable children in the hands of ‘strangers,’ I imagined the significance of the partnership between the school and the parents that had led to such a strong connection

and what seemed like complete trust. I was interested in hearing John's perspective on this, so I asked him about the significance of organizing a banquet to show his gratitude to these parents, he said:

It is a big honor or a form of trust to have parents bring their child through the door and leave them with you. It is important to keep that in mind and be thankful that the family trusts you and your staff or your school program enough to do that. They undoubtedly put much trust in us as staff.

In our discussions and my observations, I noticed that the success of the group lay not on one person alone but on the collective effort of the group, as well as from the support they get from their families. It was the coming together of all these variables that make the program successful. The staff members may have different strategies based on their backgrounds and strengths, but the main goal remained the same—empower the students with the necessary skills needed to become more independent and succeed. John commented on the support he received from the staff, his family, and how these supports enhanced his job. He said:

Working in a culture of giving, you need much support for giving to thrive. It is hard to fulfill the need of giving because it does not end. So, because of that, we need to have people in our lives, outside of the profession that supports our ability to give. For me to put myself in a position to give, lead, or do my best, I need to feel that it is not compromising my personal life. I need to be at least mindful that other people are making sacrifices for this to happen and not just me, the group or staff. It is people's spouses that support them coming to extra work hours for free, and people's family helping them talk through stressful situations when they go home. That is why for this functionally integrated program end of year banquet, everybody must be free to invite

anybody they want to share this moment with. This is a fellowship meal. The essence of having your family come over is a way of showing gratitude for their support.

It was interesting to see the amount of work that went to this year's event, and I was honored to be allowed to see and participate in the organization process. John did not just stay away and allowed the staff to work through the organization and logistics. The event was scheduled to start at 5:30 pm but John arrived much earlier to help get things ready. When I got there at 4 pm, I found John preparing the fruit salad. When everything was ready, the parents started to come in with their kids and friends. The happiness and joy on their faces and the expressions of gratitude left a lasting impression on me. It was an indication to me that John meant a lot to them, and they felt at ease with him.

Parents also showed appreciation in different ways and avenues. Many of the parents sent their gratitude's to the staff in the form of greeting cards, handwritten notes and gifts. As part of the team, I received a jar of honey and homemade jam from a parent who was thankful to the staff for the smile on her daughter's face. Some parents showered up the following day with cards and handwritten notes bearing "thank you" messages for the staff. The overwhelming supports and appreciation that came from the parents reflected an excellent job and the positive impacts these teachers had had on the lives of their children. The students also showed their gratitude to one another and the staff. It was amazing to see them exchanging hugs, kisses and plans for the summer. I noticed a former student who had moved to the regular class, often came with gifts for her friends in the FI program. She would even bring cards bearing handwriting messages. John and his staff appeared to have succeeded in creating an environment where relationships thrive.

### **Foster Positive Energy**

The energy in the FI classroom was continuously being reinforced and replenished. During lunch breaks, students from the mainstream classrooms often came and visited with

the FI students. Different students show up every day, but they were some regular faces who were consistent. During these breaks, they played games, eat lunch and share stories. These acts helped the FI students to blend into the school community. These exchanges also foster relationship building between FI student and the mainstream students.

On the one hand, mainstream students were given opportunities to experience and appreciate diversity. The high school students were able to develop and contribute to a culture of tolerance, love and understanding for those who look different from them through these interactions. On the other hand, through these experiences the students with special needs increased their chances for social interactions, new friends and more collaborative activities. It also boosted the esteem of the FI students and continuously put them in high spirit. There were days where John and the rest of the staff would join the students to play and socialize. Watching as John played with the students showed the simplicity of a leader who was genuinely interested in the wellbeing of his students. If one considers how difficult socializing was for students in the FI program, then one might better appreciate this level of positive interaction. These actions and interactions do not happen overnight; but rather were a function of the relationships and teamwork that existed in this environment.

The students were not always in high spirit. There are days where the moods in the room were dull. There was a student who became fond of me from the start. When I arrived at the school, he made me feel comfortable, continually showing up and asking me questions about myself. The mood in the classroom on that day was that of excitement and laughter. Unfortunately, things changed so quickly the next day. When I arrived the following morning, I greeted the student but received no reply. I gave him a pat on the back hoping to get his attention, he looked at me sadly and said, “Do not touch me again.” At first, I thought I had done something wrong or had offended the student in some way. I was afraid that I had ruined my chances of building a positive relationship with the student. Nevertheless, the staff

kept my energy flooded, and in no time, the student was back again and around me. It was not always rosy, but to see people showing genuine concern to rekindle your spirit and make every moment enjoyable was something quite remarkable.

Another event which boosted the self-esteem and confidence of the students was a talent show where students special need students in sister schools around the city showcased their talents and creativity. As one of the sister schools, this high school's FI students participated in singing, dancing and a cooking show. It was an honor to witness the different daily practices leading to the actual show. The students were placed under different activities of choice. The practices were always fun and had a life to them. Students stayed vibrant and positive as they practice new dance moves, their vocals and cooking techniques. The feeling in the hall on an actual day was breathtaking. Such hidden talents and creative individuals, I whispered to myself. I was honored to have experienced such displays of energy and confident coming from students who were often not visible in such area. The following day, John replayed the tape of these activities in class, and the entire room was filled with joy and a sense of satisfaction. The positive energy that these students were emitting was remarkable. They worked all year as a team and produced an enduring experience which was likely to remain in their hearts for a very long time. I asked a staff member what she made of their success at the talent show, and she said; "I enjoyed working with this staff community as we all work as a team. This is awesome because other schools I subbed at did not come together as a team. This is an essential quality for me." It is as though events like this, and activities were aimed at exposing the students to the rest of the school community has and these had created an environment where people were invigorated.

### **Capitalizing on Strengths**

The entire FI program is strength-based. This approach is unique in that, unlike most learning programs which help people become what they are not, the FI program brought to

light that which a person is. Empowering students and staff through identified strengths allowed them to do what they do best. An example was a student who always preferred to sit at the back of the bus whenever they were out on a trip. He always made sure everyone exited the bus before him. John identified this act as a leadership quality, which needed to be nurtured and promoted; so, he started assigning leadership roles to the student. In one instance, he was allowed to make squash soup for the rest of the class. This was an opportunity for him to teach the rest of the students and, at the same time, to lead through what he knew best. There is a general perception that leaders are expected to have fewer weaknesses and excel at almost everything. Nothing could be further from the truth, in my opinion. A person is more likely to succeed and become an expert if they focus on their strengths.

Another thing I noticed was that the students were paired with staff based on their strengths and interests. For example, a student who was interested in comic books and superheroes movies was paired with a staff member who had similar interests and the relationship was then used to develop the skill sets of the student. This technique was much more effective than pairing people who had nothing in common. The students were more likely to listen and learn if they had a positive relationship with their pair partner. I was curious to know how this approach had enhanced the job of EA's, so I had a casual conversation with a staff member who said she learned every day from watching students' strengths grow. Working in the FI program, she had noticed students modelling their behaviours. She added that being part of the program and interacting with her co-workers had made her realize she had the greatest job and she loved what she did. John spoke in detail about the strength-based approach use in the FI program. His views and interview findings are presented in the interview section in this chapter. Spotting strengths is something that takes time and requires expertise.

## **Use of Supportive Communication**

There was the habitual use of supportive and positive communication in the FI setting which came in the form of affirmation and appreciation. Affirmative language was used regularly to motivate students, especially when they had done something well. During my observations, I noticed that almost every positive behaviour was celebrated. The staff also showed gratitude and even celebrated the absence of negative behaviour. For example, if a student who was fond of curses spoke without cursing, then that student was expressly appreciated for that. Thus, the presence of positive behaviour was celebrated as much as was the absence of negative behaviour.

I noticed John using supportive language regularly. I have heard him say to the students, “you can do tough challenges;” he also said, “I trust your judgement and never second guess yourself” on several instances to staff who had doubted themselves. Talking to those staff, I realized that these words of support and encouragement had built their self-esteem and enhanced their job satisfaction. These discussions did not only take place in John’s office; but rather happened everywhere as the need arose. Part of that supportive communication lay in the ability to listen. In my opinion, listening is a skill with every leader should possess. When John was listening, his focus was on the moment and avoided distraction. I had several conversations with him in his office and noticed that it did not matter what the nature or form of the conversation; he always moved away from his computer and gave his full attention to me. He regularly asked how he could be of help and encouraged me (and others) to seek his help when and where necessary.

An example was when a student came into John’s office one day to complain about a computer he was working on: “I do not know how to get that computer to work.” the student said. After listening to his complaint, John replied, saying, “One thing we can do is ask for help.” Reflecting on his response, I realized asking for help was a skill that we all often take

for granted. Having that conversation with the students and encouraged him to ask for help and was a reflective moment for me. There are many things we can achieve if we ask for help.

I also noticed that negative feedback was provided, but that this negative feedback was always solution-focused rather than people-focused. An example was a student who typically yelled and used obscene language when he was frustrated. The staff members were always quick to condemn the language and not the student. In many instances, they proposed words for the students to use in place of the offensive ones. I heard the student pause in the middle of a cursed word and immediately switch to a more appropriate word. A staff member would ask the student for example, “what better word can we use in place of the “f” word?” for instance.

While working on my data collection, I receive lots of encouragement from the staff. My hope was constantly being rekindled. Even though they had spent only weeks with me, they believed my project would be successful. I regularly got messages like “It will all turn out fine,” “You should take a break,” “if there is anything we can do, do not hesitate.” I also received words of support for the crisis which has ravaged my country. I was not expecting that, but when you are in an environment where people genuinely care, even your struggles will be visited.

### **Enhancing the Meaningfulness of Work**

John’s strategy of helping his staff take control of their work and helping students attained the independence needed to succeed was accomplished by creating a more positive and inclusive environment. I identified several direct impacts of such an environment on the staff.

Firstly, I noticed that staff members always looked happy as they went about their day to day activities. I recall a staff member telling me that she went home each day filled with

too much love. She recounted an incident where one of the students kept on hugging her at the talent show as an expression of love. It was a great moment for me because I was present at the talent show when the incident she recounted occurred. I remembered saying to myself “I wish more people had the opportunity to be appreciated and loved for what they do.” It is important to note that these students express their emotions differently and sometimes could be misinterpreted as invading one’s personal space.

Also, John’s simplicity and sense of humor made him a fun person to work with. He spent most of his time in the classroom with the students and staff making jokes when necessary. The mood in the room, especially during breaks, was that of laughter. I think that appearing to be serious all the time, especially as a leader, may be detrimental to relationship building. From my experiences in these classrooms, I can say that being calm, relaxed, friendly, and humorous allowed for more connectivity amongst the students and staff members. It was these connections that seemed to enhance learning. I think one of the reasons we were all comfortable talking to John about anything was tied to his friendly and open approach to everyone.

Another direct impact of working in such an environment was that the staff associated their work with their core values. This was evident that they loved what they did and where they worked. I recall a staff member who told me that since joining the staff she appreciated more and cared for others. She claimed that these values and accompanying behaviours had been spotted and brought to her attention by a friend and family members who, in recent years, had noticed the transformation. She attributed this positive transformation to the core values of the schools where she had spent most of her time.

Personally, being in the school for some time changed my perspective on many things and especially on the way I look at persons with disabilities. This experience instilled in me more tolerance towards people who may look or act differently. My focus shifted from an

emphasis on my weaknesses to the focus and development of my strengths. The experience also instilled in me the value of care. I remember walking and holding hands with the students every morning as part of their daily exercise. I would drop whatever I was working on when it was time to walk the students. I engaged in discussions regularly and what I realized was that although these students were mentally challenged, they craved for the same things we all do: love, care and the desire to be successful.

All the staff I engaged with commended John for his great work and attributed the excellent working condition to his leadership approach. In an informal conversation, a staff member said:

I am grateful for John, who has been a true leader and has guided our team in a very gentle, humorous, intelligent and respectful way and has let all of us feel much appreciate and valued. We are genuinely a team and family.

Many people are motivated by the idea of helping someone or being helpful, which is much better than merely being told what to do. John, in his interactions with staff, tried not to tell students or staff members what to do because this might lead to conflict, and there was no growth in a compliance process. If you are doing something collaboratively, that process gets people to invest in their work, and they are more likely to take on a challenge or responsibility that is more difficult, especially if they feel as if they are supported. John tried to find the balance; not telling people what to do and being confident that they could work out what needed to be done.

Another activity that caught my attention was a barbecue organized at John's residence. I was invited to the barbecue which an honor, like being part of the family. Almost every staff member was present at the barbecue. The interactions were beyond what I regularly see at similar events organized by other schools and organizations. The scene was like a family reunion where everyone gathered at a round table to feast. There were some

games which I had the opportunity to try for the first time. Based on my experience, it became evident to me why they would consider themselves family.

### **Sustainable Leadership Initiative Projects**

In this section, I discuss John's leadership initiatives and projects that were designed to enhance students' social and leadership skills, as well as to promote the act of sharing. I also observed the interaction of the staff with the students and their contributions towards John's initiatives.

### **Transformative Moments**

Findings represented in this section are relevant to the research questions, and the data presented include the observations that I consider transformative. These findings helped change and shape my perception. In this section, I discuss my experiences working in sustainability initiatives such as functionally integrated program garden initiative and FI recycling initiative. John talked about other ongoing initiatives such as the Push Pin Snap Buttons initiative and the Food cart initiative. These ongoing initiatives were discussed in brief because I did not directly observe them. From the observation and the interviews with John, I noticed that the different initiatives were designed to raise funds for the program and students as well as to develop many skills that would help them succeed in life. John explained:

The idea behind these initiatives is so that we are not limited because of our financial constraint. So, we had to find ways to generate money in our program so that we can provide the students with a variety of experiences, at the same time building a culture of earning money into a learning experience.

I asked John how he is able to build a learning process into these initiatives. He said, we thought of entrepreneurship projects for the student to take on. These projects essentially focus on many things associated with life skills like

shopping and handling a small amount of money—leads to a social skill set like greetings, conversations, organizational skill, commitment and responsibility.

The initiatives also serve the need to provide more disposable income to fund student's activities. We are not limited by money.

It was amazing to see the student and staff working collaboratively in these projects and initiatives. The students and staff gave in their best and were ready to learn new things.

### **Gardening Activities and Their Significance in the FI Program**

The gardening activity took place on the first day I arrived at the school. I assisted John in preparing the garden for planting. At first sight, the FI garden initiative appeared to be a regular activity, but in this environment, every activity was designed to educate, empower, and develop the leadership and social skills of the group.

The first skill development observed in the gardening process was social interaction skill. One of the most significant challenges for FI students was that related to social interaction. As the students leave high school and transition into the community, there is a possibility that the support they had been getting at school will decrease. John explained that interacting socially was a challenge for many of the students and the hope for most families was for their children to grow up in a community where they made friends and felt included. Social interaction activities were therefore necessary to empower them with the skills needed to become more independent and to experience success.

Even though not every student actively participated in the gardening activity, they were all present to watch and support and, in the process, engage in friendship. It is important to keep in mind that these students did not have many friendship experiences. Being able to work in a group and share conversations in the process was one way to develop a student's social interaction skills. According to John, the garden activity represented a real-life setting where social interaction was a skill that they were required to navigate successfully.

Secondly, the garden activities were designed to instill leadership responsibilities in the students. After the activities had been completed, I asked John what the next steps would be, and he told me that they were going to assign a couple of students to regularly water the garden and check from time to time to make sure the crops were growing well. He said that this was a way to help students take on more leadership responsibilities. Besides gardening, students were also empowered to take leadership responsibilities through activities like cooking. John recounted to me that:

One of the students in the group made squash soup earlier this year, which was something he enjoyed doing. So, he will be the leader and teach the rest of the class how to make squash soup when next we harvest the squash from our garden. Now, it does not matter if the soup tasted well or not, all that matters is that he likes doing it, and he is willing to share his knowledge with the other students.

The process is what mattered, not the outcome. Cardillo and Pickeral (2013) stated that “consistently and deliberately supporting students to be engaged as co-leaders and co-learners is an essential requirement for successful and positive school climate improvement efforts” (p. 22). The actions taken to empower and build self-confidence in these students were deliberate. In an informal conversation, John expressed this when he said; “all I am trying do is take these students who are traditionally not leaders in the classroom and give them roles to of leaders and mentors to each other because it is empowering.” What this did was allow leadership to move into a demographic who more typically had their lives governed by others.

Furthermore, the garden initiative helped promote the act of sharing, which was visible at different levels in the activities. At the first level, different ideas and experiences were shared during the planting process. The second level of sharing occurs during harvesting and John explained as follows.

If we have a big harvest in the fall, we will let everyone take a little bag of vegetables home. So, they can take that pride and share with their families so that the community grows. That is the intention behind the garden.

Not all the harvest is taken home as some of it is used to prepare a meal in the school. The staff and students come together to prepare and share a common meal. One of the participants in the focus group discussion called this a “family meal.”

In conclusion, John, in collaboration with his staff, worked to create an inclusive environment where students felt safe to be themselves and build lifelong relationships. The garden initiative was designed to improve student’s leadership and social interaction skill. The activity also sought to promote the act of sharing, which was important in efforts to stimulate social interaction and build relationships. Promoting leadership among students with disabilities was thought to enhance the potential for increased self-confidence and empowerment in this group.

### **FI Recycling Initiative**

Being such a large school meant that a lot of effort and resources were needed to collect and sort out the trash. The FI program ran the Recycling Program for paper and cans in the whole school. FI students were assigned to this task to go around every day into classrooms and offices collecting cans then put these articles into recycle bins, which would be dropped off at the recycle plant. I once had an opportunity to go out and help John drop off a bin of cans. I was amazed to see that many people working at the recycling plant had some physical disabilities; I really appreciated this as I realized how this could potentially inspire some students to make a smooth transition from school life to work life. On our way back, I asked John to briefly talk about this initiative and its importance to the FI program. He said:

For generating a little money for the class, our student collects all the recycle cans from the school, then sort them. We then take the cans to recycling depot, and that

money goes towards funding opportunities in our program. That is how we pay for a lot of the stuff in this program.

There were other ongoing initiatives that John thought it wise to discuss. He talked about the Food Carts Initiative, which was a project that was done once a year at a big community garage sale event. The FI group takes advantage of this garage sale to sell hotdogs, popcorn and do a barbecue at the event. All the money made from the sales was ploughed back into the program.

Another initiative he talked about is the Push Pin Snap Buttons Initiative. The FI students make snap buttons for different organizations and communities depending on the price they are advertised for. The students print the graphics, assemble the buttons and then sell them. The importance of this initiative was that these sales bring money into the program, train student to become more responsible and at the same time helps to develop tangible life skills.

### **Daily Coffee Service for Staff Initiative**

The daily coffee service starts when a staff member places an order online via a google form. The order form was retrieved by a student who then filed the order and then prepared and delivered the coffee. There was a price of one dollar per cup charged to staff members. This initiative was an opportunity for the students to interact with other high school staff members and the rest of the school population. The initiative also generated money, which was then used to finance student projects and programming.

This section discussed the typical examples of compassionate acts, acts of forgiveness, acts of gratitude, behaviours that fostered positive energy, capitalized on strengths, supportive communication and meaningfulness of work. The second part of the observation dwelled on leadership initiatives introduced by John. The most exciting thing about these projects was their sustainability. The students were able to get involved in many

other programs that were financed from the money they made from these projects. The students had more experiences and exposures, as compare to their peers in other schools. The idea that student could make money, learn an entrepreneurial skill and build their lifelong skills at the same time was impressive. Leadership is therefore not a person but the conditions that are fostered by a person and by those they work with (student and staff).

### **Informal and Formal Interview with John**

Within the one-month data collection period, I engaged with John regularly. We had both formal and informal conversations around the research questions. As mentioned above, I would follow him around from one place to the other and often had discussions with him over lunch. John had a great personality and would go out of his way to support anyone within his circle. I was especially amazed at the extent of his hospitality towards me. We discussed in his office, at restaurants, in the hallway, in the car, and even at his residence.

One of the pertinent questions I asked John over lunch one day, at a restaurant, was when I asked him to describe his role as a special education teacher and a leader in the FI program. He said:

I view my role as the person who identifies the strength, interests and abilities of our students and our staff as a means to create the most successful educational experience for each student. I then create opportunities for students learning by designing, coordinating, or implementing learning experiences that reflect the needs of each student. After ensuring the individual needs of each student are planned for, I then work on how we can balance individual learning needs within a broader group context. Much of this process is created to teach staff and students the skills needed to develop reciprocal relationships within an educational structure. (Personal communication, May 30, 2019)

The relationships which existed amongst staff members and students were built on reciprocity and mutual respect and non-hierarchical. I noticed on several instances where John would ask the opinions of the other staff members before making a decision. Every staff appeared to be fully involved in the decision-making process and this was true to an extent for the students as well. John once said there was nothing worse than to have you set somebody else up to fail because of the choice you have made. Involving the staff members in decision making had become a form of empowerment and a tool in building relationships based on trust and mutual respect. I asked John about the process involved in building such a relationship and how these enhanced the staff members' jobs. He said:

The development of these reciprocal relationships starts by recognizing that for our program be successful, I need to rely on many people. I cannot do it alone. Leading through trusting those around me needs to be at the forefront of how we achieve our goals as a staff and how we help students to reach their goals. The trusting process often takes the form of sharing control, sharing the vision, sharing success. By focusing on strength and growth, sharing control becomes more comfortable to practice. Through the sharing process, I can foster the use of collaborative relationships, ultimately increasing staff accountability. This can create more meaningful opportunities for students and staff to work reciprocally as a means of reaching student goals. I can create each student individualized educational plan and often provide the setting for the plan to take place. For the plan to be effective, I need our staff to help each student reach their goals by using their strengths. Their strengths are the gateway to connecting with the strengths of our students. Creating that connection allows our program to develop relationships reciprocally, creating a learning environment or culture that is built upon affirmation and gratitude as its primary source of student motivation. (Personal Communication, May 30, 2019)

Trust and reciprocity have a significant role to play in relationship building. John trusted his staff to do a great job and in return, they trusted his judgments and his ability to pair students with the right staff. Trust goes hand in glove with collaboration. The staff are likely to work collaboratively if there is a high level of trust amongst them.

