

**Understanding the Impact of
Quebec's *Bill 56* on School Administrators'
Work in Maintaining Positive School Climate**

By

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Abstract

Bill 56 was a response to, and a recognition of, the need for action concerning bullying and violence in schools. In Quebec, the Ministère de L'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport mandated that school boards, schools, and principals deal with bullying and violence in schools by enacting *Bill 56* in June 2012. However, although new laws and policies can provide supports and structures, their implementation often poses significant challenges for school administration.

The purpose of this study was to examine Quebec school administrators' perceptions of the impact of *Bill 56* on their work in maintaining a positive school climate. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the goals and mandates of the anti-bullying legislation *Bill 56* in the province of Quebec as stated in the document and perceived by Quebec school administrators?
2. How do Quebec school administrators see their responsibilities and roles changing in regards to the mandates of *Bill 56*?
3. What are school administrators' perceptions of challenges and supports of the anti-bullying legislation *Bill 56* in the province of Quebec?
4. What is the impact on school administrators' confidence as they attempt to maintain a positive school climate within the context of the implementation of *Bill 56*?

This study involved a document analysis and one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interviews with six school administrators of an English school board in Quebec. The interviewees were encouraged to share their thoughts, actions, and sense of confidence when dealing with the issues surrounding bullying and violence in their schools. Data were collected from March through June of 2014.

The findings suggest that, overall, *Bill 56* had a positive impact on school culture. Although the implementation of *Bill 56* presented some challenges to the participants, the overall consensus was that *Bill 56* positively affected and supported the work lives of principals. Participants acknowledged that creating and maintaining a healthy school climate by being transformational leaders was one of their main goals, and that *Bill 56* has provided the framework to achieve that goal. However, there were different levels of confidence and varying manifestations of transformational leadership traits among the participants. Based on the research results, this thesis concludes with implications for theory, practice, policy, and further research.

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This thesis is dedicated to Tara.

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Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that all of the work described within this thesis is the original work of the author. Any published (or unpublished) ideas and/or techniques from the work of others are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices.

(Terry Kharyati)

(July, 2015)

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Recognizing the efforts from the Ministère de L'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (hereafter referred to as MELS) and school boards to deal with violence in schools, the Auditor General of Quebec (2005) recommended in his 2004-2005 annual report that more data be gathered to help determine the scope of this issue in Quebec schools. Since that recommendation, the MELS published an action plan for all public, private, elementary, and secondary schools titled *Violence in the Schools: Let's Work on it Together* (Quebec Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2009). Based on its guidelines, all schools in Quebec have participated in mandatory surveying of students regarding bullying and violence, the results of which are reflected in each school's Ministry-mandated provincial school success plan. More recently, in June 2012, the province enacted *Bill 56: An act to prevent and stop bullying and violence in schools*. However, although implementation of new laws and policies provided supports, the introduction of new policies often poses significant challenges for school administration.

Among other requirements, Quebec's *Bill 56* requires school administrators to be more responsible for the well-being of their staff and students and accountable for all reported incidents of bullying. The school administrator is now accountable to the MELS and the school community for the success or failure of the implementation of a comprehensive plan to deal effectively with bullying and violence. However, because school administrators may have already felt overwhelmed with the ever-increasing daily duties and responsibilities, *Bill 56* may have reduced the time and ability to focus on

those efforts, which in turn possibly affected their self-efficacy and confidence to effectively manage their school.

Efficacy is a sense of personal empowerment that gives us the confidence to take actions, engage in appropriate risks, and transmit our confidence to others, thus making our eventual success a self-fulfilling prophecy. (Reeves, 2008, p. 58)

The effectiveness of a school administrator has a significant impact on the efficacy levels of parents, teachers, staff, and students in school (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Therefore, a more in-depth exploration of in-school administrators' confidence in dealing with incidents of bullying and violence within the context of the implementation of Quebec's *Bill 56* may help to better understand the ways in which the educational system can support Quebec school administrators in accomplishing the reforms required by *Bill 56*, which claim to protect and support all students, parents, and staff (including school administrators). For the purposes of this study and in reference to the fourth research question that guides this project, I will not be focusing on studying the participants' levels of self-efficacy but rather, as described in Bandura (1997, p. 382), their confidence as a presentation of their strength of belief in their abilities and its potential impact on their behaviours. For principals, the strength of belief in their abilities to work effectively with *Bill 56* and its demands and expectations may directly impact their effectiveness in implementing *Bill 56*.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine Quebec school administrators' perceptions of the impact of *Bill 56* on their work in maintaining a positive school climate. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the goals and mandates of the anti-bullying legislation *Bill 56* in the province of Quebec as stated in the document and perceived by Quebec school administrators?
2. How do Quebec school administrators see their responsibilities and roles changing in regards to the mandates of *Bill 56*?
3. What are school administrators' perceptions of challenges and supports of the anti-bullying legislation *Bill 56* in the province of Quebec?
4. What is the impact on school administrators' confidence as they attempt to maintain a positive school climate within the context of the implementation of *Bill 56*?

Rationale

Having been a school administrator in the province of Quebec since 1999, I often observed incidents of bullying and violence in the schools in which I worked. However, I could not clearly articulate the depth and breadth of the violence people experienced in my schools. Although the responsibilities to ensure the safety, security, and health of students and staff existed, the logistical and accounting aspects related to these issues were not clearly defined until *Bill 56* was implemented. *Bill 56* requires that bullying incidents be documented and that their resolution (or non-resolution) be reported directly from the school boards to the MELS itself. My school's anti-bullying data were gathered and reviewed every year since 2005, which provided our school's administrators and governing board¹ with insights into our students' perceptions regarding their experiences with bullying and violence in our school. In 2008, the analysis of these data prompted the

¹ The governing board consists of representatives from the school's students, administration, parents, and teaching and support staff.

following interventions: (1) hiring a guest motivational speaker; (2) implementing a zero-tolerance approach that meant suspending students from school for violent behaviours; (3) reorganizing our school conduct policy; and (4) increasing the scope and depth of supervision of students by staff during non-class times. As a secondary school in our school board, we believed we were following the general practices of other schools in our board and, certainly, that we had met the legal requirements of the policy outlined by the school board and the MELS.

In November of 2011, I drove to my daughter Emily's daycare, as I did once a week, to pick her up. It was four o'clock in the afternoon and the sun was out, which meant the kids and the daycare provider would be playing at a nearby play structure. My daughter was a year and half old and a playful and positive little girl. As I approached the play structure, I noticed Emily was sitting some 20 yards away from everyone, sobbing. I ran to see her and she was inconsolable. I became quite concerned. I asked the daycare provider to tell me what had happened, and she explained that, to the best of her knowledge, Emily had been pushed by a boy and fallen, had started to cry, had moved to be by herself, and had not wanted to speak to anyone. I asked about the intervention that had taken place, and the provider said that she saw no reason to do much as it is something that happens on the playground; "just kids being kids." As we drove home, Emily stopped crying but would not answer any questions. I knew she was not being bullied; a single shove, whether deliberate or accidental, did not fit the definition of bullying, as I understood it. However, I felt a deep sense of failure as a parent because I had not kept her safe from harm, and a sense of helplessness as I could not help her feel better. I also felt a sense of distrust of her daycare provider, as I did not believe she had

either the knowledge or the desire to effectively deal with or plan for such daily incidents. As I spoke about the incident to my wife (also a high school administrator) during dinner that evening, we began to imagine how the parents we worked with on a daily basis must feel when their kids are harmed at school. We also realized that many students we worked with must have also felt the same pain, however short-lived or long-term, physical or emotional, as Emily had felt that day. Since then, a safe and positive school has become an even greater priority for me as a school administrator and a parent.