### **Positive Leadership**

The role John played in the exercise and articulation of leadership had much to do with a crucial understanding of the relationship-building process. His role challenged him to focus on creating an environment that fostered the growth of relationships, led to collaboration and an overarching theme of mutual support, one for the other. The development of this environment helped his team reach student goals and enhanced the learning experience. After developing an understanding of how the FI program is structured, it was important then to understand why John would consider leadership a process and what his process entails.

### **Positive Leadership as a Process**

Explaining his role as a leader in the FI program, John suggested that he understood leadership as a process. When asked why he considered leadership a process and what that process entailed, John explained that:

When I think about positive leadership in the field of education, I am looking at leadership through the lens of strength building. Educators are not often trained to look for strengths. More commonly, we are trained to look for deficits, challenges, areas of struggle and comparatives; a form of training focusing on deficit. Nevertheless, working through the lens of deficit is important and often necessary to understand what areas we may need to invest time into improving. However, it is only part of an equation when considering what makes leadership effective. Knowing what we need to improve is often rooted in understanding

deficits, but the improvement process itself should be a more significant piece of the equation developed through the recognition of strength.

A focus on strengths did not mean ignoring the deficits or weaknesses of the students but rather it meant placing more emphasis on their strength. The approach John apparently took placed more emphasis on developing students' and staff members' strengths. When John was asked to further explain his idea of building through strengths, he said:

Building through strengths means to create or foster an environment that views strengths as invaluable; they are the catalyst to relationship building and the guiding entity that can create culture. When we work in recognition of strengths, we always have something to affirm, appreciate, show gratitude for and most importantly celebrate. By adjusting our perception to see the strengths of others, we can work on growth by looking at how our strengths interconnect. It is through this interconnectedness that we find ourselves creating a space that thrives on learning from each other, where those in it feel supported by the strengths of those around them. This allows us to move into collaboration more effectively, realizing that the diversity in our strengths is complimenting each other. This serves as the driving force behind working in a setting where, at the forefront, must be a culture of giving.

(Research interview, John, June 30, 2019).

John's process or view of positive leading was modelled on three distinct approaches: strength spotting, authentic affirmation/appreciation, and gratitude/celebration. These three distinct approaches were unique in that these may be used as individual goal setting strategies but were proving to be most effective within the Special Education context where used with an interconnected approach.

## **Strength Spotting Approach**

The primary intention of strength spotting was to create a culture that gave both staff and students a place where they could use their strengths as a means to create learning through a mutually reciprocal premise. Focusing on the strengths of staff members and students, according to John, had the potential to change perceptions. Drawing to light the strengths of the diverse set of abilities that connect every person in the FI Program was the aim. It was through this strength spotting approach that John put together staff member and student pairings, created individualized forms of intervention and taught students and staff how to value each other through the recognition of each person's strengths.

In the FI Program, the perception of how each person was viewed was important. Due to the complexity of student needs, John reiterated that viewing relationships through the lens of strength spotting challenged staff to be their best selves when working with students. This entailed building their relationships through words that add to their strengths, patient, empathetic, affirmation, gratitude and celebration. By doing this, they created a thriving culture, with its foundation rooted in viewing the strengths of others. When John was asked to elaborate more on the strengths-based approach he said;

Sometimes, even with the best intentions of creating something diverse and inclusive, something driven by acceptance, we can arrive at those intentions from a place of exclusivity. In special education, this often comes in a line of questioning examining what are the factors that have led to someone not being included. Was it the physical environment, social stigmas, behavioural contexts, cognitive ability? There are so many factors that can be considered, but there is a fundamental flaw in this type of approach or mindset. Inclusivity does not come from solving problems by looking at what is wrong; it comes from valuing what each person has to offer. Each person has something to offer, regardless of a stigmatic predisposition, there is always something

that can connect us. This comes from our ability to spot the strengths in other people, and the great thing is, that this form of perceiving others, this can be taught, modelled and practiced as an educational strategy. We are focused on what we can add to others—how staff can add to their growth, can add to the group, and the school and ultimately add to building an inclusive community.

Being able to participate and engaged with the students from the FI program gave me a different look at persons with disabilities and inclusivity. I valued the students more by simply focusing on what they do best and ignored their disabilities and challenges. This new way of looking at the students changed my perception about persons with disabilities and strengthened the bond between me and the students.

When talking about strength spotting as a building philosophy at the core of the FI program, it is important to identify both the short- and long-term values of this approach. I asked John to delineate what he considered to be the short and long-term impact of the strength spotting approach.

In the short-term strength spotting challenges, us to recognize the different core values and personality traits as a means to celebrate the different skills that are possessed because of those traits and values. Once we can recognize this in each other, we can then look at how those skills can be used to enhance or add to the lives of others. When our staff members are consistently looking for strengths in each other and our students, they start to understand that strengths are interchangeable and complimentary. This type of mindset allows the staff to approach the complex and diverse set of individual needs of each student with the mind-set of growth development recognition. The focus becomes centred on what each student is doing well and how they can continue to enhance their growth. Our language becomes more

positive and affirming, we communicate with each other with words of gratitude, and our relationships with each other take on a new definition of the word supportive.

The primary goal of using supportive communication here was to achieve change in such a manner that strengthens and preserves the relationship between the staff and students; thus, ensuring that the students feel valued and respected in the process. In the long term, John said:

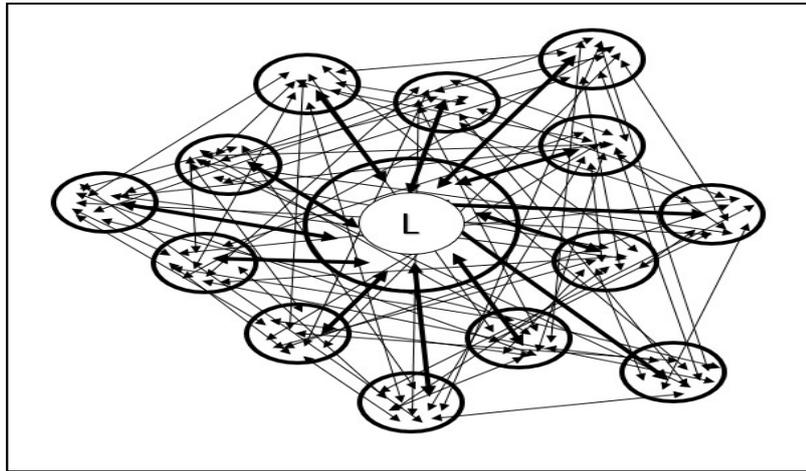
The long-term benefit is that strength spotting moves from a practice of perception to preferable practice. Our perception as a staff now becomes one rooted around the best qualities in those around us. Not only is this a dignifying approach to working with a student population who is often marginalized or vulnerable, but it is an effective way to build a team with minimal conflict, a team rooted in trust for one another and a team willing to embrace a culture of giving.

With an emphasis on deficits or weakness, it was challenging to keep staff and students fully committed, motivated, and open to growth and change (Luthans, 2002). With John's leading, the FI program adopted a strength-based approach, both conceptually and in practice, as a means to strengthen relationships and foster inherent trust amongst members in the program.

### **Strength Spotting Model**

The most important aspect of the strength-based approach was its trickle-down effect. In an environment like this where John was directly in charge of many staff, the idea of empowerment through modelling became an asset. Because John's philosophy around leadership was centred around strength spotting, the staff being exposed to this becomes mindful and started them looking for strengths in others. Hence, understanding that strengths are interchangeable and can complement one another was deemed important. In the short run, the leader (represented as L in the circle in Figure 4.2) may be required to give more (bold

arrows), build reciprocal relationship and share knowledge; but once every staff's (represented as circles) competency becomes high enough then they are able to support and sustain the group by sharing in their strengths (represented as the thin arrows connecting the circles). The diagram Figure 4.2 presented below is a joint attempt between me and John to create a visual representation of the interconnectedness of the strengths in the FI program



*Figure 4.2: Interconnected Strength Spotting Model*

The strength spotting approach instituted by John in central the FI program. The strength spotting approach has helped in fostering relationships, trusts and reciprocity in the FI program. the second approach to John's leadership strategy is Affirmation/Appreciation. John emphasized on many instances the need for affirmation to be authentic or genuine.

### **Authentic Affirmation/Appreciation Approach**

Affirmation and the show of appreciation—be it a verbal or a physical act, was frequently noted during the observations. The staff affirmed each other as much as they affirmed the students. During my encounter with the students, I realized that the students could perceive if behaviours were genuine or not. The need for individuals/teachers/leaders to be authentic in affirming these students cannot be overemphasized. It was, therefore, necessary to get a deeper understanding of how John worked to create an environment in which students and staff felt safe and comfortable enough to allow their relationships to

flourish. When John was asked how he fostered relationships with other staff and students through affirmation and appreciation, he had this to say:

As a staff, we spend a large majority of our professional development time focusing on building relationships. This started for us when we really committed to using the philosophical principles of strength spotting as the means to strengthen relationships with our students. This commitment led us to look at relationship building as a methodology that we could use as a teaching strategy with our students. The amazing thing about this process is, what started as a way to develop consistency with our students turned into a guiding source of principles that gave us the tools to appreciate the strengths of each other. Once we had the tools to strength spot, we realized that recognizing the strength spotting was not enough. It was a great foundation for relationship building, but it's not enough to cultivate authentic relationships. This was when we started to conceptually understand that when we pair strength spotting with authentic affirmation and appreciation, we can create connections with each other and the students we work with.

The affirmation and appreciation approach were introduced to compliment the strength spotting approach. To appreciate the student's strengths or what they do right is a catalyse for positive change in school. Giving words of encouragement regularly to both students and teachers made them feel fulfilled. Most of the educational assistants told me that they were felt fulfilled working with their students because they get the opportunity to put smile on their faces daily,

To better understand the emphasis that is placed on affirmation, I examined the strategic posters hanging above the classroom door in both FI Classrooms. The text on each Poster, as depicted in Figure 4.3.



Figure 4.3: Affirmation circle

At first glance, the posters are seen to be regular motivational and positive message, but it was more profound than that. The posters contained a series of affirming messages used in specific order to guide and enhance positive behavioural outcomes. I asked John to guide me through the process of how these positive and affirmative statements connected to relationship building. He said:

The intention was to create a language-based strategy that would create a framework for solving behavioural challenges for our students. The strategy had to be limited in words but have a broad enough context to connect with the root reasons that present themselves when students are struggling with a learning need. Most commonly, our students display acts of defiance or noncompliance for the following reasons:

- (1) They feel limited in choice, or when they do not feel that their choices are being valued.
- (2) They perceive or feel that what is being asked of them is too difficult
- (3) When something is new or unexpected, and they cannot predict the results, or see something as too abstract, without a concrete ending point.
- (4) They are unsure, fearful, or unable to predict how they are going to feel during the task or process.

This strategy essentially created a circle of affirmation around the student's challenge, allowing staff to create a looping effect as a means to support the student as they navigate through past, present and future outcomes. By having the capacity to identify the root of the

problem, they were then able to determine where to start within the circle. To demonstrate how the affirmation circle was put into practice, John used an example of a student who had refused to take part in an activity and was non-compliant to the request the staff. The affirmation circle may be used as follows:

**Student:** “I do not want to go to the gym today; I hate soccer.” Using the affirmation circle, a staff member addressed this challenge by first reflecting upon the root of the problem. In this circumstance, it could have been that the student disliked soccer because they perceived to be too challenging. Maybe the version of soccer they are going to play had new rules, and they did not understand the new version of the game. The important thing was to try and identify something in their words or body language that would lead you to recognize the root of the problem.

**Staff:** “I know you find soccer very hard; it is a tough challenge, I find it difficult too, but you know what? You can solve tough challenges. The staff then provide past examples of times where the student found something difficult and proceeded to solve the challenge. Once those past examples have been established and reciprocated, then the staff member would begin teaching the student to cultivate new feelings through the affirmation circle. This led the strategy to connect with past feelings. **Staff:** “Do you remember how you felt after you were able to solve this past problem.” The goal in this stage of the affirmation circle is to connect and affirm the feeling of past successes. When a connection to past success has been established, we can move on to the present, progressing through the loop.

In John’s example, the establishment and affirmation of the students help them understand that in the past, they have shown the skills to take on tough challenges. When they have taken on those tough challenges, they were able to try something new. When they have

tried something new, they have been affirmed how hard that must have been for them, and they were appreciated for sharing their experience. John further elaborated:

We express the gratitude we feel for the work that they put into this process, and we try to teach them to describe and remember how they feel in this moment of hard work. We then acknowledge how they made adult choices throughout this process. At this point we have made our way around the loop, consistently affirming the strengths the student has shown in the past, present, and hopefully will show when addressing future challenges. A crucial factor to consider with this strategy was the quality versus quantity effect. Quality should always play the most significant role and should always be the goal. It has to be authentic; and it has to come from a place of strength spotting. It was also important to note that during the affirmation circle, ideally, time should be treated as an irrelevant factor. Depending on particular student's ability, this process might vary in length of time to operationalize.

When we draw attention to the thoughts and positive actions of students, student then become self-aware. Affirming and reinforcing positive behaviours allowed the students to be more reflective and value their self-thoughts. When asked about the short term and long terms effects of appreciation and affirmation as a leadership strategy John expressed that;

The short-term effects of using an approach rooted in affirmation and appreciation are that our staff members become practitioners of the self-reflective process. They consistently challenge themselves to work on identifying positive feelings and allowing you to see the interconnected strengths of others. If you feel appreciated, supported and valued for your strengths, you are more likely to collaborate with a mindset that is open to being more appreciative and affirming to those around you. It is through this openness that we can increase our flexibility as individuals allowing our strengths to lift and add to the group. This is the long-term effect of this type of

strategy, to create a culture where all parties involved, where the staff and students' model for and share with, their strengths as a means to foster skill development and cultivate a culture of inclusivity through growth.

I observed that these approaches—strength spotting, affirmation and appreciation had been entrenched into all aspect of the FI program, making these the part of the school culture. The approaches were created for the FI students, but the staff members had been observed appreciating and showing gratitude to each other as well as the students. The outcome of such an approach was a relationship based on dignity and mutual respect. The focus was not on people's challenges but recognizing that growth was a process. Seashore Lewis and Murphy (2018) placed an emphasis on relationship building as an essential part of positive leadership. For John, working with a strengths-based model required him to base his interaction with the staff on appreciation and affirmation. He talked about the need to have an affirmation-based approach for interaction through staff morale and staff planning. In an interview, he shed more light on his relationship with the staff and the importance of using this approach in relationship building. He said;

It is not enough to assume that everyone within our staff is using their strengths all the time. It is my job to consistently affirm and compliment them when they do. It is important that both the students and staff feel appreciated for using their strengths because strengths are tied to individual values and traits and there is a vulnerability in the use of strengths as it often connects to our deeper selves. I need to recognize and affirm the commitment it takes to cultivate those qualities and share them with others. This needs to come with a commitment to authenticity. The model of affirmation and appreciation only works if it is authentic.

The affirmation and appreciation approach used in the FI program is also great tool accelerate the relationships building process. The students in the FI program were drawn more the staff

members who noticed pointed out the good things they did. In addition to strength spotting and affirmation, John introduced me to his third approach which is the gratitude and celebration approach.

### **Gratitude and Celebration Approach**

Gratitude and celebration are used synonymously in this case because gratitude is considered a form of celebration. The idea that small achievements that we do not necessarily view as celebratory but take for granted often are not worth celebrating is a mind-set that does not support affirmation. In an environment like this where affirmation was a guiding principle, people were celebrated regularly; the idea was that people recognize the strengths of others and celebrate positive interactions. At one point, John described the gratitude and celebration as key components in relationship building, he elaborated:

We had become great strength spotters, consistently able to shift our mindset to look through the lens of perceiving the strengths of each other and with our students. From there, we were able to start authentically affirming each other, ultimately learning to appreciate the strengths we valued and admired in each other. As a staff, our relationships with each other had become very trusting and positive. We were proud of one another. The behaviour of our students improved, and their relationships with the staff were stronger than before. It had become very evident that strength spotting and affirmation were changing the culture of our program, but we knew that there were still areas of student growth that had not progress the way we were wanted. Although our staff to student relationships were thriving, we still had not seen the growth in the peer to peer relationships that were wanting to see. The interactions between students were better, but they were not where we wanted them to be. We wanted the students to feel the same way the staff were feeling towards each other; we wanted them to know that their peer groups were supporting their strengths as well.

In the quotation above, John presented a process in which the three approach—strength spotting, affirmation and gratitude are used in the program. It is evident from the quotation these leadership approaches had created an atmosphere of trust and a community where staff cared for each other. A significant challenge that John talked about that arose from this strength spotting and affirmation approach, was that sometimes one can miss or take for granted how hard students are working on learning and practicing specific skills. He forwarded two reasons under which this was likely to happen:

One reason this can happen is that we often unconsciously undervalue the difficulty of skill because we as a neurotypical person do not really view it as a skill, rather a common practice. For example, just sitting beside someone at a table. For some students, that task could be one of the most challenging social customs to master, constantly leading to behavioural outburst or acts of non-compliance. Sometimes we struggle to realize the degree of difficulty because it is such a normalized behaviour.

The other reason he talked about was that when strength spotting and affirmation become a common practice, one tends to look for grand gestures or big acts of kindness; it is almost like one has become so used to recognizing strength that they are looking for something to surprise them. John stated that “In our case, we needed to get better at celebrating the little things, making sure students knew exactly what they did right, and teach them how to do that with their friends and families.” John added:

We had to teach our students how to celebrate social interactions, events, behaviours and acts of kindness. Especially ones that were shown as part of the peer to peer relationship. Teaching students how to celebrate was a hard concept to wrap our heads around, but ultimately, it led us to try out different strategies that we referred to as compliment transferring. The regulation of emotion to demonstrate self-expression is one of the most prevalent challenges that students in the FI Program are

experiencing. Behavioural, emotional and physical behaviours are often directed outward because the students are having difficulties expressing and understanding how they feel. The compliment transferring strategy gives them an opportunity to cultivate positive feelings in social situations with their peers without having to fully grasp the language or skills needed to compliment someone.

Because social interaction skills like showing gratitude are thought regularly, the student in the FI program have internalise it and have made it a daily routine. For example, there was a student who said “thank you” in every situation. Compliment transfer is another way through which social interaction is amongst students is promoted. John gave an example of a staff member only working in the affirmation and appreciation process by directly affirming student in a linear context. The staff member can affirm the student by having peer support the compliment. Participants in the focus group mentioned how these affirmative acts had been modelled onto the students. John elaborated:

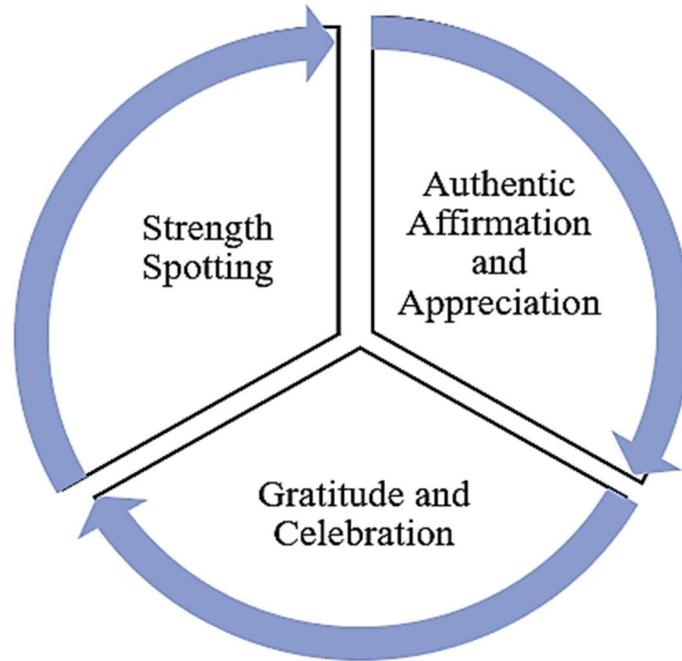
A staff member can use the group setting to provide multiple people in the group with an opportunity to individually affirm another classmate. For Example, a staff member working in a four student intervention group can say to another student, “Hey Mike, Ryan is doing such a great job waiting for his turn, can you let him know that you’ve noticed how hard he has been working?” Mike says to Ryan, “I know, he is working really hard. Thanks, Ryan.”