In 2011, our school took further steps in the direction of promoting and creating a safe learning environment. The research about effective school anti-bullying programming (Melbourne Department of Education and Training, 2006; Smith, Cousins, & Stewart, 2005; Smith & Schneider, 2004) helped to inform our school's newly formed anti-bullying and violence prevention committee chaired by the principal, which happened to be me at the time. Although the research showed that this approach might have a significant impact on school climate, there were no guarantees that a whole-school program would have a significant and/or immediate impact on bullying issues (Smith & Schneider, 2004). We continued with a whole-school approach because of a fundamental belief that such an approach to various issues we faced in the past had merit and worked well over time if we were committed to the process.

With the introduction of *Bill 56*, I was further obliged to create and maintain a comprehensive plan to ensure staff and students would be kept safe. Part of this process was making certain that our school community knew the importance of an orderly, safe, and healthy school climate. In January 2012, school administrators in my school board were informed of the first draft of *Bill 56* (*Bill 56* was implemented to reduce bullying

and violence in schools) and the upcoming legal, procedural, and practical implications that were likely going to impact schools. First, *Bill 56* mandated the establishment of a committee comprising teachers, support staff, counsellors, a parent, student government leaders, and the school administration. This committee had to: (1) begin to gather relevant and meaningful data; (2) create a comprehensive anti-bullying and violence prevention plan; (3) begin to pool together our already extensive resources and coordinate their implementation; and (4) commit energy, planning, and resources and embark on a journey to immediately and effectively reduce bullying and violence in our school. As *Bill 56* was implemented in schools in the province of Quebec, a question was raised about whether or not the regulations had a significant impact on principals' judgments regarding bullying and violence in their schools.

Significance of the Research

This study was of value for several reasons. First, it examined perceptions of the principals charged with understanding and implementing *Bill 56* in schools in Quebec. Principals' roles had not yet, at the time of the writing of this study, been examined in this way. When implementing any initiative, law, or program, principals' perceptions that motivate their subsequent actions must be considered important to the successes of such interventions. In the context of this study, their perceptions were valuable in better understanding the challenges they faced and may continue to face.

The research findings provided insight into principals' understanding of their roles in the guardianship of their schools as safe environments and the continued challenges that will be ever-present when achieving that goal. The study was concerned with providing principals with an avenue to articulate their experiences with *Bill 56*

specifically, but it also became an avenue to express their challenges as they continued to work at reducing bullying violence and bullying in their schools. This study can be considered significant due to its focus on the perceptions of school leaders and the impact anti-bullying legislation has had on schools in Quebec from a qualitative perspective. The results of the study may be used to add to the perceptions and the practices of principals working with *Bill 56*, while adding insight for policy-makers as to the effectiveness, impact, and potential future supports for schools with regards to anti-bullying initiatives, grants, programs, and other potential supports.

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

It is critical to acknowledge assumptions and constraints present within this research study. Specific inquiries often require researchers to delimit their exploration in order to facilitate the development of a specific focus for the study. The assumptions, delimitations, and limitations inherent in this study are described within this section.

After conducting this study, it was understood that:

1. Administration and leadership, in one form or another, occurred in the participants' schools;
2. The principals were aware of, and had participated in, administrative and leadership practices in their schools;
3. The principals believed that the administrative and leadership processes were valuable;
4. The principals had beliefs about administrative and leadership processes and their attitudes were influenced by such beliefs;

5. The principals preferred choice among a variety of approaches to administrative and leadership roles;
6. The processes of administration and leadership were a necessary component of principal professional growth;
7. Perceptions shared in April to May 2014 also pertained to other periods of time during the year.

The study was subject to the following delimitations:

1. This study was delimited to principals who had at least five years of experience as in-school administrators;
2. The study was delimited to all elementary and secondary principals in an English school board in Quebec;
3. This study was delimited to perceptions of selected administrative and leadership approaches;
4. This study was delimited to actual and ideal perceptions of *Bill 56*;
5. This study was delimited to perceptions shared during the period of April to May 2014.
6. Based on the conceptual framework, the examination of principals' self-efficacy in this study does not encompass all levels of self-efficacy but is delimited to the participants' confidence as a presentation of their strength of belief in their abilities and its potential impact on their behaviours.

The study had the following limitations:

1. The study was limited by the depth of information and insights gained through document analysis and individual principal interviews.

2. The participants' responses might have been limited due to the sensitive and high-profile nature of *Bill 56* and its anti-bullying and violence prevention expectations. However, the participants were reminded and assured of the processes that exist to insure privacy and that I was committed to providing a safe and secure environment for them to share their perspectives.

Definition of Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following notions were defined:

Bullying. For the purposes of this study, bullying is understood as:

any repeated direct or indirect behaviour, comment, act, or gesture, whether deliberate or not, including in cyberspace, which occurs in a context where there is a power imbalance between the persons concerned and which causes distress and injures, hurts, oppresses, intimidates, or ostracizes. (Quebec Official Publishers, 2012, p. 9)

When the term anti-bullying is used in this study, it describes actions and interventions designed to combat any acts of bullying as defined above. *Bill 56* is a direct response by the Quebec government to assist to eliminate bullying in schools.

Confidence. For the purposes of this study, confidence is understood as a person's positive expectations for favourable outcomes. Confidence influences a person's willingness to invest money, time, reputation, emotional energy, or other resources or to withhold or hedge such investments. This investment, or the absence of investment, shapes the ability to perform. Confidence may allow a person to take control of their circumstances rather than be dragged along by them (Moss Kanter, 2004).

Self-efficacy. For the purposes of this study, self-efficacy is understood as the belief “in one’s own capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (Bandura, 1995, p. 2). Moreover, it is a “sense of personal empowerment that gives us the confidence to take actions, engage in appropriate risks, and transmit our confidence to others” (Reeves, 2008, p. 58).

School violence. For the purposes of this study, school violence is understood as “any intentional demonstration of verbal, written, physical, psychological, or sexual force that causes distress and injures, hurts, or oppresses a person by attacking their psychological or physical integrity or well-being, or their rights or property” (Education Act, 2012, c. 13 s. 3). For the purpose of this study, a safe school is considered a school where students and staff are not subjected to school violence. *Bill 56* aimed to specifically address forms of school violence.

School administrator. For the purposes of this study, a school administrator is understood as the principal or vice-principal who works directly in a school setting and is responsible for the everyday administrative and leadership tasks in the school.

School climate. For the purposes of this study, school climate is understood as “norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe” (National School Climate Council, 2007, p. 4). Although school climate was not mentioned specifically in *Bill 56*, it was identified as central to the success for the implementation of *Bill 56*.

School leadership. For the purposes of this study, school leadership is understood as a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes. This leadership

role is seen as a central factor in building a collective commitment to the improvement process (Aitken & Aitken, 2008).

Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the research project and outlines the reasons for the investigation of this issue. In addition, the purpose, research questions, and rationale for the study, as well as the assumptions, delimitations, and limitations, are provided, along with the relevant definitions required for the completion of the study. Chapter 2 reviews some of the current literature pertaining to the areas of: anti-bullying legislation specific to Quebec; bullying and violence in schools; the importance of a healthy school climate; and the impact principals may have on school climate. Chapter 3 details the research methodology, procedures for the collection and analysis of the data, and establishment of trustworthiness used in the study. The means by which this study met the required ethical guidelines for social sciences research are also detailed. The data analysis and the research findings are presented in Chapter 4. A summary of the study, discussion, conclusions, and implications for theory, practice, policy, and further research are the focus of Chapter 5.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this chapter, I review the literature pertaining to: (1) the Quebec educational context and *Bill 56*; (2) the importance of a positive school climate; (3) the impact of bullying and violence on school climate; and (4) the role of the school administrator in maintaining a safe school environment. The literature on the role of a school administrator is further discussed through the conceptual lenses of (a) the importance of a school administrator's sense of confidence, and (b) the impact of transformational leadership in a school setting.