Although this may seem contrived, and in some cases, inauthentic, it is important to realize that these types of strategies are intended to teach a peer group how to compliment, how it feels to give a compliment, and most importantly how it feels to receive a compliment that is validated by their peer group. In concluding, he said:

Developing these skills are very important because we need students to learn how to cultivate feelings of positivity that are authentic and intrinsic. By practicing and

modelling this process, we can develop stronger ways to motivate them, with the intention being, trying to limit extrinsic motivators and teaching students to become appreciative, and invested in a culture of inclusiveness that celebrates more than occasions. Our goal is to teach them to recognize their interconnectedness through the value of strengths, the affirmation and appreciation of others because of those strengths and how to recognize the gratitude they feel when they celebrate their connections. By really focussing reaching educational and individualized goals through this process, our students are more compliant, less prone to physical behaviours (self-injurious or aggressive). They are becoming stronger self-advocates and developing friendships that once did not exist. Most importantly, this process has shown that a traditionally marginalized population of students, can become leaders, creating and fostering an inclusive culture whose reach extends beyond our classroom and school, into a broader community, serving a greater need.

John's three leading strategies are at their core centred on relationship building in the FI program. there is sufficient evidence from the data provided that once a positive relationship has been established, things automatically falls in place—the program flourishes, trust is established, staff feel a sense of community and fulfilment. Figure 4.4 below sums up the John's leadership strategies in used in the FI program



*Figure 4.4: Positive Leading Model Use by Positive Teacher Leader*

The three leadership strategies covered in this section were perceived to be most efficacious when used holistically. These strategies were pieced together from my observations and the interviews with John and became clear as we co-constructed it with time. When one starts looking for strengths in others, they are more likely to appreciate and celebrate those strengths. An important component of this positive teacher leadership approach was that it builds on efforts to dignify persons and support respectful relationships. The focus is not on what people are doing wrong or their challenges but rather what they are good at. An important take way from the John interview is the interconnectedness of the strength model. It is an example of how students and staff and build through each other's strengths in a mutually beneficial process.

## **Staff Focus Group Findings**

The focus group discussion was attended by 12 staff members, all educational assistants (EA) in the Functional integrated program. Two focus group discussions were carried out with the second being a continuation of the first, due to time constraints during the first session. In total, the discussions lasted for more than an hour. Having been in the school with these teachers for a month, I was able to establish a good relationship, which I believe was the reason for the high turnout.

There were seven prepared questions and a couple of follow-ups formulated for the discussions. The questions were presented to the participants corresponded to the study's research questions. It is important to reiterate that the focus of the research was on John as a case of positive teacher leadership. It was important to include his staff in order to gain a broader understanding of the influence of his practical and philosophical ideologies around positive leading.

The focus group findings are presented using both a deductive and inductive approach. The deductive approach focused on John's three guiding leadership principles; strength spotting, affirmation/appreciation and gratitude and celebration. Since these principles were purported to govern John's leadership approach, it was important to confirm and elaborate these principles in the experiences of those he worked with and to hear of the practical experiences of his staff members. Questions were then formulated to capture these experiences and their influences on both students and staff.

In the second part of this section, findings are presented using an inductive approach—data were categorized and presented under the different emerging themes. The questions in this part were designed to establish a subset of the three principles from the perspective of the staff. The staff members were asked to identify other principles which

could be added to the list of three and to share their views on whether a positive work environment is sustainable for long term learning.

### **Authenticating John's Leadership Strategies**

The participants were asked to describe how John's three strategies—strength spotting, affirmation and gratitude, as mentioned above, impacts their experiences and the extent to which it has enhanced their work. All the participants agreed that they see and used these principles every day. The staff members had become so comfortable within this approach to leadership that they frequently used the three strategies, sometimes without even thinking about it or doing so consciously. One participant said, "these principles are so entrenched within our group that it has become a part of us." He further explained that using the student with whom he was paired as a prime example of how the strategies had enhanced his work. He said:

Strategies rooted in affirmation, strength spotting and positive reinforcement have impacted and greatly improved my relationship with a student who displayed more aggressive behaviours. When I started to use these strategies, I saw such an improvement with his behaviours and actions. He has gotten much better in terms of how he deals with different situations, interactions, and his relationship with the community has grown into something I could not have predicted. More can be gotten from these students if one is positive, polite or makes an extra effort to understand them from a strength perspective. Bringing more to the forefront in terms of being positive is important. It reinforces the best behaviours in the student because it feels more supportive and authentic when we can find a common ground to build a meaningful relationship with the students.

These strategies have had a significant impact on relationship building on staff and students. In the example above, the participant demonstrated how students have able to make a quick

turned around from a negative behaviours due to the introduction and implementation of these strategies.

Another participant emphasized the need to continually use positive reinforcement techniques with students and colleagues; she said, “we are constantly using positive reinforcement on our students every time they do something right.” She further gave credit to John for introducing and promoting the idea of positive reinforcement. She said:

At first, it felt odd that we were always asked to clap and give an excessive amount of compliment to students. Later became contagious. Today, as EA’s, we have to model leadership for these students, and the students are catching on because we are demonstrating that leadership too. Because they have caught on with that, they have become more supportive of each other. A student who is not willing to participate in an activity, for example, is likely to be persuaded by a friend instead of us as EA’s. When such an initiative is taken by another student towards a friend, we do not hesitate to appreciate and celebrate that action. What that tells us is that these students are consistently learning how to be leaders and good friends. They have taken that role on to be a leader, a friend and compassionate human beings.

It is amazing how the strategies are trickled down from John to the students. The teachers took on these strategies and passed them down to the students. Transferable is important in sustaining leadership skills and philosophies.

Participants suggested that positive reinforcement or affirmation also took different forms, including having fun with co-workers. A participant stated that “joking around and having fun with light-hearted people is also a form of affirmation experienced in the group because using humour and being light-hearted balances with some of the challenges” within their work. The participant further stressed the need to catch a little fun at work. She explained:

There is also a time and a place for that fun. Being able to laugh and joke with students and co-workers shows the human side of you— that you are not just about reaching goals one way. There are so many different ways to reach goals, and sometimes it comes from just learning to laugh together. When the students see that from their EA's that teaches them that there are many different sides of people and that it's okay for them to show different sides as well. I really appreciate co-workers who are light-hearted and make jokes from time to time. John is excellent at that because he can take that fun and dish it out to everyone. You could be having a stressful day, and John can recognize it, say something funny, or just challenge you to laugh at something rather than take it personally. He can just change your mindset or mood instantly.

Most people would perceive the issue of having fun at work synonymous to laziness but the this could not be further from the truth. John has established a fun working environment which have seen a reduction in the stress levels.

The participants appeared to believe that John's three principles were a significant factor in relationship building. An excerpt from an educational assistant participant from transcript reads:

I think all these principles help to build relationships among students and staff. These principles bring us together as a community. So, we are stronger together. When these relationships have been established and strengthened, it becomes easier to deal with a crisis. For example, when a student is struggling, there is always another staff or a friend of the student who can recognize that struggle, and in a really amazing way, try to relate, console or find a way to connect with them. It really does create a learning environment that is genuinely supportive.

The principles were also believed to have increased staff efficiency and performances, especially with the students. Participants agreed that they had recorded significant improvement and job satisfaction since John's arrival three years ago as the program's teacher and leader:

Strength spotting has much to do with organizing people differently. Before the arrival of John, a lot of us were displaced and had no idea what we were doing. Staff members were most likely to be paired up with students that they have shown success with. The problem with that is that we all became good at working with specific students, rather than being able to work with every student. By using a strength spotting approach, I've been able to strengthen my skills by working with several students in a lot of different ways. Even though I've been working with a greater variety of students, I feel more supported than I did working with one because we now get to do more work in group settings. This allows me to see how my colleagues are working with the same groups of students that I am. I can watch their interactions and learn from them throughout the day. Understanding the strengths of my colleagues have helped us to avoid obstacles or overcome tough challenges when they arise.

The changes that have been recorded since John took over as the special need teacher and a coordinator is remarkable. Staff member have been able to improve and strengthen their skills. Another participant further explained the importance of knowing the strengths of students and colleagues. She said:

For me, knowing the strengths of my colleagues allows me to guide the students better. For example, if a student is non-compliant, I can use the positive relationships they have with other staff to help correct the behaviour, or to motivate the student. For example, how would you behave with staff x? She told me that when you're working

with her, you are such a great listener. Because our staff are developing such strong relationships with so many students, we can use the strengths of our colleagues to motivate and affirm students, improving our relationships with them.

In my observations, I noticed that student felt more comfortable and safer around the staff they had been paired with. The staff used those positive relationships to influence students' behaviours. Another participant recounted:

If I am having a big problem with a particular student, especially in my afternoon, if I know somebody that knows that student very well, in that situation that strength comes in handy. I am aware that the staff knows the student very well and I know the staff very well, together we can diffuse that situation quickly without the student getting too agitated. In that case, working with each of our strengths, we can keep that student calm and likely get them into the best spot for learning.

There was a day a student was acting up and John had identified the connections I had with the student. He immediately asked me to take the student for a quick walk and by the time we returned, the student was calm enough. John identified the strengths in me and paired us up which helped stabilize the situation.

Participants also referred to the principles as a source of motivation at work. They feel much better and could do more because their efforts were recognized and appreciated. Many had something positive to say about the contributions of the leadership towards that positive feeling.

John displays positive reinforcement all the time—he tells us we are doing a good job all the time. I always feel appreciated. I would do a lot for somebody that appreciates me. John appreciation is always coming from a good place. He has a good heart. He does not just say things to compliment people unless it is sincere. He is always checking in to make sure that everyone is feeling confident and feeling prepared. He

has a fantastic memory which allows him to remember and notice a lot more than one can imagine. He practices what he preaches, which makes him a unique leader. When assigning tasks, he takes the most challenging. He will never ask us to do something he will not do.

I had quite an encounter with John and on every instance, he made sure I was being appreciated for the things I did. John was more concerned with his staff and student placing them their wellbeing above anything. I recalled an end of year banquet celebration where John took leadership from the preparatory to the executive phase. I remember arriving half a minutes earlier and saw John making the salad. In most organisations, activities like making salad wouldn't even be a responsibility of the leader of that organization. his simplicity is what separated him from leaders

The participants reported that the principles had guided them and instilled in them positive values such as care, compassion, forgiveness and sharing. A participant said:

We do affirm each other, and John does affirm us too, which helps us to do our duty to the best of our ability. What this kind of programming and positive leadership has brought to us is the conviction not only to see what we do as more than just a job. It has instilled in us values like giving more than what's required—we care, we stay longer on the job than required, we do the little tasks that turn into something big, we trust that John will help us get better. John always says, 'we are in a profession of giving,' I think when your efforts are being appreciated and recognized, it's so much easier to go the extra mile.

Compassion, love, care, friendly act which I observed frequently. I was a beneficiary of these values which made my stay memorable. The staff were always concerned about my wellbeing and the development of the project. It was evident that these values had become part of the culture

The participant gave examples of situations where they had shown forgiveness and compassion. A focus discussion participant talked about the need to develop a culture of forgiveness, especially in such an environment. She said:

Always learn to forgive. There are instances where a student will attack you. You must be prepared to deal with the situation and then bounce back and be forgiving at the same time. For some students, they can be so impulsive; their roller-coaster is too much, they can get upset, hit you, turn around, apologize and then compliment. Usually, they only act that way when they cannot express what they need, or we cannot understand what they need. I think it is crucial to figure out a student so that we can figure out why they are having those types of challenges, not take them personally, move on and try super hard to give them the benefit of the doubt as we recognize that they are learning and we are teaching them. From that perception, it is easy to address and forgive them— ‘I know what you wanted and am sorry that this happened to you, but let’s move on, and we will figure it out together. There is an element of trust and forgiveness there.

Working in such an environment and with special need student requires a compassionate and a forgiving approach in dealing with them. Forgiveness is a value that was identified with all the staff.

John’s three guiding leadership principles seemed to have had a long-lasting effect on his staff. Most of the participants admitted that these principles and related practices had influenced their lives both professionally and personally. They also emphasized that these had influenced more than the culture within the FI Program; these principles had impacted the whole school. A participant recounted:

I notice with myself that I have become more patient, looking at things positively and always ready to switch gears. These attributes have been carried over into my

personal life and to other areas outside the school. The principles and values I learn here are what I take out of the school and share with my family, friends, and community. I have friends outside of our program that has recognized changes in my way of seeing things. They have commented, ‘wow! You always look at things from a positive angle’. It’s amazing to me, because these changes that have been noticed in my personal life are coming as a result of being in this environment for six hours every day and being taught how to view things from a positive perspective. I have no doubt that these skills are being carried out into the community and in other aspects of my life.

As mentioned earlier, transferability of skills is essential in maintaining its sustainability. There is no use in cultivating positive values if it can not be used to impact the lives of others. The participants all said these values have had a significant impact on them and those around them.

Another effect of John’s leadership strategy cited by participants was its transferability and potential to build confidence and develop good work ethics among students and staff. For example, instant gratification through affirmation or gratitude could change a person’s mood to the better, allowing them to go on doing the same to others in a similar situation. A participant explained that:

In the short term, an act of affirmation or gratitude can change the mood of the student instantly. You can see their body language improve immediately. In the long term, self-confidence increases. The students start initiating this gratitude and celebration strategy with their friends—they start saying thank you, start complimenting each other and really become appreciative to their friends. It becomes a chain reaction.

Another participant shared her experiences on how the principles had affected the students. She added that:

When you affirm and show the gratitude to students, they intern do that to each other. Sometimes you hear the student say to each other ‘good job’ or that was “awesome,” it is almost infectious in a way. I took student x to a restaurant here in the city for a volunteering program, and the people in the community started giving him affirmation. It was amazing to watch the affirmation process come from more than just us at school because it was now members of the community seeing this. They came up to him and thanked him for cleaning the table very well. They acknowledged how hard he was working, and he even got tips from some customers. His expression showed a sense of fulfilment. When he later approached me, I said to him, ‘see I am not the only one noticing, other people, are noticing that you are working very hard and doing a good job.’ It was amazing to see how the appreciation strategy affected his work ethic. He worked harder, he was more willing to take advice, and he became so proud of his accomplishments. It is contagious; they like hearing affirmation from other people, and when our students get a chance to show their strengths in community settings and community members notice the effort, we all benefit. Our community becomes more inclusive.

The trickle down of these principles and strategies are visible amongst the students. Their expression of gratitude and affirmation to one another is an evident that the students were modelling on the strategies.

The views and experiences of the staff were in line with those expressed by John in the interview section of this chapter. The rationale for presenting these strategies to the staff was to establish the impact of the strategies on the staff and to determine the extent to which these were expressed in their experiences.

## **Other Leadership Strategies and Principles**

In this section, the findings are framed by the responses of educational assistants' responses when asked to suggest other strategies or factors that they might have experienced under John's leadership. What might be added to this list of three leadership principles? What makes this environment a positive place to work? The contributions or responses of the participants were then grouped into the six themes: cultivating trust, a sense of community, teamwork, positive environment, mindfulness and self-reflection.

### **A Culture of Trust**

Trust was one of those principles that participants mentioned continuously. In their view, trust was an essential component in relationship building. The participants noted a considerable level of trust among themselves and John. A participant said: "We must have each other's back in this environment at all times because if we do not trust each other, the team is likely to break." What was remarkable was that they expressed a firm conviction that John's trust in them was one of the greatest reasons why they felt like they were successful within their work assignments. When asked to describe the extent to which they believe John trusted them, a participant said:

John completely trusts us, one hundred percent. Do you know what that means to have a leader trust you? We have all worked for some leaders that have micro-managers, questioning everything we do. That type of leadership made us feel belittled. John doesn't work that way; John makes us feel like we are working with him, rather than working for him.

Most of the participants said they had been empowered as a result of John's trust. They shared instances where that trust elevated their self-esteem and bolstered their confidence.

I think I feel empowered in my job because John has verbally told me that he trusts me. For instance, there have been moments where I have doubted myself, as to whether I am doing the right thing with my student. In a moment like that John would make statements like “I trust what you are doing, do not second guess yourself, if you want to talk it over, let’s sit down and figure it out together.” Statements like this make you feel empowered.

Another participant added that:

He empowers us—he challenges us to make choices and support the choices we make. He is always offering support, challenging the way we think and adding to our choices. In my opinion, part of that good leadership is the trust he has in us, and us in him. He is aware that we work with these students, and we know the students very well, so he trusts that we know their personalities and strengths. He refers to us always as professionals, and he trusts our judgement. To be trusted with such responsibilities has increased my self-esteem and pushed me to always try to keep learning. The trust factor is so important because it changes how we view ourselves and allows us to let our strengths become more relevant in the learning experience.

All the participants agreed that trust was an essential component in leadership, especially in building relationships. A participant explained that

The students in our program are challenging; their needs are diverse and, in some cases, dangerous. If they do not trust you, they are not going to let you in their world. Until they feel safe and valued, you cannot go any further. The relationship is missing its flexibility. I think that the trust that John puts in us has taught us to develop more trusting relationships with our students because sometimes building trust takes a long time, and in the past, with other leaders, what they wanted done was put first, before building trust.

Trust was a component which was present in the FI program. I recalled just telling me how much he trusts the staff are doing a thing. The principal also mentioned the trust he has for John to manage the FI program. Trust is something that is build with time. These staff spend more time with the students and so, trust is built through mutual respect and consistency.

Another participant added that:

I think you cannot have trust until you build a relationship. This year we had a new student who came in with a lot of anxiety. At the beginning of the year, it was hard for him, he was always running outside and trying to get away, his past experiences with school wasn't great, and it took a long time for him to learn to trust us. John and I would continuously talk about the challenges this student was having, and John would tell me to trust in the process, keep affirming and work on celebrating everything.

He's just not ready to trust us yet; he's learning what this feels like. A few months into the school year, the student's behaviours changed dramatically, now that he trusts all of us, he sits in the classroom, he participates to the best of his abilities, and he has developed some friendships. It completely changed once he trusted us. Trust is very important.

The incident with the student mentioned above is an example of how people can change for the better when they operate in an atmosphere made up of trustworthy people. The student above showed a remarkable turned around in his behavior once there was trust.

A participant talked about trust as being reciprocal and that trust must happen both ways. She talked about the trust that existed between herself and the two students who were paired up with her. She said,

If we didn't teach each other how to develop trust in our relationship, it would not have worked out. At first, I had a difficult time understanding why John would pair me with these students. I felt like we had so many differences that it would be hard to

develop the relationships we needed to be successful. John and I spent lots of talking about how my strengths were needed to help compliment the strengths he wanted the students to work on. Although we seemed like opposites, this pairing was created because both the students and I needed to learn something from each other's strengths. John has such a different perspective when it comes to bringing together the strengths of other people; I think he has special power.

John has an overwhelming influence on his staff and students. Some participants in the focus group referred to his superpowers as Merlin (a fictional magical character in the movie Merlin), Dumbledore (a fictional character in the movie Harry Potter). These characters were similar in that they were all visionary leaders working towards an objective.

### **A Sense of Community**

The participant expressed some degree of connectedness with one another. During the engagement period, I also experienced a feeling of belonging—people genuinely care about you and were always willing to help you to the best of their ability. A participant went to the extent of calling the FI program a family. She stated that:

I have always said this is not just a community here; it is a family. I call this my Gateway family. The meals we have on short Thursdays, feel like a family meal to me—we all come together, break the bread, pray and then eat. That, to me is what family does.

When asked about how John acts within his role as the leader in creating this “family” out of people from different backgrounds and ability sets, another participant explained:

By focusing us on the importance of positive leadership and affirmation, John has created a conducive atmosphere for us to grow into something more than a community. Our students are here for eight years. We are going to have ups and downs, we are going to fail sometimes, but just like a family, we know that we are

going to appreciate the attempt more than the result. When you feel appreciated, you are more willing to put in your best at work. If you do not feel appreciated, you will not. It is almost impossible to grow in a negative environment. Thus, focusing on that positivity lets us grow to the best we can be, which to me is the goal of any family.

The love that existed among these staff members is overwhelming. They cooked, cleaned and had lunch together every day like a family. Using the word “family” in the workplace invokes a different kind of feeling. I recalled a staff told me family is not necessarily biological ties, but family is where you feel loved.

### **Teamwork**

The participants reported having a high team spirit. They worked collaboratively in developing students’ skills, designing activities for students, and implementing new teaching approaches and strategies. It was interesting to see how leadership was manifested through collaboration and teamwork. When asked why teamwork was so important in an environment like this, a participant said

if one is struggling in a certain area, he/she can lean on the strength of a colleague for guidance. When you use the perception of strength spotting, it stops you from viewing your colleagues as competitors, because you realize that through the strengths of the group, we can share the stresses and increase the celebrations. Even if you are not having the best day, you can lean on someone who is to help you refocus.

Competition is something good in organisations where the objective is to maximize profit, but in an area like education where the focus is on wellbeing of students, competition is not necessary. The staff members at FI do not see themselves as being in a competition, rather they emphasized collaboration.

Teamwork was vital in such an environment because it created supports and empowered other staff by removing constraints that may have otherwise impeded their work.

A participant gave an example of how they relied on each other to overcome challenges. She said:

Take a student, for instance, who is not willing to participate in an activity or listen to me. In such an instance, I can seek help from a colleague who has a good relationship with that student. It would be impossible to ask help from a colleague had it been a different environment, but here the story is different. I always ask myself why stress and struggle and get all emotional with a student when you can use relationships that already exist within the class to foster the development of the skills we need to work on.

Even though staff members have got students assigned to them, they still build relationships with other students not under their control. In an event where a staff is absent, it becomes easy for another person to take over his/her student. I also noticed the staff working together in the garden, to design and execute projects. Team spirit is what keeps the group together and fosters unity.

Another participant reechoed the belief that working together as a team helped to build relationships and unify people. she said:

Early this year, John's focus on our professional development program was to really take an in-depth look at identifying our characteristics through strength spotting. This training taught us that there is a spectrum of how we view the strengths of others, and often, this spectrum is impacted by the strengths we have in ourselves. For example, staff whose strengths are rooted in kindness can often come off as intrusive when kindness is used in excess. By learning how to recognize the strengths in others, it really challenged my perception of how I view others around me. Things my colleagues did, or the way they acted, no longer annoyed or bothered me. I learnt that they weren't acting a certain way to be intrusive or off-putting, but they were using

their strengths. For whatever reason, at that moment, they weren't lining up with mine. It's a powerful shift in perception when you stop looking for things that others are doing wrong and start trying to recognize when others are using their strengths. You really start to appreciate them and their efforts a lot more. Often trying to pair up some of their strengths with yours. Learning how to shift that perception really has improved our ability to work as a team. We can better deal with the students because we are not focused on the frustration or the thing that divides us but on the things that brings us together. The students see that, and they begin to model that behaviours as well, focusing on strengths.

It is clear from the perspective of the participant above that when we understand others and relate with them from an area of strength, conflict and misunderstanding becomes limited. This is because we are not being judgmental of them but focusing on what they have to offer. There is no doubt that everyone loves to be recognized and appreciated for what they do best. An advantage of approaching things from a point of strength is that it becomes easier to relate with everyone.

### **Positive environment**

The focus group discussion participants agreed that a positive environment was necessary for the school to flourish. They attributed the success of the FI program to the positive approach instituted by John. Different benefits of this approach were highlighted. A participant said:

Being helpful, kind and showing reciprocity makes the environment much better to come into. For students and staff, the environment becomes less scary and more supportive. A positive feeling is necessary for learning, students are not going to take the necessary risks that they need to if they don't feel like the environment is there to allow them to feel safe in their own choices.

If the school environment is positive, teacher-teacher and teacher-student relations is bound to be positive. The energy in the FI program is overwhelming. Just coming into the environment and watching the collaboration and love that goes into educating the students is something that lightens up and put a smile on my face. The emphasis here was that if the environment has positive energy then those within the environment will absorb this energy and release energy to others:

Any person who comes into a negative environment is bound to feel down. You can come in as positive as you want, but if you walk into a negative environment, it just drains you and then you become part of that negative pool. It is hard to sustain a positive attitude when you come into a negative environment.

Participants recalled events that had shaped their perception of positivity. A participant said, “There are two positive approaches that John has taken, which has earned him much respect from me,” she further explained the first of these:

At the end of the 2018 school year, a student registered in our program from another school, to start in our class in September. There was so much fear, negative reports, and challenging history that followed him. We were all scared and nervous because his needs were so well documented, but John said something that changed how we all felt, he changed how we were all viewing this student. He said, “I’m not really going to read too much into anything from the past, we will be mindful of the past, but we won’t let it influence what we do here. He asked us all a question, “Based on the philosophies we use, the way we treat students, the way we trust in each other, can anyone tell me reasons why this student wouldn’t be successful in our program?” We couldn’t give him an answer. The truth is that you are always going to find trouble if you expect it; the same can be said about success.

The example above is a clear indication of a positive mind-set. John made a choice to ignore the past of the student giving him another opportunity. John showed leadership by when he focused on the student's abilities and strength instead of the negative records of the students. This action is the strength spotting strategy in practice.

Another staff member expressed that John's perspective had led them to view students in a different light, she mentioned that John's perception of a specific student in one of their staff meetings was an enlightening way to look at how important this student was to create a positive environment. She said,

John described a student 's non-verbal, limited mobility. This student who needed assistance in every area of independence (personal care, accessibility, and communication) was arguably most important student in our classroom when it comes to creating a positive environment. She teaches everybody in the room to be a better person. Too often, students with their diverse set of needs are defined by what they cannot do; but let's look at what she is doing for her classmates. Her needs are teaching our students how to show empathy, how to be nurturing, how to recognize that difference doesn't mean worse; it just means that she can do things that they can't. I never saw things like that until he said that, and it changed the way we looked at teaching other students about her.

Sometimes it is necessary to take a second look at a student's abilities rather than dismissing students who do not fit a particular narrative. John was able to see pass the student's shortcomings and looked attentively to what the hidden potentials. John saw potential where other had failed to see. This example is a clear evident that everyone, no matter their condition has something to offer. If we could just look a little deeper, our schools will be a better place.

Having a positive mindset does not mean ignoring the negative things; it means being aware or mindful of your negative biases but choosing and challenging yourself to see things positively. John was highly aware of this. This is why he trained his staff to recognize those negative biases when these arose. A participant said;

After John taught us about the negativity bias, I could see myself having this bias. Being negative is never something that comes consciously for me, but I do catch myself being negative sometimes—you walk into a situation with the mindset that whatever intervention you have is not going to work out, and you wait minutes later to realize everything is working. Reflecting on that, I realized there was no need to be negative as I did. I should probably work on approaching things with a more positive mindset.

Everyone has got prejudice. Being aware of those prejudices and making deliberate effort to counter them is what makes a person mindful. Based on the staff's position, a positive mindset is not one with the absent of negative thoughts or bias but one that recognizes these thoughts and makes deliberate attempts to focus on the positives.

### **Mindfulness and self-reflection**

Participants praised the efforts of John with respect to his promoting self-reflection. Self-reflection was described as a form of mindfulness: a participant said:

I have heard John said mindfulness. Self-reflection is mindfulness in a way. It is being able to process and take in the things that are happening, while they are happening to at least look back on them and take them—how you approached that situation, what got you there.

There are several activities that John had initiated, aimed at promoting this self-reflection and mindfulness amongst the staff. An example of these activities was a reflection piece that staff members were required to write at the end of every year. It comprised of

questions such as ‘what did you learn this year that positively impacted your work? What are you grateful for this year? What moments made your job great this year? All these questions were designed for educational assistant participants to reflect on their practices and become more mindful of their impact on the students, their colleagues and themselves. I have heard John saying:

I believe that in order to provide students with the best educational experience, then as a staff, we need to be reflective practitioners. We need to be able to answer challenging questions about work and progress with students. Why is this skill important to learn? How does my language use impact students learning? What strategy do I use when I am trying to motivate a specific student? How can I better support my colleagues? In what way can I make this the best possible period/day/month for students that I am working with? To serve the need of our students, the importance of collaborative and personal reflections is vital to student success. A staff that is united through collaboration creates the most consistent learning environment for students who thrive in consistency-based programming.

The staff members in the FI program engages in a lot of reflective practices. I had the opportunity to take a look at one of the reflective tasks given to the staff at the end of the year. The questions posed to guide the staff through the reflective process were geared at making them more appreciative of their effort and the processes in educating the students throughout the year. This form of reflection is not a common practice in most schools. Staff members had the opportunity to look back and reflected on those instances which passed away because they were caught up in the moment.

When participants were asked how writing down this reflective piece at the end of the year had impacted them, one of them said:

Many times, when I reflect on those things, I feel blessed to know I was able to experience them because you never know when it would happen again. It sometimes sucks to hear someone tell a story and you are like—I wish I saw that; I wish I were there to see them reach that level. So, it is helpful when you have the experience, and you can write about it and reflect on it.

Another participant added that:

Sometimes I am so busy being in the moment of my day that I only realize when I reflect—wow! that was a beautiful moment. My student keeps me hopping till afterwards when I sit down at the end of the day and reflect on my day; I can say; ‘Wow! That was a special moment’. So, it is helpful to reflect because the day is always busy.

It takes leadership to create an environment where: relationships can flourish; people can work collaboratively in teams; people are ready and willing to adopt positive values and can consider each other family. Throughout the discussion, participants kept reminding me that all these were made possible through the leadership of John. Everything that was discussed in the focus group correlated with John’s narratives. His strategies were well digested, and everyone seems to be on board with these. His leadership approach had produced a ripple effect, which had been felt right down to the student. The students were observed by this group of educational assistants to model expressions his principles, in their practices.

All the educational assistants who took part in the focus group discussion agreed that they had experienced the three strategies that John had mentioned in his interview. They affirmed that positive reinforcement, strength spotting, and appreciation occurred frequently in their experiences. The participants claimed these strategies had instilled in them positive values, build positive relationships and boosted their confidence. The participants also

identified additional strategies and principles used in the program. These strategies included the building a culture of trust, teamwork, fostering a positive environment, and mindfulness and self-reflection.

### **Interview Findings with the Principal**

The principal and John's staff members were included in this study to provide a broader understanding of John's leadership influence on those working with him in the school. The interview with the principal took place in her office. The interview was brief because of her tight schedule. The interview took place at a time when the school year was coming to an end, and the principal was busy with reports and students' graduations.

The findings in this interview are presented in two parts. The first parts review answers to questions pertaining to John's leadership approach and qualities from the perspective of the principal. The responses are then grouped into a number of themes: Collaboration and strength spotting; trustworthiness and empowerment; and consistency in leadership approach and transparency. The second part of the principal interview findings pertain to the perceived impact of John's leadership on the school culture, from the principal's perspective.

#### **Collaboration and Strength Spotting**

When the principal was asked to describe John's FI program leadership approach, she first identified collaboration and strengths spotting as the two main approaches used in the FI program. She arrived at this view based on her observations and the progress reports issued to her regularly. She explained:

He is very collaborative and focuses on people's strength. He tries to create situations and scenarios that are based on people's strength and the feedback that he's received from them and empowers them to be able to do those things but that's not without a

lot of work on his part of making sure he understands people and the students and creating some good situations so that there is a higher chance of success happening. Apparently, the focused-on strength spotting was a strategy everyone seems to be on board with. It was amazing how the principal so clearly articulates this strategy. She did not hesitate to voice her approval and satisfaction of John's leadership. She said:

John has done wonders with our FI program, so I am extremely satisfied. He does exceptional work. He's got a big task of not just managing the FI students but also has a large educational assistant staff. He makes sure that all the pieces go together, so the students are getting the learning and support they need, and that the staff are having job satisfaction and feeling like they are contributing. John does a good job of bringing the strengths together to get the best outcome, and it's been very successful. He is also very collaborative with the other learning assistant teachers and our Alternative Education program. They've got some overlap, but they work closely together to use their EAs and staff in the way they have their students. They make the most they can with the resources they have and to ensure that some successful outcomes are coming from the learning and what's happening every day.

John has an extraordinary leadership and managerial skills judging from the principal's perception of him. His ability to manage a huge staff and the students is an evident of these skills. School management is often reserved for principals and administrators, but to see a teacher managing a program like John is not common. One remarkable thing identified here is that he involves everyone in the management of the program.

The efforts of John to promote collaboration through strength spotting had earned him full recognition across the school. The principal's comments on John's work were evidence that his strategies were yielding positive outcomes.

## **Trustworthiness and Empowering.**

Trust is vital in relationship building. Throughout the findings, participants had mentioned that John was a trustworthy person with whom they had enjoy working. The principal shared the degree to which she trusted John's leadership, when she said,

John is very down to earth, and what you see is what you get. For any leader to be successful in any capacity, you will have to be genuine. So, you can't be saying one thing and thinking you're trying to get them to do something else or try to avoid a situation where the scenario is not going to be very great. You have to talk about all the challenges, good or bad. You need to be real with people and let them know exactly what's going on even though it may not be what they need to hear. That builds trust. I think one of the biggest things that John has done is to build trust with the people that work with him. They trust, first of all, that he's shown that he knows what he is doing with the schedule and they've seen how to works with the students. They see that he is taking what they say into consideration and that he has had success with the programming, so they trust him. So, the way you talk to people or treat them is important factors in building trust. John is very sincere and will not, all of a sudden, do something that catches you by surprise.

Trust is a value that goes hand in hand with competency. Part of why John is trusted is due to his competency in the job. He also trusts those with whom he works with which makes the trust piece reciprocal. The principal talked largely about trusting John do to what is right because he knows what he is doing. Trust also works with a person's character like honesty and sincerity, all of which have been established as a hallmark of John.

Empowerment was another important dynamic that played out in the school environment. Empowerment goes together with trust because to allow someone to manage a program, you must trust their decision making and their competence. The principal

continuously expressed her trust in John's approach as a positive teacher leader, which is why she had allowed him to sort out his own program design and processes. It was interesting to see how empowerment was trickled down from the principal, then through John to the staff and then to the students. The principal's trust of John to do a great job had allowed him to fully lead and manage the FI program. John, in turn, trusted and empowered his staff who served as an example for students with respect to empowering each other. In the interview, the principal justified her trust in John's leadership and why she had chosen to empower him rather than try to control everything. She said:

I do not micromanage John. He is the expert and knows more about his area. As the principal, I cannot be the lead in every area. First, it would be physically impossible. Secondly, it wouldn't even be the right thing to do. We have people on our staff that are experts and know more than I about their areas, and I provide support. John and I have had several conversations in the past, and he's shown me a lot about his program in binders. He does keep very good records, and I'm sure you've seen a lot of his stuff. They are very impressive, and he does make sure to celebrate their successes and to record those celebrations, so you'll see lots of pictures.

Most often it is difficult for administrators to admit they cannot do everything. The principle's decision to empower John and rely on experts to do what she is unable is a sign of humility which is absent in many educational establishments.

She added, citing an example of what she considered demonstrations of John's exceptional leadership practices:

He takes a leadership role like when we do the Grade 8 transitions, for instance. So, we need to make sure we have great communications with the Grade 8 schools who need to communicate with their families about what Gateway high school has to offer. John, as well as the other special areas in the school, do their presentations about their

areas. John and I would be similar in this way not to micromanage. You need to be there when needed, you need to know what's going on and when there is a problem, be there to intercede and empower people. They are strong, knowledgeable and invested in their areas, so giving them that lead is better for the programming in our school.

John's leadership influence was not limited to the Functional Integrated Program but had been felt throughout the school.

### **Consistency in Leadership Practice**

Consistent practices were another factor that the principal mentioned in John's leadership practice. She said:

He has beliefs, and his philosophy is quite strong about how he thinks he needs to manage, and he's been very consistent with that. So, you are not going to be caught off guard with John. If there is something going on, he is proactive and communicates whenever he can. On consistency, he is very levelled, and that's very important when you work with students that are not levelled (i.e. have ups and downs) and manage staff where some situations might cause emotions to come up. He is very grounded, and the staff know they can come to him to heal and figure things out. I talked with John in many instances, and one thing I noticed during our conversations was his consistencies. It is evident that these the principal and strategies used in the FI program have been so ingrained in him.

Consistency is very important in leadership. I was particularly amazed with John's responses to the questions I asked. He was quite consistent and did not mix things up. He was clear about his strategies and always came related his activities back to them. I found it amazing because every activity and project was tailored towards his leadership principles and strategies

## **Transparency**

Transparency was another leadership quality that John was known to possess, from perspective of the principal who elaborated on this quality as being essential in the workplace. She explained:

Transparency is very important when you work with staff, and that's why his position is unique in the school. John is very transparent and works with other adults and manages their schedules, so his leadership role in the school would be right up there as far as what other teachers might be doing in school.

The Principal eloquently described John's leadership approach in a manner that revealed some of his character traits. There was no doubt that these leadership practices and traits had had a significant effect on the school climate. The effect of this leadership is discussed below.

### **The Impact of John's Leadership on the School Culture.**

The impact of John's leadership had been felt throughout the school. Some of his initiatives, which has been discussed in the observation section of the findings, had gained significant attention and recognition. The principal highlighted two examples of how these initiatives had influenced the general school culture and changed perceptions around the students with disabilities. The principal explained:

Honestly, I have been so impressed with John's leadership and not just within his program but also how he's reached out to the rest of the school. If you've been here for the last month, then you were here for the celebration of our Special Olympics where they did the "walking through the halls." John had students come out of their classrooms and line the hallways to congratulate and celebrate our FI students.

Whenever possible, we create opportunities to integrate what John has in his program to what is happening in the school. Another example of these comings together is the

daily Coffee Card initiative. John brought that in last year, and it was very positive for the FI students as they learned some skills like counting the money but most importantly, the interaction that they have with the teachers and regular students, as they go through the halls, has been very positive.

The initiatives which have been introduced in the FI program have made the program and the students popular within Gateway High School. The initiatives have exposed them to the rest of the school, thereby increasing their chances of making new friends and changing perception about students with disabilities.

To conclude, the principal painted a picture of John as someone she confidently trusted. When the interview had ended, she looked at me and said, “If you are looking for positive leadership, John is a great example of that.” She also had this to say about the study, “I am sure John learned a lot about positive leadership and having this verbalized and described could help to take a step back and look at all the things that he is doing and see what else can be done. There are always ways we can do better. I am immensely grateful for John’s leadership in our school.”

#### **Summary of Chapter Four**

The chapter started with a detailed description of the FI program and how it is structured. Next, came the findings from my observation which was carried out with the used of a tool or guide, suggested by Cameron (2012), to identify and develop positive leadership by seeing positive deviant behaviours in the organization. The second part of the observations were based on leadership initiatives introduced by John to build students skills and to raise fund for the FI program. Next John’s interviews provided findings. The interview questions were designed to establish the methods and strategies he used in his leading. By his own articulation leadership strategies included at least three guiding principles: strength spotting,

affirmation/ appreciation, gratitude and celebration. The three strategies were understood to operate better when used together. The order in which these strategies appear was thought to be crucial. It is important for affirmation/appreciation to come before strength spotting because one cannot really move beyond the idea of a surface compliment or affirmation if one is not willing to reflect on what people are good at.

The findings from the focused group discussion were presented in two parts. The questions in the first part were designed to test the leadership strategies; strength spotting, affirmation/appreciation and gratitude/celebration. In the second part, the researcher designed questions to expand on and add to John's principles or strategies of leadership. It was also interesting to hear the different views on John's leadership approach and practices, and the perceived impacts of these on the FI community.

The participant affirmed that the three leadership strategies that John mentioned as his guiding principles were visible at all levels in the FI program. These governing principles had become part of the program's culture. As part of the culture, the educational assistants act on these principles with practices that were sometimes unconscious. The participants highlighted the importance of these strategies on their work and their lives. Firstly, they have been empowered to make decisions. The participants consider themselves leaders to the students. This feeling of empowerment was directly tied to the trust John had in his staff members. He referred to them as professionals and trusted in their judgments. The fact that he did not micromanage allowed the participants to be flexible in the ways that goals are attained. All in all, the leadership skills of participants had increased because they had been empowered to lead.

Secondly, the participants reported a significant improvement in positive values like care, compassion, the act of sharing, and forgiveness. According to some participants, these values had spilled over into their private lives and had a positive impact on them. One

participant reported going home with “too much love.” The participants also showed less interest in the money they earned; instead, their focus was on the impacts and the changes they had brought to the lives of their students.

Thirdly, these principles have instilled in the participants positive mindsets, which had changed their perceptions on many levels. In one instance, a participant had said that if we look for the trouble or negative in a situation, we will find it. The students in the FI program already have so many challenges, and it was thought to be unfair to focus on those challenges.

The interview with the principal was brief but relevant. The interview questions were designed to unveil her perceptions around John’s positive leading, and how John might fit her understandings of a positive teacher leadership. The principal identified some qualities in John, which might be considered hallmarks of a positive teacher leader. In one instance, she stated that “If you are looking for positive leadership, John is a great example of that.”

Strength spotting and collaboration are the first hallmarks she identified in John’s leading. She acknowledged that John had undertaken a large group of educational assistants under his management and that he had being able to empower them using strength spotting. She thought this was remarkable. Under his leadership, students are able to get the support they need, and the staff were satisfied in their work and felt strong belonging.

She also mentioned authenticity as another hallmark of a positive leader. She stated, “for any leader to be successful; they must be genuine. Genuine meant matching words with actions. The principal saw John as a genuine and trustworthy person. This was fascinating because a participant in the focus group discussion had referred to John as someone who would never ask them to do something, he would not do. The idea that trust was an essential ingredient in building relationships was one which was also shared by the principal. She

stated that “I think one of the biggest things that John has done is to build trust with the people that work with him.”

Consistency and transparency were also spotted by the principal in his leadership approach. John’s philosophy and leadership strategy was built around strength spotting and this was seen consistently throughout the organization from his staff members to the principal. The principal stressed the importance of being transparent and consistent when working with staff. In her opinion, John was transparent in the way that he worked and managed the staff schedule.

Lastly, the principal expressed her satisfaction in John’s leadership practices, which she said had been felt throughout the school. She recounted the initiatives adopted by Johns, such as the coffee cart, and the special Olympic Games, which had increased the interaction between the FI students and the rest of the school.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this research, therefore, was to contribute to the notions of Positive Teacher Leadership in schools by identifying elements and practices that constitute Positive Teacher Leadership and to describe the perceived impact of this role on school improvement. Two research questions were formulated to address the purpose of the study; (i) As a new and emerging concept, within the framework of school leadership, what does positive teacher leadership look like? (ii) What are the ideations, dynamics and practices that constitute positive teacher leadership in the case a selected school setting, from perspective of teacher, associated staff and principal? The concept of a positive teacher leadership is relatively unexplored. Because the concept and practice have not been widely researched, the capacity to review and compare the literature was limited. This study made use of Cameron (2012) positive leadership theories—practical strategies on how to engage in positive leadership within an organization. The central focus of his work was on positive deviance; which are behaviours that produce extraordinary organization and personal results. He made use of words such as flourishing, thriving, and virtuous performance to describe the deviant effect in the workplace. Positive deviance was enabled by four positive leadership strategies: enabling a positive climate, fostering positive relationships, enabling positive communication, and positive meaning (Cameron, 2012). The study also draws from leadership principles and positive school leadership (Louis & Murphey 2018; Cherkowski & Walker 2018) in order to situate the study within the existing literature.

The methodology employed to investigate the research questions was a qualitative case study. Three data collection methods were selection: observations, formal and informal interviews, and focus group discussions. The study focused on Mr. John—the sole special

education teacher in a high school with unique leadership skills and 12 staff members under his direct supervision.

### **Statements of Findings**

This section summarizes the main findings arising from the research questions. It generated answers for the research two research questions based on the findings. The remainder of the chapter consists of discussion, implications and conclusion.

#### **Statement of Findings from Observation**

Findings from observation. seemed to indicate an environment encourages compassion, forgiveness, gratitude, positive energy, use of supportive communication, capitalizes on strength and meaningfulness of work. These elements listed are precursors for a positive school climate, positive relationship building and energy and meaningfulness. Also, there were leadership initiatives carried out the school to development student schools and to make some money for the program in the process.

Findings from observations and participants transcripts seemed to indicate that the culture of professional collaboration and teamwork flourished in the FI program. The participant reported having a high team spirit and working collaboratively in developing students' skills, designing activities and implementing new teaching techniques. Participants talked about the importance of teamwork as a support system and a tool for empowerment.

The research findings and personal observations seemed to suggest that the atmosphere at the school is one of positivity. All participant at the focus group agreed that a positive environment was necessary for a school to flourish. They attributed the success of the FI program to positive approach introduced by John.

### **Statement of Findings from Interview**

John's leadership approach was a peculiar one. My findings indicated that there were three distinct approaches to his leadership; strength spotting, affirmation/appreciation and the show of gratitude and celebration. Part of John's role as a positive teacher leader was to identify the strengths, interests and abilities of both students and staff then use these to create a positive educational experience for each student, while fostering positive relationships and reciprocity.

### **Building through Strength-Based Approach**

Findings showed that the FI program was managed using a strength-based approach. This approach was wrapped around the idea that every individual in the FI program had something to offer regardless of their physical and mental state or ability. Inclusivity comes from the focus on what people are good at and what they can offer. The rationale for this strength-based approach was to create a culture that gave both staff members and students a place where they could use their strengths as a means to create learning.

John highlighted the short and long-term effects of using a strength-based approach in the FI program. In the short term, a focus on strengths required the identification of core values and personality traits in both staff and students, which were then used to enhance their lives and the lives of others around them. The more the staff members became aware of their strengths and those of their students, the more they used positive and affirming languages and showed more gratitude and support for one another. In the long term, the practice of strength spotting become internalized. People's perceptions of one another became rooted in their best qualities. There was a great feeling that came with another person recognizing what you are good at and seeing you in that light. Not only was this a dignifying approach to working with a student population who were often marginalized or vulnerable, but it was an effective way to build a team with minimal conflict; a team rooted in trust for one another.

## **Building Through Affirmation and Appreciation**

The research findings point to the use of authentic affirmation and appreciation as another strategy build into the John's leadership practices. Strength spotting was a great foundation to build relationships, but it was not sufficient for cultivating and maintaining an authentic relationship. Once a strength had been spotted, it then became necessary to affirm and appreciate the person with the strength. In the interviews John considered it both a part of his job and a personal obligation to continually affirm and give compliments to the staff members and students. Both staff and students must feel appreciated for using their strengths because strengths are tied to the individual's values and traits. John's sense of responsibility also required that he cultivate those qualities and share these with others.

Mr. John formulated a language-based strategy called the affirmation circle, which was a framework for solving behavioural changes that the staff faced daily. The circle of affirmation was a process rooted in four positive statements; "I can make adult choices," "I can solve tough challenges," "I can try new things," and "I am grateful." This strategy essentially created a circle of affirmation around the students' challenges and allowed staff members to create a looping effect as a means to support the student as they navigated through past, present and future outcomes.

The affirmation and appreciation approach had long and short-term effects. The finding showed that using approaches rooted in affirmation and appreciation allowed the staff to become practitioners of the self-reflective process in the short-term. They constantly challenged themselves with the work of identifying the positive and seeing the interconnectedness of strengths. Because the staff and students felt appreciated and supported for their strengths, they were more likely to collaborate with a mindset that was open to being more appreciative and affirming of others, including students and co-workers.

## **Building Through Gratitude and Celebration**

Gratitude and celebration were considered the cherry on the cake. They were a key component in relationship building in the FI program. John's leading strategies followed a circular process. Once the focused-on strengths became prevalent, this led to a shift in the mindset of both students and staff members. The staff then began looking for strengths as opposed to deficits. From there, they were able to authentically affirm each other, ultimately learning to appreciate the strengths and values in each other. Since the focus was on strengths, there was always something to affirm, appreciate, show gratitude for and celebrate.

The FI program benefited tremendously with the application of these positive teacher leadership strategies. Through these strategies, the students became more compliant and less prone to unhelpful physical behaviours (self-injurious or aggressive). They became stronger self-advocates and developed friendships that once did not exist. Most importantly, this process showed that a traditionally marginalized population of students could become leaders who created and fostered an inclusive culture which extended beyond the classroom and school, into the broader community, to serve a greater need. This approach was considered unique because it could be both learned and modelled.

Findings associated with John's positive teacher leadership strategies were also discussed in the focus group with the staff. All of the participant who expressed their views on John's strategies—affirmation, strength spotting and positive reinforcement said these had significantly improved the behaviour of the students and their interaction with each other. Since John had been around for three years, the staff members who had served under the previous administration were in a unique position to assess the effectiveness of the strategies. The participant each agreed to the use of positive reinforcement as a strategy for their students to enhance their relationships and self-esteem. Positive reinforcement and

affirmation had been entrenched within the group, so much that the student had begun modelling on them. Thus, producing a ripple effect.

The participants also concurred to John's three strategies as a significant component in relationship building amongst students and staff. They added that understanding each other strengths had helped in preventing obstacles, conflict and misunderstanding amongst them. Knowing the strengths of their co-workers played a significant role in fostering a spirit of unity and collaboration within the FI program. Participant recounted several instances where they had successfully resolved challenges involving students with the help of a co-worker. The regular interactions that staff members have with their students have enabled them to build a culture of tolerance and reciprocity. The relationships formed through strengths spotting created this genuinely supportive learning environment.

Participants concurred that the strategies had instilled in them positive values and principles that had significantly enhanced both their personal and professional lives. They mentioned care, compassion, forgiveness and sharing as some of the values that had been enhanced. They recounted instances where the use of these values had made a positive impact and turned a negative situation around. People found themselves acting compassionately towards others, caring and forgiving those who may have hurt them either consciously or unconsciously. The strategies were also referred to as a source of motivation at work. Most of the participants said they worked harder and put in their best efforts because they were appreciated continuously for using their strengths.

Findings also revealed that these strategies boosted their self-confidence and had challenged them to demonstrate sound work ethic. Constant expressions of gratitude and affirmations in the short-term appeared to change the moods of students or staff members for the better. In the long-term, these instilled self-confidence. Most participants said they felt

good when John gave them positive affirmation. They described their relationship with him and the other staff as one based on trust and mutual respect.

### **Responses to Research Questions One from Observations Focus Groups and Principal.**

This study produced insights into how we might better understand Positive Teacher Leadership (PTL) within the framework school leadership. Information that addresses research question one was generated from the formal and informal conversation obtained from John, the leadership strategies and principles obtained from the Principals interview and the focus group discussion

#### **Towards an Understanding of Positive Teacher Leadership**

Context played a significant role in understanding and defining positive teacher leadership for this case. This study was conducted at a high school with a focus on a special education teacher. To unpack PTL, several elements must be taken into consideration; teacher leadership philosophy, personality and leading strategies, and their impacts on both co-workers and students. In this study, I identified three main philosophies which informed decision making and management in the FI program. Strength spotting, affirmation and gratitude were strategies which helped fostered a positive climate, work environment, and positive relationships. John modelled his positive teacher leadership practices based on these strategies. The goal was to create the most positive learning experience for every student and to create an enabling work environment for the staff. Based on the findings of the study, Positive Teacher Leadership (PTL) entailed leading through strength building, positive affirmation and gratitude. Approaching PTL through strength spotting, affirmation and appreciation has the potential to empower staff members to be leaders themselves even when they do not consider themselves to be leaders. In this context, PTL created an environment where people were invited to thrive through their best practices.

### **Statement of Findings from Staff Focus Group Discussion.**

Several cultures and practices under which staff and students operate were uncovered in the course of the focus group discussions. Findings from the focus group seemed to indicate a culture of trust amongst staff and the students. The trust that exists in this environment is a component that has been used to enhance positive relationships. The participant confirmed that trust is an essential factor holding the group together. What is remarkable in the findings is that they all expressed a firm conviction that John trusts them even as they trust him. The participants also expressed a high degree of connectedness with each other. There is a sense of community that exists with some members referring to the FI program as a “family.”

Findings from focus group and interview and participants transcripts seemed to indicate that the culture of professional collaboration and teamwork flourished in the FI program. The participant reported having a high team spirit and working collaboratively in developing students’ skills, designing activities and implementing new teaching techniques. Participants talked about the importance of teamwork as a support system and a tool for empowerment.

The findings revealed a greater state of mindfulness and self-reflective practices amongst the staff. They recounted several activities which had been introduced by John to guide them towards becoming ever more conscious and aware of their environment. The participants mentioned a reflective task which comes up at the end of every year. This reflective writing is aimed at stimulating their minds so that they can recall and appreciate those moments they were too busy to recognize. The writing exercise contained questions such as ‘what are you grateful for this year?’ ‘what made your job great this year?’

### **Statement of Findings from Interview**

The interview with the principal was necessary for a broader understanding of John's leadership; the leadership impacts from the perspective of the principal. The interview findings were presented in two categories representing two main objectives. The first objective was to establish an understanding of John's leadership style from the perspective of the principal, while the second pertained to the impact of his leadership on the school culture. Most of the principal's responds were in line with responses gotten from the focus group discussions. It seemed that John's leadership style is consistent across the board.

Finding from the interview suggested collaboration and strength spotting as areas where Johns seemed to focus his leadership. The principal recognized the massive responsible John shoulders and commended him for his excellent approach in bringing students and staff together so that the needs of the student can be met.

The principal also mentioned trustworthiness and empowerment as factors characterizing John's leadership style. John was considered a trustworthy person to work with. The principal expressed her trust in John's ability to manage the FI program because he has continually showed his capacity in leadership. It is interesting to see how trust and empowerment go together. The principal trusted John with the management of the FI program; at the same time, John trusted in his staff to do the right thing. The staff members have been empowered to make decisions and participate in general decision making.

John's principles and strategies were described as consistent and transparent. John was described as calmed when working with staff and the students. He was considered to be very grounded, and the staff knew that they were welcome to demand support from him when necessary. Transparency was another leadership quality the principal had noticed. She stressed the importance of transparency when working staff members.

Finally, the principal highlighted the impact of John's positive teacher leadership approach to the overall culture of the school. The initiatives organized to expose the special need students to the rest of the school through fund raising activities was one area in which John had received accolades. These initiatives changed the perceptions of mainstream students and provided them with an understanding of what persons with a disability encountered daily. In her final words, she described John as a positive leader who had positively impacted many.

### **Responses to Research Questions two from Observations, Focus Groups and Principal.**

This section attempted answers to the question; What are the ideations, dynamics and practices that constitute positive teacher leadership in the case a selected school setting, from perspective of teacher, associated staff and principal? Responses to this question were generated from the focus group discussion, and the interview with the principal. From the Principal and staff members responses, a group of themes were identified which would constitute PTL. These themes were identified as factors which has promoted positive environment and wellbeing of the students and staff and has propelled the school towards flourishing. Positive teacher leadership involved taking a positive approach to leading. This approach has much to do with focusing on the strength of people, creating a culture of trust, instilling a sense of community, empowering others, and creating opportunities for both students and staff.

### **Discussion of Findings and Extant Literature**

From the findings provided, it is evident that positive teacher leadership was a composition of many variables coming together. These variables which have been mentioned in the findings included: The different leadership initiative, the positive climate (encouraging compassion, forgiveness and gratitude), the positive relationships (capitalizing on strengths, and positive energy), the positive communication (encouraging positive and supportive

communication) and positive meaning(cultivating meaningful work environment). Aside from creating an enabling environment, for school to flourish, character traits also play a significant role in determining PTL. Evidence provided in the finding points to traits such as trustworthiness, a collaborative and team spirit, mindfulness, compassionate, consistent, transparent and forgiving nature. The traits that have been listed are based on the findings in this study and are not necessarily a comprehensive list of PTL traits. Because leadership is often not associated with teachers (Harris, 2003), a positive teacher leader might be described as positive deviant for the simple reason that she/he brave the odds to create an environment where people can thrive, and schools of students can flourish.

Positive Teacher Leadership as it applies to this case study and context was constituted as a combination of strategies aimed at creating a positive impact on people, a personal conviction to serve others, positive and an optimistic mindset. Figure 5.1 represents a framework for understanding positive teacher leadership.

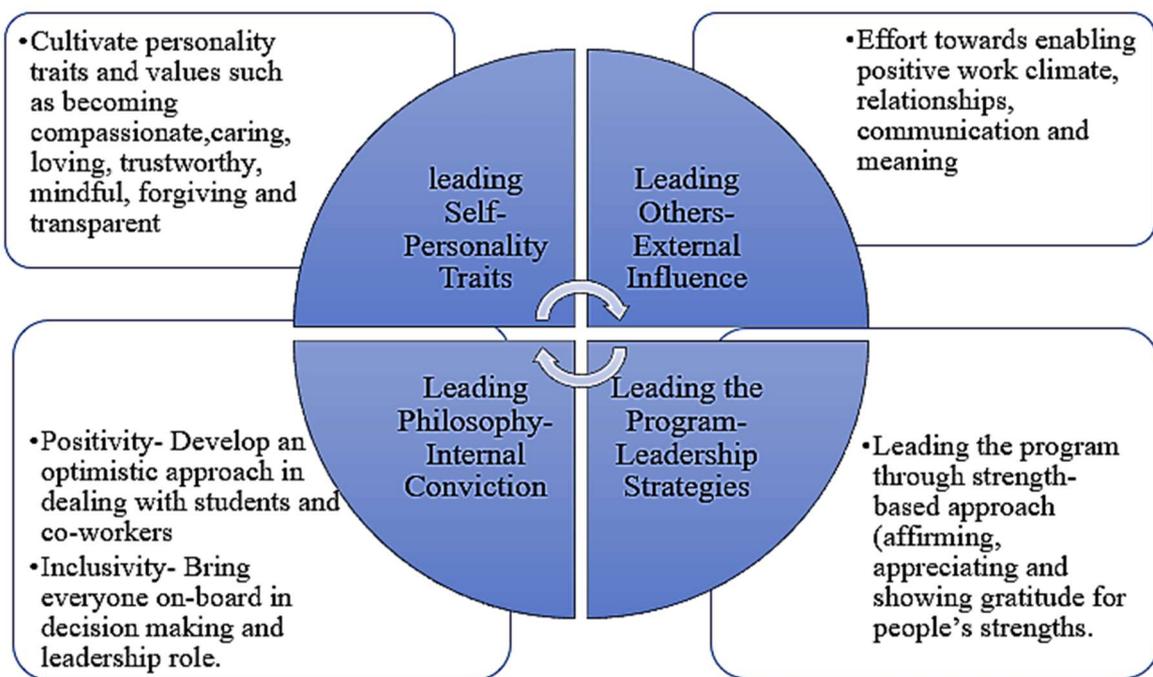


Figure 5.1: A Framework for Understanding Positive Teacher Leadership.

As indicated, the concept of PTL is relatively new in education. Figure 5.1 is a framework established from the study through which the concept and practices of PTL can be better understood. PTL has been framed from the combination of available literature on positive and school leadership (Cameron 2012; Cherkowski, 2018; Louise & Murphey 2018), and the finding from this case study. The PTL leadership framework is represented by four quadrants; each of the quadrants is a valuable piece to understanding what PTL constitutes.

The first quadrant leading self has much to do with personality traits. This quadrant—cultivating compassion forgiveness care... was manifest in the findings, especially with respect to facets of John’s personality. PTL must be able to look inward and bring out those values he/she wants the students and co-workers to enumerate. It is a well-documented assertion that “The work of the leader consists of influencing, through his or her value and behaviour, the motivations of the collaborator in order that the latter will seek to form with the former the richest possible relationship” (Cardona 2000, as cited in Louis & Murphy 2018, p. 23). A positive teacher leader sets a high standard of accountability for himself and his behaviours.

The second quadrant has to do with leading other: This quadrant was adapted from Cameron’s (2012) leadership strategies that were enabling of positive deviance. Positive teacher leadership enables thriving and flourishing rather than focusing on impediments in school. the positive teacher leader is one who helps bring out the best of human nature through enabling a positive work climate, a positive relationship, positive communication and positive meaning. The third quadrant represents the leading philosophy of the leader. This has a significant role to play in determining PTL. A positive teacher leader is one who has a positive and optimistic approach. This attitude was evident in the research findings. The FI program was instituted from an inclusive and a positive orientation standpoint with a focus on what is good in people. Louis and Murphy (2018) pointed out that a problem-solving

approach to leadership has more negative consequences than positive. One author added that “Positivism is a recent strand in organizational theorizing, focusing on the “best” of the human condition” (Fineman, 2006, as cited in Louis & Murphy, 2018, p.18). The fourth quadrant represents leading the program (school) through a strength-based strategy—affirming appreciating and celebrating people’s strengths. Data from the findings showed a significant benefit with the use of a strength-based approach. Through this approach, the students had become more compliant and less prone to physical behaviours (self-injurious or aggressive), a positive relationship based on reciprocity had been build and enhanced.

Findings from this case study engagement provided theoretical and practical strategies for how to engage in positive teacher leadership within a school. The findings of this thesis echo many of the same themes that are discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis. Cameron’s (2012) four leadership positive leadership strategies that enable positive deviance are reflected in these findings. The idea of enabling a positive climate, fostering positive relationships, enabling positive communication and positive meaning were all found to be in evidence and key aspects that John seemed to be promoting.

The focus on strengths and the promotion and development of positive energy are strategies implemented in John’s leadership and were experience as effective tools in the fostering positive relationships. is the view that it was more beneficial to identify and build people’s strengths rather than focusing on their weakness was sustained by all those interviews, in focus group and in observations (Cameron 2012). I also experienced some of these benefits, especially when it comes to addressing student behaviours and engaging them in tasks. The idea that focusing on strengths brings more benefit to a school is also echoed by Clifton and Harter (2003) who pointed that, school leaders who recognize and promote strengths are one-and-a-half times more likely to see success rates increase. The relationship between staff and students in the FI program is remarkably strong and deeply rooted in the

strength-based pairing instituted by John. While there is no consensus on an accepted definition, positive teacher leadership may be described as strength-based, focused on building and supporting positive relationships, enabling positive communication, and valuing of virtuous human capacities such as, compassionate kindness, caring, forgiveness, loving, gratitude, to name a few features (Cherkowski, 2018).

Even though servant leadership was not directly mentioned, my transcript findings and personal observations both suggested service for the benefit of others as a cornerstone for positive teacher leadership practice. John showed his commitment and dedication to serving his students and staff to the best of his abilities and described his profession as a ‘profession of giving.’ Greenleaf (2002) described this approach to leading as one which does not seek self-gratification and interest but instead steps back and supports the interests of the followers. The priority of a positive teacher leader is meeting the needs of others (Driscoll & McKee, 2017, as cited in Louis & Murphy, 2018) and inspiring hope in them (Walker, 2006).

Another take away from the findings, which resonates with the literature is that trust both in relationship building and as a personality trait are important for the positive teacher leader. Louis and Murphy (2018) considered relationship building as an essential component of positive school leadership, thus, encouraged leaders to foster positive behaviours such as trust. In the FI program, John gives different tasks to the staff to grow their ability to be independent and to become leaders themselves. Greenleaf (2002) suggested that guidance, empowerment and a culture of trust are among the unique characteristics of this style of leadership. Trust plays a central role in school flourishing and relationship building (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018). The principal confidently said to me that she had delegated the management of the FI program to John because of the trust she had for him. I witnessed and heard the same thing from John’s staff members, who confirmed that John trusted them with the students and treated them as professionals.

The ability to connect to students and co-workers leveraged by compassion, forgiveness and gratitude are themes echoed in the literature. These themes are displayed in the findings in this study, making it unique to positive teacher leadership. The presence of these themes is evidence of a positive school climate that is conducive for growth and development. Cherkowski and Walker (2018), have emphasized the important role compassion plays in building and sustaining relationships in the school milieu. The examples of John's compassionate response to recalcitrant students is a clear indication that compassion is a precursor to forgiveness. Compassion is said to be a central facet of teaching, and, therefore, teachers are obligated to nurture in them a caring approach towards every student (Goldstein, & Lake, 2000). Witnessing compassion in this environment has had a significant impact on me, creating a feeling of gratitude and leaving an impression on me.

Another key take away from this study is that the creation of such a conducive environment allows people to see that their work is having a positive impact and brings meaning and satisfaction to them. This observation is aligned with the perspective presented by Cameron (2012) on positive leadership strategy of fostering positive meaning at the workplace. A meaningful workplace is evident in the way the staff in the FI program related to each other and went on their day to day activities. The constant smiles and expressions of satisfaction from the staff involved in the program signified a sense of purpose and fulfilment. Most of the staff members told me how much their personal lives had been enhanced from the positive values they have adopted in the FI program.

Another important element I observed was John's dedication to preparing students for future opportunities. John's initiative towards ensuring that students had what they needed to grow and develop talents and skills was part of what makes him a positive teacher leader. The initiatives he introduced were geared towards teaching the skills that aimed to integrate

the student to work-life post-school. These skills will also help them on their way towards partial or complete independence after leaving school.

This study offers a different perspective on teacher leadership grounded in the research on positive psychology, positive organizations and deviance, showing the benefits and potentials for staffs/students and schools when focus is placed on what works well and encouraging strengths and human capacities for wellbeing such as, caring, compassion trustworthiness, kindness love and many others. Research into the effect of implementing positive psychology in the workplace has recorded benefits, including increased happiness, decreased depression, work efficiency, job satisfaction and motivation (Seligman et al., 2005). Findings from both the focus group discussion and observations confirmed that the benefits highlighted by Seligman et al. (2005). A participant in the focus group said she returned home every day filled with much love and happiness. Another participant added that, she felt motivated within the FI program because she was constantly being appreciated. These feelings of satisfaction at work expressed by the participants was evident that more can be gotten from an environment that focuses on positive rather than negative in people (Lewis & Murphy, 2018).

This section provided a framework for positive teacher leadership by linking and fusing theories and research on positive psychology, positive deviance, teacher leadership and findings from current month-long study of a particular teacher leader.

### **Case-Based Conceptualization**

At this point, I would like to reiterate that my capacity to review the extant literature on positive teacher leadership was limited due to the prior under exploration of the concept. Figure 5.2 presents a case-based conceptualization of the approach, strategies, features and practices of a positive teacher leader and leadership. This conceptualisation of Positive Teacher Leadership was based solely on this case study. In this case, the positive leader took

a positive leadership approach grounded in positive psychology which focused on principles and virtue, together with what seemed to work well. This approach resulted in a greater level of individual and collective wellbeing (Cherkowski, 2018). John did many things right and well—including organizing sustainable projects, fostering positive climate, enabling positive relationships, and positive energy through his leadership strategies and approach. The leadership strategies went hand-in-hand with John’s personality. His personality traits and practices indicated in the Figure 5.2 were established from the perspectives of teacher, associated staff members and the school principal. All these components, including leadership approach, leading strategies, features and practices, were fused together in what I considered to be signals of positive teacher leadership. Based on the analysis of the findings of this case, the description of Positive Teacher Leadership was not limited to a person but to the conditions that were fostered by a person and by those they worked with (students and staff members and principal). John In this case, John was the embodiment of that positive teacher leadership.

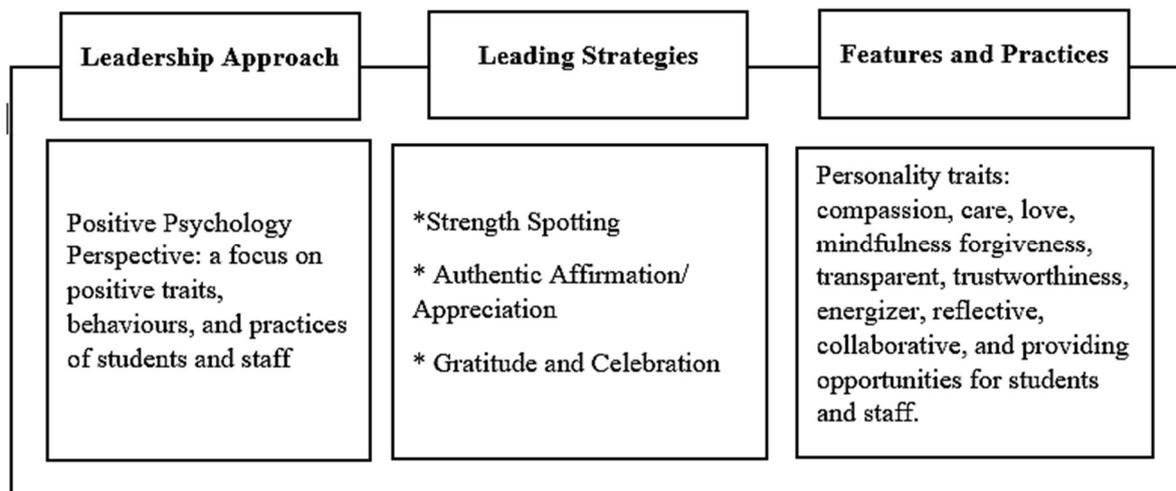


Figure 5.2: Case-based Conceptualisation of Positive Teacher Leadership

## **The Implications from this Research**

Findings from the observations and responses to the research questions helped to achieve the purpose of the study which, was to contribute to notions of Positive Teacher Leadership in schools by identifying elements and practices that constitute Positive Teacher Leadership and to describe the perceived impact of this role on school improvement. These findings have implications for practice, theory, teacher and administration development and future research.

### **The Implication for Theories**

This case study provided a framework of positive teacher leadership by linking theories and research on positive psychology, positive deviance, teacher leadership and findings from current month-long study of a particular teacher leader. The framework will increase the understanding of the concept and practice of Positive Teacher Leadership since research in this area limited.

### **The Implication for Practice**

The finding in this study suggest several practical applications. First, the study provides an insight into the concept and practices of teacher leadership in schools. Despite the popularity of teacher leadership, the concept is often dismissed as a mere concept or sometimes rejected because of the complexity of seeing teachers as leaders within a system of hierarchy where the principal sits at the top of the organization with well-defined roles (Harris, 2003). This study has demonstrated with sufficient examples that teachers can take on leadership roles in a school if given the opportunity.

The findings of the study were also helpful to John's professional career. John expressed his intention to use the strength spotting model and the positive leading model which were co-constructed as an instrument to facilitate professional development workshops

with his staff. He also printed out the models and pasted them in his office as a guide and a reminder of the underlying strategies propelling the FI program towards flourishing.

### **The Implication for Teachers and Administration Development**

This study presents a shift from the popular narrative where leadership in the school is synonymous with the role of the principal to one where the leadership may be understood with a more inclusive angle. Where principal, students, teachers and staff members are all possible leaders. Looking at teachers as leaders from a positive standpoint may just be the way forward toward flourishing for all in schools. This study has shown the benefits what that can come from teachers who are empowered and entrusted with leadership roles and responsibilities. John did many things right—including organizing sustainable projects, fostering positive climate, enabling positive relationships, and positive energy through his leadership strategies, that could be adapted to other schools or programs. that could be taught to teachers and administrators in graduate school or undergraduate education or in staff development

### **The Implications for Future research**

Future research on positive teacher leadership could follow different research designs.

It would be interesting to carry out a similar study on a larger scale using multiple teachers from different educational institutions and levels. Findings of such scale might be better suited to generalize to other school and leadership contexts. Nevertheless, this study provided a framework on how to better understand positive teacher leadership.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Based on all these variables in play in this case, a positive teacher leader might be described as someone who leverages physiological, emotional, cognitive, productive, environmental and financial advantages to positively impact the development and

experiences of students and co-worker (staff) in school. This research has further highlighted some important attributes of a positive teacher leader such as the ability to develop and implement strategies that enhance positivity, take creative initiatives and have personality traits like solid integrity and great communication skills. Though positive teacher leadership is a relatively new concept, people like John are important role models in leadership that schools and their students would do well to have more of. I have always believed that leadership has a significant role to play in students' success; this study affirms this belief (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018; Shava 2015). The same view was shared by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) who concluded that behind any flourishing school is excellent leadership. From this case study, it was clear that positive teacher leadership was not a single element, a simple concept nor was it the use of a single strategy to impact others; but rather positive teacher leadership is represented by a combination of positive traits and values, a dedication to serving others from a positive perspective using different approaches such as strength-based and appreciative approach.

I would like to reiterate that based on the study, Positive Teacher Leadership was not limited to a person but to the conditions that were fostered by a person and by those they worked with (student and staff). John In this case, John was the embodiment of that positive teacher leadership.

## REFERENCES

- Alonderiene, R., & Majauskaitė, M. (2016). Leadership style and job satisfaction in higher education institutions. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 30(1), 140-164. Doi:10.1108/IJEM-08-2014-0106
- Althof, W., & Berkowitz, M. W. (2006). Moral education and character education: Their relationship and roles in citizenship education. *Journal of Moral Education*, 35(4), 495-518. DOI: 10.1080/03057240601012204
- Alvarez, R., & Urla, J. (2002). Tell me a good story: using narrative analysis to examine information requirements interviews during an ERP implementation. *ACM SIGMIS Database: The Database for Advances in Information Systems*, 33(1), 38-52.
- Anderson, K. D. (2004). The nature of teacher leadership in schools as reciprocal influences between teacher leaders and principals. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 15(1), 97-113. DOI: [10.1076/sesi.15.1.97.27489](https://doi.org/10.1076/sesi.15.1.97.27489)
- Bass, B. M., & Steidlmeier, P. (1999). Ethics, character, and authentic transformational leadership behaviour. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 10(2), 181-217.
- Baumeister, R. F., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C., & Vohs, K. D. (2001). Bad is stronger than good. *Review of general psychology*, 5(4), 323-370.
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The qualitative report*, 13(4), 544-559.
- Beach, L. R., & Mitchell, T. R. (1987). Image theory: Principles, goals, and plans in decision making. *Acta Psychologica*, 66(3), 201-220. [Doi: 10.1016/0001-6918\(87\)90034-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-6918(87)90034-5)

- Belschak, F. D., & Den Hartog, D. N. (2009). Consequences of positive and negative feedback: The impact on emotions and extra-role behaviors. *Applied Psychology, 58*(2), 274-303. Doi: 10.1111/j.1464-0597.2008. 00336.x
- Bénabou, R., & Tirole, J. (2002). Self-confidence and personal motivation. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 117*(3), 871-915. Doi:[10.1162/003355302760193913](https://doi.org/10.1162/003355302760193913)
- Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: a tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation?. *Qualitative health research, 26*(13), 1802-1811. [Doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870](https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870)
- Breen, R. L. (2006). A practical guide to focus-group research. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 30*(3), 463-475.
- Bright, D. S., Stansbury, J., Alzola, M., & Stavros, J. M. (2011). Virtue ethics in positive organizational scholarship: An integrative perspective. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences/Revue Canadienne des Sciences de l'Administration, 28*(3), 231-243. DOI: 10.1002/CJAS.199
- Bryman, A. (2012). Sampling in qualitative research. *Social research methods, 4*, 415-429.
- Burchett, H., Umoquit, M., & Dobrow, M. (2011). How do we know when research from one setting can be useful in another? A review of external validity, applicability and transferability frameworks. *Journal of health services research & policy, 16*(4), 238-244. [Doi.org/10.1258/jhsrp.2011.010124](https://doi.org/10.1258/jhsrp.2011.010124)
- Burleson, B. R. (2009). Understanding the outcomes of supportive communication: A dual-process approach. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 26*(1), 21-38. DOI: 10.1177/0265407509105519
- Bush, T., & Glover, D. (2003). School leadership: Concepts and evidence. *National College of School Leadership*

- Bushe, G. R., & Kassam, A. F. (2005). When is appreciative inquiry transformational? A meta-case analysis. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 41(2), 161-181.  
[Doi:10.1177/0021886304270337](https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886304270337)
- Cameron, K. (2012). *Positive leadership: Strategies for extraordinary performance*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Cameron, K. S., & Caza, A. (2004). Introduction: Contributions to the discipline of positive organizational scholarship. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47(6), 731-739.
- Cameron, K., & Dutton, J. (Eds.). (2003). *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville, A. J. (2014, September). The use of triangulation in qualitative research. In *Oncology Nursing Forum* (Vol. 41, No. 5). DOI: [10.1188/14.ONF.545-547](https://doi.org/10.1188/14.ONF.545-547)
- Cardillo, R., & Pickeral, T. (2013). School climate and youth development. *School Climate Practices for Implementation and Sustainability*, 22.
- Cemaloğlu, N., Sezgin, F., & Kılınc, A. Ç. (2012). Examining the relationships between school principals' transformational and transactional leadership styles and teachers' organizational commitment. *The Online Journal of New Horizons in Education*, 2(2), 53-64.
- Cerit, Y. (2010). The effects of servant leadership on teachers' organizational commitment in primary schools in Turkey. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 13(3), 301-317. Doi:10.1080/13603124.2010.496933
- Cherkowski, S. (2018). Positive Teacher Leadership: Building Mindsets and Capacities to Grow Wellbeing. *International Journal of Teacher Leadership*, 9(1), 63-78.

- Cherkowski, S., & Walker, K. (2018). Teacher wellbeing: Noticing, Nurturing, sustaining and flourishing in schools. *World & Deed Publishing Inc.*
- Chin, J. M. C. (2007). Meta-analysis of transformational school leadership effects on school outcomes in Taiwan and the USA. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 8(2), 166-177.
- Ciulla, J. B. (2004). Ethics and leadership effectiveness. *The nature of leadership*, 302-327.
- Cochlan, G. (2008). *Love leadership: What the world needs now*. Saskatoon: New Voices Press.
- Cohen-Meitar, R., Carmeli, A., & Waldman, D. A. (2009). Linking meaningfulness in the workplace to employee creativity: The intervening role of organizational identification and positive psychological experiences. *Creativity Research Journal*, 21(4), 361-375. [doi.org/10.1080/10400410902969910](https://doi.org/10.1080/10400410902969910)
- Clifton, D. O., & Harter, J. K. (2003). Investing in strengths. *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline*, 111-121.
- Cooperrider, D. L., & Srivastva, S. (1987). Appreciative inquiry in organizational life. *Research in organizational change and development*, 1(1), 129-169.
- Conger, J. A., & Pearce, C. L. (2003). A landscape of opportunities. *Shared leadership. Reframing the hows and whys of leadership*, 285-303.
- Cram, F. (2010). Appreciative Inquiry. *Mai Review*, 3(1), 1-13.
- Cross, R., Gray, P., Gerbasi, A., & Assimakopoulos, D. (2012). Building engagement from the ground up. *Organizational Dynamics*, 41(3), 202. doi: 10.1016/j.orgdyn.2012.03.004
- Crawford, M. (2012). Solo and distributed leadership: Definitions and dilemmas. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 40(5), 610-620.

- Danielson, C. (2006). *Teacher leadership that strengthens professional practice*. ASCD.
- Dees, J. G. (2017). The Meaning of Social Entrepreneurship. In *Case of Studies in Social Entrepreneurship and Sustainability* (pp. 34-42). Routledge.
- DeMatthews, D. E. (2014). Principal and teacher collaboration: An exploration of distributed leadership in professional learning communities. *International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management*, 2(2), 176-206. [Doi.org/10.447/ijelm.2014.16](https://doi.org/10.447/ijelm.2014.16)
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Sage publications, Inc.
- Dooley, L. M. (2002). Case study research and theory building. *Advances in developing human resources*, 4(3), 335-354. [Doi:10.1177/1523422302043007](https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422302043007)
- Dutton, J. E., Frost, P. J., Worline, M. C., Lilius, J. M., & Kanov, J. M. (2002). Leading in times of trauma. *Harvard Business Review*, 80(1), 54-61.
- Dutton, J. E., Glynn, M. A., & Spreitzer, G. (2008). Positive organizational scholarship. *Handbook of Organizational Behavior*, Sage Publications, 1, 693-712.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of management review*, 14(4), 532-550. [Doi:10.5465/amr.1989.4308385](https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1989.4308385)
- Eldor, L., & Shoshani, A. (2016). Caring relationships in school staff: Exploring the link between compassion and teacher work engagement. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 59, 126-136. [doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.06.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.06.001)
- Elliott, S. N., & Clifford, M. (2014). Principal assessment: Leadership behaviors known to influence schools and the learning of all students. Retrieved from University of Florida, Collaboration for Effective Educator, Development, Accountability, and Reform Center <http://cedar.education.ufl.edu/tools/literature-syntheses>.

- Elmore, R. F. (2000). Building a new structure for school leadership. *Albert Shanker Institute*.
- Eriksson, S., & Helgesson, G. (2005). Potential harms, anonymization, and the right to withdraw consent to biobank research. *European Journal of Human Genetics*, 13(9), 1071.
- Fairholm, G. W. (1996). Spiritual leadership: Fulfilling whole-self needs at work. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 17(5), 11-17.  
[Doi.org/10.1108/01437739610127469](https://doi.org/10.1108/01437739610127469)
- Fédération Canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants. (2004). Recrutement et maintien du personnel enseignant: Pourquoi les enseignants et enseignantes sentrent dans la profession, y restent ou la quittent. *Bulletin des services économiques et services aux membres*, 5, 1-20.
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American psychologist*, 56(3), 218.
- Fitzgerald, S. P., Murrell, K. L., & Newman, H. L. (2001). Appreciative inquiry: The new frontier. *Organization development: Data-Driven Methods for Change*, 203-221.
- Flett, J. D., & Wallace, J. (2005). Change Dilemmas for Curriculum Leaders: Dealing with Mandated Change in Schools. *Journal of curriculum & supervision*, 20(3).
- Flood, P. S. (2004). Instructional Leadership: It is Not Just for Principals Anymore. *Middle School Journal*, 36(1), 54-60. Doi: 10.1080/00940771.2004.11461467
- Fullan, M. (2002). The change. *Educational leadership*, 59(8), 16-20.
- Frost, D., & Durrant, J. (2003). Teacher leadership: Rationale, strategy and impact. *School leadership & management*, 23(2), 173-186. doi:10.1080/1363243032000091940

- Fry, L. W. (2003). Toward a theory of spiritual leadership. *The leadership quarterly*, 14(6), 693-727. [Doi: 10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.09.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.09.001)
- Gable, S. L., & Haidt, J. (2005). What (and why) is positive psychology? *Review of general psychology*, 9(2), 103.
- Galperin, B. L. (2002). *Determinants of deviance in the workplace: An empirical examination in Canada and Mexico* (Doctoral dissertation, Concordia University).
- Gardner, W. L., Avolio, B. J., Luthans, F., May, D. R., & Walumbwa, F. (2005). "Can you see the real me?" A self-based model of authentic leader and follower development. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16(3), 343-372.  
[doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.03.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.03.003)
- Geertz, C. (2008). Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. In *The cultural geography reader* (pp. 41-51). Routledge.
- George, A. L. (2019). Case studies and theory development: The method of structured, focused comparison. In *Alexander L. George: A Pioneer in Political and Social Sciences* (pp. 191-214). Springer, Cham.
- Gergen, K. J. (1985). Social constructionist inquiry: Context and implications. *The social construction of the person* (pp. 3-18). Springer, New York, NY. Doi: 10.1007/978-1-4612-5076-0\_1
- Gill, R. (2002). Change management--or change leadership? *Journal of change management*, 3(4), 307-318. Doi:10.1080/714023845
- Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E., & Chadwick, B. (2008). Methods of data collection in qualitative research: interviews and focus groups. *British dental journal*, 204(6), 291.

- Goldstein, L. S., & Lake, V. E. (2000). “Love, love, and more love for children”: Exploring preservice teachers’ understandings of caring. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 16*(8), 861-872. [doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(00\)00031-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(00)00031-7)
- Greenfield Jr, W. D. (1999). Moral Leadership in Schools: Fact or Fancy? *Educational Research Information Center*
- Greenleaf, R. K. (2002). Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness. [Kindle version]. Retrieved from *Amazon.com*.
- Gregory Stone, A., Russell, R. F., & Patterson, K. (2004). Transformational versus servant leadership: A difference in leader focus. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 25*(4), 349-361. DOI 10.1108/01437730410538671
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. *Handbook of Qualitative Research, 2*(163-194), 105. Newbury Park, CA: Sage
- Hairon, S., & Dimmock, C. (2012). Singapore schools and professional learning communities: Teacher professional development and school leadership in an Asian hierarchical system. *Educational Review, 64*(4), 405-424.
- Hall, J., & Hammond, S. (1998). What is appreciative inquiry? *Inner Edge Newsletter, 1-10*.
- Hallinger, P. (2000). A review of two decades of research on the principalship using the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale. In *annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA*. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-15533-3\_1
- Hallinger, P. (2003). Leading educational change: Reflections on the practice of instructional and transformational leadership. *Cambridge Journal of education, 33*(3), 329-352. Doi:10.1080/0305764032000122005

- Hallinger, P., & Leithwood, K.(1998). Unseen forces: The impact of social culture on school leadership, *Peabody Journal of Education*, 73(2), 126151, Doi:[10.1207/s15327930pje7302\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327930pje7302_6)
- Hardman, B. K. (2011). Teacher's perception of their principal's leadership style and the effects on student achievement in improving and non-improving schools.  
<https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/3726>
- Hargreaves, A. (2009). Leadership succession and sustainable improvement. *School Administrator*, 66(11), 10-15.
- Harris, A. (2003). Teacher leadership as distributed leadership: heresy, fantasy or possibility? *School Leadership & Management*, 23(3), 313-324).  
Doi:10.1080/1363243032000112801
- Harris, A. (2004). Distributed leadership and school improvement: leading or misleading? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 32(1), 11-24.  
DOI: 10.1177/1741143204039297
- Harris, A. (2013). *Distributed school leadership: Developing tomorrow's leaders*. Place of publication: Routledge.
- Harris, A. (2013). Teacher leadership and school improvement. In Editors? *Effective leadership for school improvement* (pp. 82-93). Place of publication Routledge.
- Heckert, A., & Heckert, D. M. (2002). A new typology of deviance: Integrating normative and reactivist definitions of deviance. *Deviant Behavior*, 23(5), 449-479.  
Doi:10.1080/016396202320265319
- Hernandez, M. C. (2016). *Promising Practices: Developing Principal Leadership Succession* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Southern California).

- Herrera, R. (2010). Principal leadership and school effectiveness: Perspectives from principals and teachers. details
- Herington, M. J., & van de Fliert, E. (2018). Positive deviance in theory and practice: A conceptual review. *Deviant Behavior*, 39(5), 664-678.  
Doi:10.1080/01639625.2017.1286194
- Hillway, T. (1969). *Handbook of educational research: A guide to methods and materials*. Place of publication Houghton Mifflin.
- Hoffman, A. J., Badiane, K. K., & Haigh, N. (2010). Hybrid organizations as agents of positive social change: Bridging the for-profit and non-profit divide. In editors *Using a positive lens to explore social change and organizations* (pp. 152-174). Place of publication Routledge.
- Hoyle, J. R. (2001). *Leadership and the force of love: Six keys to motivating with love*. place of publication Corwin Press.
- Hunzicker, J. (2017). From teacher to teacher leader: A conceptual model. *International Journal of Teacher Leadership*, 8(2), 1-27.
- Hunzicker, J. (2018). Teacher leadership in professional development schools: a definition, Brief history, and call for further study. In editors *Teacher Leadership in Professional Development Schools* (pp. 19-37). Place of publication Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Jick, T. D. (1979). Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods: Triangulation in action. *Administrative science quarterly*, 24(4), 602-611.
- Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2000). Educational research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

- Johnson, B., & Turner, L. A. (2003). Data collection strategies in mixed methods research. *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*, 297-319.
- Jung, D. I., & Avolio, B. J. (2000). Opening the black box: An experimental investigation of the mediating effects of trust and value congruence on transformational and transactional leadership. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 21(8), 949-964.
- Katzenmeyer, M., & Moller, G. (2001). *Awaking the sleeping giant*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin.
- Kilinc, A. Ç. (2014). Examining the relationship between teacher leadership and school climate. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 14(5), 1729-1742.
- Kirby, P. C., Paradise, L. V., & King, M. I. (1992). Extraordinary leaders in education: Understanding transformational leadership. *The Journal of educational research*, 85(5), 303-311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.1992.9941130>
- Kocabaş, I., & Karakouml, T. (2009). Ethics in school administration. *African Journal of Business Management*, 3(4), 126-130.
- Kohlberg, L., & Hersh, R. H. (1977). Moral development: A review of the theory. *Theory into Practice*, 16(2), 53-59. Doi:10.1080/00405847709542675
- Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 45(3), 214-222. Doi:10.5014/ajot.45.3.214
- Lambert, L. (2002). A framework for shared leadership. *Educational Leadership*, 59(8), 37-40.
- Lambert, L. (2006). Lasting leadership: A study of high leadership capacity schools. In *The Educational Forum* (70, (3), 238-254).. Doi:10.1080/00131720608984900

- Lieberman, A., & Miller, L. (2005). Teachers as leaders. In *The Educational Forum*. 69(2), 151-162).
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2008). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. *School Leadership and Management*, 28(1), 27-42.  
Doi:10.1080/13632430701800060
- Leithwood, K. (1994). Leadership for school restructuring. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 30(4), 498-518. [Doi: 10.1177/0013161X94030004006](https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X94030004006)
- Leithwood, K. A., & Riehl, C. (2003). *What we know about successful school leadership*. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.
- Leithwood, K., Patten, S., & Jantzi, D. (2010). Testing a conception of how school leadership influences student learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(5), 671-706.  
Doi: 10.1177/0013161X10377347
- Leithwood, K., & Riehl, C. (2005). What we know about successful leadership. In W. Firestone & C. Riehl (Eds.), *A new agenda: Directions for research on educational leadership* (pp. 22-47). New York: Teachers College Press.  
[Doi:10.1108/09578230510625719](https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230510625719)
- Lieberman, A. (1992). Teacher leadership: What are we learning. *Teachers as leaders: Evolving roles*, 159-165
- Lilius, J. M., Kanov, J., Dutton, J. E., Worline, M. C., & Maitlis, S. (2012). Compassion Revealed. Editors In *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship* (pp. 273-288). Place of publication: Publisher
- Lindahl, R. (2008,). Shared leadership: Can it work in schools? *The Educational Forum* (72(4), 298-307). Doi:10.1080/00131720802361894

- Linley, P. A., Woolston, L., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2009). Strengths coaching with leaders. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 4(1), 37-48.
- Lune, H., & Berg, B. L. (2016). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Pearson Higher Ed.
- Luthans, F. (2002). Positive organizational behavior: Developing and managing psychological strengths. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 16(1), 57-72.  
Doi:10.5465/ame.2002.6640181
- Luthans, F., & Jensen, S. M. (2002). Hope: A new positive strength for human resource development. *Human Resource Development Review*, 1(3), 304-322. Doi: [10.1177/1534484302013003](https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484302013003)
- Malinga, K. S., Stander, M., & Nell, W. (2019). Positive leadership: Moving towards an integrated definition and interventions. In Editors Theoretical Approaches to Multi-Cultural Positive Psychological Interventions (pp. 201-228). Springer, Cham.  
Doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20583-6\_9
- Marks, H. M., & Printy, S. M. (2003). Principal leadership and school performance: An integration of transformational and instructional leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39(3), 370-397. DOI: 10.1177/0013161X03253412
- Marsh, D. R., Schroeder, D. G., Dearden, K. A., Sternin, J., & Sternin, M. (2004). The power of positive deviance. *329(7475)*, 1177-1179.
- Marshall, E. M. (2000). *Building trust at the speed of change: The power of the relationship-based corporation*. Toronto, ON: American Management Association.
- Marques, S. C., Lopez, S. J., & Pais-Ribeiro, J. L. (2011). Building hope for the future: A program to foster strengths in middle-school students. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 12(1), 139-152. Doi:10.1007/s10902-009-9180-3.

Mathison, S. (1988). Why triangulate? *Educational Researcher*, 17(2), 13-17.

[Doi.org/10.3102/0013189X017002013](https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X017002013)

Morse, J. M. (1991). Approaches to qualitative-quantitative methodological triangulation. *Nursing Research*, 40(2), 120-123.

Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2), 13-22. Doi:10.1177/160940690200100202

Muijs, D., & Harris, A. (2006). Teacher led school improvement: Teacher leadership in the UK. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22(8), 961-972. Doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2006.04.010

Muijs, D., & Harris, A. (2007). Teacher leadership in (in) action: Three case studies of contrasting schools. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 35(1), 111-134. Doi:10.1177/1741143207071387

Muijs, D., & Harris, A. (2003). Teacher leadership—Improvement through empowerment? An overview of the literature. *Educational Management & Administration*, 31(4), 437-448. [Doi: 10.1177/0263211X030314007](https://doi.org/10.1177/0263211X030314007)

Murphy, J. F., & Louis, K. S. (2018). *Positive school leadership: Building capacity and strengthening relationships*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Nachmias, D., & Nachmias, C. (1987). *Research methods in the social sciences*.

Nappi, J. S. (2014). The teacher leader: Improving schools by building social capital through shared leadership. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 80(4), 29.

Nettles, S. M., & Herrington, C. (2007). Revisiting the importance of the direct effects of school leadership on student achievement: The implications for school improvement

policy. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 82(4), 724-736.

Doi.org/10.1080/01619560701603239

Pascale, R., Pascale, R. T., Sternin, J., & Sternin, M. (2010). *The power of positive deviance: How unlikely innovators solve the world's toughest problems* (Vol. 1). Boston: Harvard Business Press.

Patterson, T. E. (2016). News coverage of the 2016 national conventions: Negative news, lacking context. Doi:10.2139/ssrn.2884835

Patton, M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health Services Research*, 34(5 Pt 2), 1189.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Phelps, P. H. (2008). Helping teachers become leaders. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 81(3), 119-122.  
doi:10.3200/TCHS.81.3.119-122

Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Moorman, R. H., & Fetter, R. (1990). Transformational leader behaviors and their effects on followers' trust in leader, satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviors. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 1(2), 107-142. Doi: 10.1016/1048-9843(90)90009-7

Portin, B. S. (2010). Shared leadership at its best. *Principal*, 89(5), 22.

Priest, K. L., Kaufman, E. K., Brunton, K., & Seibel, M. (2013). Appreciative inquiry: A tool for organizational, programmatic, and project-focused change. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 12(1). Pages?

- Printy, S. M., & Marks, H. M. (2006). Shared leadership for teacher and student learning. *Theory into Practice*, 45(2), 125-132. Doi: 10.1207/s15430421tip4502\_4
- Regina, M. M. (2015). The application of positive leadership theory and practice in a New Zealand law enforcement organisation. <https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/handle/10092/11348>
- Robinson, V. (2007). "The impact of leadership on student outcomes: Making sense of the evidence" [http://research.acer.edu.au/research\\_conference\\_2007/5](http://research.acer.edu.au/research_conference_2007/5)
- Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C. M., & Ormston, R. (Eds.). (2013). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. Place of publication Sage.
- Sahin, S. (2004). The relationship between transformational and transactional leadership styles of school principals and school culture (The case of Izmir, Turkey). *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 4(2).
- Schumacher, S., & Mcmillan, J. (2006). Research in education evidence-based inquiry. *Boston: Pearson Education*.
- Seligman, M. E., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014). Positive psychology: An introduction. In *Flow and the foundations of positive psychology* (pp. 279-298). Springer, Dordrecht.
- Seligman, M. E., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: empirical validation of interventions. *American psychologist*, 60(5), 410.
- Senge, P., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R., Roth, G., Smith, B., & Guman, E. C. (1999). The dance of change: The challenges to sustaining momentum in learning organizations. *Performance Improvement*, 38(5), 55-58. Doi:10.1002/pfi.4140380511

- Shava, G. N. (2015). Educational leadership and learner achievement. Contemporary issues. Zimbabwe Journal of Science and Technology, 10: 26-39.
- Sheldon, K. M., & King, L. (2001). Why positive psychology is necessary. *American psychologist*, 56(3), 216. DOI: 10.1037//0003-066X.56.3.216
- Shelley, B. P. (2018). “Primum non nocere,” harmful medical mistakes, hubris syndrome, and human fallibility; Getting to the heart of the matter. *Archives of Medicine and Health Sciences*, 6(2), 195.
- Silins, H. C. (1994). The relationship between transformational and transactional leadership and school improvement outcomes. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 5(3), 272-298. Doi: 10.1080/0924345940050305
- Simon, M. K., & Goes, J. (2013). Assumption, limitations, delimitations, and scope of the study. Dissertation and scholarly research: *Recipes from success*. Seattle, WA
- Sirotnik, K. A., & Kimball, K. (1996). Preparing educators for leadership: In praise of experience. *Journal of School Leadership*, 6, 180-201.
- Spears, L. C. (2010). Character and servant leadership: Ten characteristics of effective, caring leaders. *The Journal of Virtues & Leadership*, 1(1), 25-30.
- Spreitzer, G. M., & Sonenshein, S. (2004). Toward the construct definition of positive deviance. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47(6), 828-847. DOI: 10.1177/0002764203260212
- Smylie, M. A. (1992) Teachers’ reports of their interactions with teacher leaders concerning classroom instruction, *Elementary School Journal*, 93(1), 85/98
- Smylie, M. A., & Denny, J. W. (1990). Teacher leadership: Tensions and ambiguities in organizational perspective. *Educational administration quarterly*, 26(3), 235-259.  
[Doi.org/10.1177/0013161X90026003003](https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X90026003003)

- Smylie, M. A., & Eckert, J. (2018). Beyond superheroes and advocacy: The pathway of teacher leadership development. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 46(4), 556-577. Doi: 10.1177/1741143217694893
- Stake, R. E. (1995). The Art of Case Study Research. *Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage*.
- Stewart, D. W., & Shamdasani, P. N. (1998). Focus group research: Exploration and discovery. Handbook of applied social research methods. *Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage*. pp. 505-526
- Sudsberry, M., & Kandel-Cisco, B. (2013). Transformative leadership: An asset-based approach to leadership for diverse schools and learners.  
<http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/876170387>
- Snyder, C. R. (2002). Hope theory: Rainbows in the mind. *Psychological Inquiry*, 13(4), 249-275. [doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1304\\_01](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1304_01)
- Stein, L. (2016). Schools need leaders-not managers: It's time for a paradigm shift. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 15(2). DOI: 10.12806/V15/I2/I3
- Takyi, E. (2015). The challenge of involvement and detachment in participant observation. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(6), 864-872.
- Tate, T. F. (2003). Servant leadership for schools and youth programs. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 12(1), 33.
- Thibodeaux, A. K., Labat, M. B., Lee, D. E., & Labat, C. A. (2015). The effects of leadership and high-stakes testing on teacher retention. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*, 19(1), 227.
- Thomas, D. R. (2006). A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(2), 237-246.  
[Doi.org/10.1177/1098214005283748](https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214005283748).

- Thompson, L. J. (2004). Moral leadership in a postmodern world. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 11(1), 27-37. Doi: 10.1177/107179190401100105
- Tombaugh, J. R. (2005). Positive leadership yields performance and profitability: Effective organizations develop their strengths. *Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal*, 19(3), 15-17. Doi: 10.1108/14777280510590031
- Tran, N. H., Hallinger, P., & Truong, T. (2018). The heart of school improvement: a multi-site case study of leadership for teacher learning in Vietnam. *School Leadership & Management*, 38(1), 80-101. doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2017.1371690
- Trevino, L. K., Hartman, L. P., & Brown, M. (2000). Moral person and moral manager: How executives develop a reputation for ethical leadership. *California Management Review*, 42(4), 128-142. doi.org/10.2307/41166057
- Uribe-Flórez, L. J., Al-Rawashdeh, A., & Morales, S. (2014). Perceptions about teacher leadership: Do teacher leaders and administrators share a common ground? *Journal of International Education and Leadership*, 4(1), n1.
- Van Maele, D., Forsyth, P. B., & Van Houtte, M. (2014). *Trust and school life: The role of trust for learning, teaching, leading, and bridging*. Place of publication: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Waldersee, R., & Luthans, F. (1994). The impact of positive and corrective feedback on customer service performance. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 15(1), 83-95.
- Wan, S. W. Y., Law, E. H. F., & Chan, K. K. (2018). Teachers' perception of distributed leadership in Hong Kong primary schools. *School Leadership & Management*, 38(1), 102-141. doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2017.1371689
- Walker, K. D. (2006). Fostering hope: A leader's first and last task. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 44(6), 540-569. [Doi: 10.1108/09578230610704783](https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230610704783)

- West, D. L., Peck, C., & Reitzug, U. C. (2010). Limited control and relentless accountability: Examining historical changes in urban school principal pressure. *Journal of School Leadership, 20*(2), 238-266.
- Whitney, D., & Cooperrider, D. (2011). *Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in change*. ReadHowYouWant.com
- Whitaker, T. (1995). Informal teacher leadership—the key to successful change in the middle level school. *NASSP Bulletin, 79*(567), 76-81. Doi: 10.1177/019263659507956712
- Wiens, A. N. (2017). *The interview: Research on its anatomy and structure*. Place of publication: Routledge.
- Willis, B. (2014). The advantages and limitations of single case study analysis. Available: [https://open.uct.ac.za/bitstream/handle/11427/22804/thesis\\_ebe\\_2016\\_warburton\\_dal\\_e.pdf?sequence=http://www.e-ir.info/2014/07/05/the-advantagesand-limitations-of-single-case-study-analysis/](https://open.uct.ac.za/bitstream/handle/11427/22804/thesis_ebe_2016_warburton_dal_e.pdf?sequence=http://www.e-ir.info/2014/07/05/the-advantagesand-limitations-of-single-case-study-analysis/)
- Wong, J. Y., & Anderson, R. L. (2010). *U.S. Patent No. 7,748,616*. Washington, DC: U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.
- Wynne, J. (2001, November). Teachers as leaders in education reform. ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education. (EDO-SP-2001–5).
- Yin, R. K. (2012). A (very) brief refresher on the case study method. *Applications of Case Study Research, 3*-20.
- York-Barr, J., & Duke, K. (2004). What do we know about teacher leadership? Findings from two decades of scholarship. *Review of Educational Research, 74*(3), 255-316.  
Doi:10.3102/00346543074003255

- Youssef, C. M., & Luthans, F. (2012). Positive global leadership. *Journal of World Business*, 47(4), 539-547. [doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2012.01.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2012.01.007)
- Zach, L. (2006). Using a multiple-case studies design to investigate the information-seeking behavior of arts administrators. *Library Trends*, 55(1), 4-21. [doi:10.1353/lib.2006.0055](https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2006.0055)
- Zbierowski, P., & Góra, K. (2014). Positive leadership: Its nature, antecedents and consequences. *Journal of Positive Management*, 5(1), 85-99. <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/JPM.2014.008>
- Zhu, W., He, H., Treviño, L. K., Chao, M. M., & Wang, W. (2015). Ethical leadership and follower voice and performance: The role of follower identifications and entity morality beliefs. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 26(5), 702-718. [doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.01.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.01.004)

## **APPENDICES**



# *Certificate of Completion*

*This document certifies that*

**Leke Ivo Jingwa**

*has completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement:  
Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans  
Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE)*

Date of Issue:

**14 December, 2018**

## Appendix B: Certificate of Ethics Approval



UNIVERSITY OF  
SASKATCHEWAN

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) 23-Apr-2019

### Certificate of Approval

Application ID: 1011

Principal Investigator: Keith Walker

Department: Department of Educational  
Administration

Locations Where Research  
Activities are Conducted:

████████████████████ high school located in |  
Saskatchewan, Canada

Student(s): Leka Ivo Jingwa

Funder(s):

Sponsor:

Title: A Case of Positive Teacher-Leadership: Positive Deviance in a Canadian High School

Approved On: 23/04/2019

Expiry Date: 22/04/2020

Approval Of: 1) Behavioural Research Ethics Application

2) Letter of Introduction

3) Teacher and Principal Interview Guide

4) Focus Group Schedule

5) Observation Guide/Schedule

6) Transcript Release Form

7) Focus Group Consent Form

8) Interview Consent Form

9) Observation Consent Form

Acknowledgment Of:

Review Type: Delegated Review

Application ID: 1011

Principal Investigator: Keith Walker

2 / 2

#### CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2 2014). The University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this project, and for ensuring that the authorized project is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

#### ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month prior to the current expiry date each year the project remains open, and upon project completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: <https://vpresearch.usask.ca/researchers/forms.php>.

*Digitally Approved by Vivian Ramsden, Vice Chair*

## Appendix C: Research Approval School Division

---

March 28, 2019

Leke Ivo Jingwa  
4-1002 Dufferin Ave  
Saskatoon, SK S7H 2C1  
Email: [lej261@mail.usask.ca](mailto:lej261@mail.usask.ca)

Dear Leke,

Thank you for your interest in conducting research within [REDACTED] Schools. We have reviewed your application entitled "*A Case of Positive Teacher Leadership: Positive Deviance in a Canadian High School.*"

We are please you to inform you that we are willing to support this initiative. Please draft and submit an invitation for participation in your project. On your behalf, we will aid in the distribution of invitations to participants.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have further questions.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Research Committee

---

## Appendix D: Participants' Letter of Introduction

Date: .....

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am writing you to let you know about a research study that you have the option to take part in. My name is Jingwa Leke Ivo, a graduate student in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Saskatchewan. My research project is titled *A Case of Positive Teacher-Leadership: Positive Deviance in a Canadian High School*. The project is conducted under the supervision of Dr. Keith Walker, a professor at the Department of Educational Administration.

The purpose of this research project is to contribute to the notions of positive teacher leadership in schools by identifying elements and practices that constitute positive teacher leadership and to describe the perceived impact of leadership on sustainable school improvement. The study seeks to increase our understanding of how sustainable change in school might be readily influenced through positive teacher leadership practices and processes.

The findings from this research could provide educators with a full description of positive teacher leadership and may provide potential insights into some positive school leadership practices for other schools. The study may also inform enabling policy directions in school jurisdictions, education and educational administration preparation programs.

Also, the research finding could shed more light on the concept and practices of teacher leadership thereby providing a framework on how positive teacher-leadership operates in preferred practice. Furthermore, the project is an opportunity to highlight the importance of some teacher-led activities such as techniques, methods and strategies useful in the classroom.

There are three data collection methods planned for this study. The observation, interview and focus group activities will be done within the period of engagement. The expected period of engagement at the school is between Six to eight weeks depending on the availability of participants

Your participation in the research project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you have the right to withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort.

This study had received provisional approval from Catholic School Division, pending attainment of Ethics Certification and willingness of prospective School and teacher-leader. Attached to letter is both Ethical Certificate from the University of Saskatchewan Ethical Board and the Greater Saskatoon Catholic School Ethics board.

The University of Saskatchewan requires that all research conducted by its members conform to the highest ethical standards. It is within this framework that the current study has been situated. The participant's data will be stored safely in a locked cabinet, designed and maintained for this purpose, in a designated office at the University of Saskatchewan. Measures have also been taken to ensure participants confidentiality. These measures include; assigning pseudonyms to both participants and the school to conceal the original names, and location of the school.

This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board.

Please do not hesitate to call us if you have any questions as you read over this material. We are happy to review any of this with you and answer any questions you may have. Contact me ([Lej261@mail.usask.ca](mailto:Lej261@mail.usask.ca)) or Dr. Keith Walker ([keith.walker@usask.ca](mailto:keith.walker@usask.ca)).

Your Sincere

Leke Ivo Jingwa.  
Graduate Student,  
Educational Administration  
University of Saskatchewan,  
Email: [Lej261@mail.usask.ca](mailto:Lej261@mail.usask.ca)

## Appendix E: Focus Group Consent Form

### Research project title:

A Case of Positive Teacher-Leadership: Positive Deviance in a Canadian High School

### Researcher:

Leke Ivo Jingwa.  
Graduate Student,  
Educational Administration  
University of Saskatchewan,  
Email: [Lej261@mail.usask.ca](mailto:Lej261@mail.usask.ca)

### Supervisor:

Professor Keith Walker  
Department of Educational Administration  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon, SK, Canada  
Email : [keith.walker@usask.ca](mailto:keith.walker@usask.ca)

Dear Sir/Madam,

You are invited to participate in a focus group discussion.

The purpose of this research project is to contribute to notions of positive teacher leadership in schools by identifying elements and practices that constitute positive teacher leadership and to describe the perceived impact of this role on sustainable school improvement. The study seeks to increase our understanding of how sustainable change in school might be readily influenced through positive teacher leadership practices and processes.

The discussions in this focus group activity are centered around the participant's perception of positive teacher leadership and how it is manifested in school. In other words, I am looking at "leadership" as the conditions, relationships or the co-created environment.

A focus group discussion is a type of data collection method in which a moderator moderates a small group to understand the views of member regarding a specific topic. This session is

scheduled to last for 1 hour and will be moderated by the researcher (Leke Ivo Jingwa). The entire discussion will be recorded, to produce a transcript.

The University of Saskatchewan requires that all research conducted by its members conform to the highest ethical standards. This consent form is to ensure that participation is voluntary, and the participant has carefully read and understood the purpose of their involvement in the study.

### **Risks and benefits involve.**

The researcher cannot guarantee confidentiality to participants due to the nature of a focus group. Nevertheless, participants are required not to disclose information mentioned here with others. The researcher will respect the confidentiality of all participants' information shared here in this focus group and compels all participants to do the same.

Secondly, participants in the focus groups may respond to each other in ways that are frustrating for other participants. In order to ensure this risk is properly mitigated and minimized the researcher (moderator) will ensure that everyone is respected. The participant(s) will be encouraged to talk one at a time and not debate.

The study has the following potential benefits;

The term positive teacher leadership is new in the academic arena. Some have argued that for schools to flourish, more teachers need to be encouraged to function as positive leaders. This study may help to clarify how positive teacher-leadership operates in preferred practice.

This study aims to provide a full description of positive teacher leadership and may provide potential insights into some positive school leadership practices for other schools. The study may also inform enabling policy directions in school jurisdictions, education and educational administration preparation programs.

This case study will provide an opportunity to highlight the importance of some teacher-led activities such as techniques, methods and strategies useful in the classroom.

### **Confidentiality and Data Security**

The researcher cannot guarantee confidentiality due to the nature of a focus group.

Nevertheless, participants are required to respect the confidentiality of the other members of the group by not disclosing the contents of this discussion outside the group and be aware that others may not respect their confidentiality.

All information you provide in this study is considered confidential. Your name will not appear in the final report or any publication resulting from this study; however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. In the case of quotation, the participant(s) will be referred to as Participant 1 or Participant 2.

The data collection process, analysis and report, will adhere to the University of Saskatchewan ethical guidelines. The notes and recordings taken during the discussion sessions will be transcribed or written up and saved safely on the University of Saskatchewan secure Cabinet. A copy of the de-identified data will be backed up in PAWS. After the data has been analyzed, it will be stored safely in a locked cabinet, designed and maintained for this purpose, in a designated office in the University of Saskatchewan. Only the Principal investigator (Dr. Keith Walker) has the key to the file cabinet. It will then be destroyed after five years.

**Participant Right to Withdraw:**

1. Your participation is voluntary, and you can participate in only those discussions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, without explanation or penalty of any sort. Should you wish to withdraw, you may leave the focus group meeting at any time; however, data that have already been collected cannot be withdrawn as it forms part of the context for information provided by other participants.
2. Whether you choose to participate or not will not affect your position [e.g. employment, class standing, access to services] or how you will be treated.
3. Two weeks after the completion of any activity, a transcript and an update of data collected will be issued to the participant to revise his/her contributions. The purpose of this is to ensure that the participant has been represented accurately. A period of three days will be given for the participant to read, revise and sign a release form. By completing and signing the transcript release form, the participant(s) is indicating that they have completed the review of their transcripts and have given permission for them to be used in the data analysis. The data collected from participants cannot be used if this form has not been reviewed and signed. Once the release form has been signed, the integration of the data into my report will commence immediately. Any revision or data withdrawal after the transcript release form has been signed will not be considered.

By signing this form, I consent to the following that;

Statement
I agree to participate in the focus group discussion on positive teacher leadership organized by Leke Ivo Jingwa from the University of Saskatchewan.
I have read the information sheet related to the “A Case of Positive Teacher-Leadership: Positive Deviance in a Canadian High School” and understood the purpose of the research.
I have been made aware of the topics to be discussed in this focus group session.
I am aware that my information will remain confidential throughout data reported and that I have the right to leave the focus group at any point.
I am fully aware that the data collected will be securely stored safely
I am fully aware that I am not compelled to answer any question or partake in a discussion, but that I do so at my own free will.
I agree to have the focus group recorded. I am aware of my right to revise the transcript containing the contributions I made in the focus group. A period of three days will be given for me to read and sign the release form. Once the release form has been signed, a further revision of the transcript is not possible.
I am fully aware that anything discussed in this focus group and the identities of participants must remain confidential.
I am aware that this consent form will be stored separately from the data.

**Questions or Concerns:**

For any question and concerns Please feel free to contact the researcher or supervisor using the information at the top of page 1.

This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office [ethics.office@usask.ca](mailto:ethics.office@usask.ca) (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free (888) 966-2975.

**Signed Consent**

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the description of the project.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions, and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Name of Participant*                      \_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*    \_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Researcher's Signature*                      \_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

*A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher (Leke Ivo Jingwa)*

## Appendix F: Observation Consent Form

### Research project title:

A Case of Positive Teacher-Leadership: Positive Deviance in a Canadian High School

### Researcher:

Leke Ivo Jingwa.  
Graduate Student,  
Educational Administration  
University of Saskatchewan,  
Email: [Lej261@mail.usask.ca](mailto:Lej261@mail.usask.ca)

### Supervisor:

Professor Keith Walker  
Department of Educational Administration  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon, SK, Canada  
Email : [keith.walker@usask.ca](mailto:keith.walker@usask.ca)

Dear Sir/Madam,

You are invited to participate in a direct and overt observation.

The purpose of this research project is to contribute to notions of positive teacher leadership in schools by identifying elements and practices that constitute PTL and to describe the perceived impact of this role on sustainable school improvement.

The participant will be observed regularly. The purpose of this observation is to identify those practices that would constitute positive leadership. The observation will be conducted in a manner that does not interfere with the participant's daily activities. The expected period of engagement at the school is between 6 to 8 weeks depending on the availability of the participant. At the end of every two weeks, the participant will be required to review and verify the transcript. The purpose of this is to ensure that the participant has been represented accurately during the observation. The participant will be given three days to read then sign the transcript release form.

### Confidentiality and Data Security.

There is a risk participant could be identified in the final report due to the nature of the study (case study). The participant under observation could be identified because of his relationship with the researcher. The participant under observation is the primary research participant in

this study and would be seen regularly with the researcher. In order to ensure that these risks are properly mitigated and minimized, the following measures have been taken; A pseudonym (John) has been used to conceal the original name of the participant. The name of the school has also been changed to Gateway high school. Only the pseudonym will feature in the final report of the study; however, quotations may be used with you permission. In this case, participants quotation will be referred to his pseudonym (John). Confidentiality will also apply to the way data is handled and safeguarded. The notes taken during the observation's sessions will be transcribed or written up and saved safely on the University of Saskatchewan secure Cabinet. A copy of the de-identified data will be backed up in PAWS. After the data has been analysed, it will be stored safely in a locked cabinet, designed and maintained for this purpose, in a designated office in the University of Saskatchewan. Only the Principal investigator (Dr. Keith Walker) has the key to the file cabinet. It will then be destroyed after five years.

### **Benefits of the study**

The study has the following potential benefits;

The term positive teacher leadership is new in the academic arena. Some have argued that for schools to flourish, more teachers need to be encouraged to function as positive leaders. This study may help to clarify how positive teacher-leadership operates in preferred practice.

This study aims to provide a full description of positive teacher leadership and may provide potential insights into some positive school leadership practices for other schools. The study may also inform enabling policy directions in school jurisdictions, education and educational administration preparation programs.

This case study will provide an opportunity to highlight the importance of some teacher-led activities such as techniques, methods and strategies useful in the classroom.

### **Right to Withdraw:**

1. Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort. Should you wish to withdraw, all data collected to that point will be destroyed, and no publication that would have been based on the observation will be published.
2. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your position or how you will be treated.
3. After every two weeks, a transcript and an update of data collected will be issued to the participant. A period of three days will be given for the participant to read and sign a transcript release form. By completing and signing the transcript release form, the participant(s) is indicating that they have completed the review of their transcripts and have given permission for them to be used in the data analysis. The data collected from participants cannot be used if this form has not been reviewed and signed. Once the transcript release form has been signed, the integration of the data into my report will commence immediately. After the period of engagement is complete, the participant can no longer revise or withdraw the data but still reserves the right to pull out of the study.

Please sign and date this form below to show you give consent to all the statements

<b>Statement</b>
I consent to be observed by Leke Ivo Jingwa (Researcher) and volunteer to be part of this research project. I am fully aware that I can stop participating at any time, without giving a reason.
I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet provided for the above study
I have had the opportunity to consider the information and to ask questions, and I have had these answered satisfactorily.
I have been told that notes will be taken during the observation sessions and that these will be written up, analyzed and securely stored at university for five years, then destroyed.
I agree to the use of quotes bearing “John” from the observation session in publications, reports and conference presentations
I understand that a copy of this Consent form has been given to me for my records.
I am aware that this consent form will be stored separately from the data.

**Questions or Concerns:**

For any question and concerns Please feel free to contact the researcher or supervisor using the information at the top of page 1.

This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office [ethics.office@usask.ca](mailto:ethics.office@usask.ca) (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free (888) 966-2975.

**Signed Consent**

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the description of the project.

_____	_____	_____
<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
_____	_____	
<i>Researcher’s Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>	

*A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher (Leke Ivo Jingwa)*

## Appendix G Interview Consent Form

### Research project title:

A Case of Positive Teacher-Leadership: Positive Deviance in a Canadian High School

### Researcher:

Leke Ivo Jingwa.  
Graduate Student,  
Educational Administration  
University of Saskatchewan,  
Email: [Lej261@mail.usask.ca](mailto:Lej261@mail.usask.ca)

### Supervisor:

Professor Keith Walker  
Department of Educational Administration  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon, SK, Canada  
Email : [keith.walker@usask.ca](mailto:keith.walker@usask.ca)

Dear Sir/Madam,

You are invited to participate in an interview.

The purpose of this research project is to contribute to notions of positive teacher leadership in schools by identifying elements and practices that constitute positive teacher leadership and to describe the perceived impact of this role on sustainable school improvement. The study seeks to increase our understanding of how sustainable change in school might be readily influenced through positive teacher leadership practices and processes.

Your participation in this study will involve answering a prepared set of open-ended questions regarding your perception of positive teacher leadership and how it is manifested.

This interview will last for approximately 30 minutes.

The University of Saskatchewan requires that all research conducted by its members conform to the highest ethical standards. The purpose of this consent form is to ensure that the interviewee has carefully read and understood the purpose of their involvement in the study. The interview will be conducted and transcribed by the researcher (Leke Ivo Jingwa). With your permission entire interview will be recorded, to produce a transcript. Nevertheless, the

recording device will be turned off at any time on the interviewee's request without any reason.

### **Confidentiality and Data Security**

All information you provide in this study is considered confidential. Your name will not appear in the final report or any publication resulting from this study; however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. In the case of quotation, the participant(s) will be referred to as Participant 1 or Participant 2.

The data collection process, analysis and report, will adhere to the University of Saskatchewan ethical guidelines. The notes and recording taken during the interview will be transcribed, written up and saved safely on the University of Saskatchewan secure Cabinet. A copy of the de-identified data will be backed up in PAWS. After the data has been analyzed, it will be stored safely in a locked cabinet, designed and maintained for this purpose, in a designated office in the University of Saskatchewan. Only the Principal investigator (Dr. Keith Walker) has the key to the file cabinet. It will then be destroyed after five years.

### **Risks and Benefits**

The is risk participants may be easily identified due to the size of the sample. The study is taking place in a school environment and involves only the staff. Participants views could easily be identified. Also, there are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research. However, the results of this research may provide the following benefits in general;

The term teacher leadership is viewed more as a concept than practice. Some have argued that for schools to flourish, more teachers need to be encouraged to function as leaders. This study may help to clarify how positive teacher-leadership operates in preferred practice.

This study aims to provide a full description of positive teacher leadership and may provide potential insights into some positive school leadership practices for other schools. The study may also inform enabling policy directions in school jurisdictions, education and educational administration preparation programs.

This case study will provide an opportunity to highlight the importance of some teacher-led activities such as techniques, methods and strategies useful in the classroom

### **Right to Withdraw:**

1. Your participation is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort. Should you wish to withdraw, all data collected to that point will be destroyed, and no publication that would have been based on the interview will be published
2. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your position [e.g. employment, class standing, access to services] or how you will be treated.
3. Two weeks after the interview, a transcript and an update of data collected will be issued to the participant. The purpose of this to ensure that the participant has been represented accurately. A period of three days will be given for the participant to read, revise and sign a release form. By completing and signing the transcript release form, the participant(s) is indicating that they have completed the review of their transcripts and have given permission for them to be used in the data analysis. The data collected from participants cannot be used if this form has not been reviewed and signed. Once the release form has been signed, the integration of the data into my report will commence immediately. After the period of engagement is complete, the participant can no longer withdraw or revise the data but still reserves the right to pull out of the study.

By signing this form, I consent to the following that;

<b>Statement</b>
My participation in the interview is entirely voluntary, and I reserve the right to withdraw at any time.
I have read and understood the information sheet.
I do not expect to receive any form of payment or benefit for my participation
I have had an opportunity to ask questions, and my questions have been answered.
A copy of this Consent form has been given to me for my records.
I agree with the use of direct quotes bearing my pseudonym in publications
I am aware that this consent form will be stored separately from the data.

**Questions or Concerns:**

For any question and concerns Please feel free to contact the researcher or supervisor using the information at the top of page 1.

This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office [ethics.office@usask.ca](mailto:ethics.office@usask.ca) (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free (888) 966-2975.

### **Signed Consent**

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the description of the project.

_____	_____	_____
<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
_____		_____
<i>Researcher's Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>	

*A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher (Leke Ivo Jingwa)*

## Appendix H: Transcript Release Form

Principal Investigator: Leke Ivo Jingwa, Masters student Department of Educational Administration

Supervisor: Dr. Keith Walker, Department of Educational Administration

Title: A Case of Positive Teacher-Leadership: Positive Deviance in a Canadian High School

I, \_\_\_\_\_,

I have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with Leke Ivo Jingwa. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Leke Ivo Jingwa to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

Decline to review the transcript.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Name of Participant*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Researcher's Signature*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

## Appendix I: Observation guides

Principal Investigator: Leke Ivo Jingwa, Masters Student Department of Educational Administration

Supervisor: Dr. Keith Walker, Department of Educational Administration

In part, what to observe will be guided by themes of positive leadership strategies laid out by Cameron (2012, p. 108; expand to include Seashore Lewis & Murphy and Cherkowski & Walker). These strategies have been adapted to address the research questions.

<b>Table 1: theme guides to observation</b>			
	<b>Positive leadership strategies</b>	<b>Observations</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
1	<b>Encourage compassion</b>		
	Expresses emotions and feelings		
	Enable appropriate compassionate responses.		
2	<b>Encourage forgiveness</b>		
	Maintain high standards		
	Provide personal support		
	Use forgiving languages		
3	<b>Encourage gratitude</b>		
	Keep a gratitude journal		

	Write gratitude letters		
4	<b>Foster positive energy</b>		
	Provide opportunity for serving others,		
	Personally, model positive energy		
	Recognize and reinforced positive energizers		
	Manage negative energy in stages		
5	<b>Capitalized on others strength</b>		
	Provide opportunity for others to do what they do best.		
	Frequently celebrate positive outcome.		
6	<b>Provide best-self feedback</b>		
	Help others develop a best-self-portrait when they are at their best.		
7	<b>Use supportive communication</b>		
	Habitually use supportive communication		
8	<b>Enhance the meaningfulness of work</b>		
	Associate the work with a core personal value		

	Clarify the long-term effect of what is being accomplished		
--	--	--	--

## Appendix J: FI Program Outline

Period	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1	<b>Tutorial</b>  Period 1 tutorial is designed to help foster friendship, build confidence, strengthen self-regulatory behaviours and give students an opportunity to increase their leadership skills.	<b>Tutorial</b>  The first 30- 45 minutes of this tutorial works on calendar skills, group work, group conversation and provide students with opportunities to lead the class and teach their classmates about each other.	<b>Tutorial</b>  For the remaining 20 minutes students are split into two groups. During this time, we practice our numeracy skills by doing money math skills booklets and calculator skills.	<b>Tutorial</b>  We have also been using a language-building tool called the EET to build vocabulary, improve oral reading skills as well as increase speech articulation and conversation skills. Some students work on personal identification skills, writing their own name and address, identifying shapes, letters and numbers.	<b>Tutorial</b>  We also work on collaborative projects with the College of Nursing as well as the College of Education during these periods.
2	<b>Included Class / Work Ed / Intervention</b>  <b>Life Skills</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• cooking,</li><li>• taking the city bus</li><li>• shopping</li><li>• Recycling</li><li>• Laundry</li></ul> Mopping, sweeping, washing tables and doing dishes.	<b>Included Class / Work Ed / Intervention</b>  <b>Community Work Education Placements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Food Bank</li><li>• Amazing stories</li><li>• Cosmo Industries</li><li>• Sask Abilities</li><li>• Value Village</li><li>• St. Annes Care Home</li></ul>	<b>Included Class / Work Ed / Intervention</b>  <b>Social Based Electives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Art</li><li>• Drama</li><li>• Cooking</li><li>• Sewing</li></ul>	<b>Included Class / Work Ed / Intervention</b>  <b>One on One Tutorials</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Self-Regulation</li><li>• Exercise</li><li>• Math</li><li>• O.T. based Interventions</li><li>• Reading</li></ul>	<b>Included Class / Work Ed / Intervention</b>  <b>School and Community Based Entrepreneurial projects</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Button Making</li><li>• Food Cart</li><li>• Coffee Cart</li><li>• Concessions</li><li>• Recycling</li></ul>
3	<b>Included Class / Work Ed / Intervention</b>	<b>Included Class / Work Ed / Intervention</b>	<b>Included Class / Work Ed / Intervention</b>	<b>Included Class / Work Ed / Intervention</b>	<b>Included Class / Work Ed / Intervention</b>
	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
Lunch					