Quebec Educational Context and *Bill 56*

The Quebec Ministry of Education (MELS) documents defined bullying as “any repeated direct or indirect behaviour, comment, act, or gesture, whether deliberate or not, including in cyberspace, which occurs in a context where there is a power imbalance between the persons concerned and which causes distress and injures, hurts, oppresses, intimidates, or ostracizes” (Quebec Official Publishers, 2012, p. 9). The MELS defined violence “as any intentional demonstration of verbal, written, physical, psychological, or sexual force which causes distress and injures, hurts, or oppresses a person by attacking their psychological or physical integrity or well-being, or their rights or property” (Education Act, 2012, c. 13 s. 3). In Quebec, the MELS made its concerns clear in 2009:

Violence is a serious and complex problem that transcends borders, commanding the attention of a number of researchers. Whatever form it takes, violence in the schools has a negative impact on young people, their academic success and their quality of life at school. Indeed, observations from researchers and testimonies

from the field tend to confirm that violence in schools creates an unhealthy atmosphere and breeds mistrust, feelings of not belonging, low self-esteem, anxiety and isolation, and increases absenteeism, academic failures, the number of drop-outs, and so on. (Quebec Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2009, Introduction)

Based on this statement that the safety, health, and security of students in Quebec was a serious concern, the MELS embarked on a plan to create supports in the educational system that included but were not limited to: (1) hiring support officers for the 11 MELS regional offices and setting up regional resource groups working in the area of preventing and dealing with violence; (2) setting up regional training and support sessions; (3) creating a reference tool outlining different problems involving violence and distributing a list of existing resources; (4) ensuring there is an intervention strategy in each school; (5) ensuring there is an emergency intervention plan for each school board and school; (6) producing a semi-annual newsletter, an inventory of effective practices and programs, and a website, and holding a yearly provincial forum; (7) obtaining recurrent financial support for carrying out effective actions in schools; and (8) obtaining recurrent financial support for establishing a guidance and support service for students who have been suspended or expelled from school (Quebec Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2009).

The MELS action plan communicated the commitment of the Ministry to prevent and deal with violence in schools and described the perceived state of safety in Quebec schools and the potential negative impact violence has on schooling in Quebec. The MELS concluded:

Violence in the schools affects young people as well as their families and the school staff...Fighting violence in the schools requires periodic intervention as well as an overall joint, structured approach that is part of a series of actions and interventions to prevent and deal with violence. In addition, the school, acting alone, cannot respond to the different manifestations of violence in the community, nor can it be expected to. Indeed, the school must establish or strengthen collaborative ties with families, various partners, and community organizations so that they can work together.(Quebec Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2009, Conclusion)

This MELS action plan foreshadowed what was going to be the framework for *Bill 56*. The recommendations found in the MELS action plan resulted in grant monies being distributed to the schools in 2009 to be used for interventions related to anti-bullying and later, in 2012, the legislation resulting in *Bill 56* (Quebec Official Publisher, 2012).

Each school must adopt such a strategy, based on its success plan, taking into account the characteristics of its population and elements such as the following: a profile of the situation including actions carried out to prevent and deal with violence and means to evaluate their impact in the school; a profile of the manifestations of violence occurring between fellow students, between students and adults, or involving school partners, and a description of the circumstances; safety and emergency measures; measures to assist personnel and students who are victims; the role of school stakeholders (administrators, teachers, complementary services personnel, support service staff and all partners

concerned, including parents); the school code; information about rights and responsibilities; legislative frameworks; occurrence report; protection of personnel and students who are victims; dealing with complaints; a clearly announced school policy on violence that takes into account the characteristics of the school population, etc. (Quebec Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2009, article 1.1.5)

Bill 56 is an act of law in Quebec that defines the term bullying and outlines educators' duties and responsibilities to provide a healthy and secure learning environment "which allows every student to develop his or her full potential, free from any form of bullying or violence" (Quebec Official Publisher, 2012, p. 2). *Bill 56* requires every public and private educational institution to adopt and implement an anti-bullying and anti-violence plan. The plan must:

include prevention measures to put an end to all forms of bullying and violence and measures to encourage parents to collaborate in preventing and stopping bullying and violence and in creating a healthy and secure learning environment, specify the actions to be taken and the supervisory or support measures to be offered when an act of bullying or violence is observed, determine the disciplinary sanctions applicable to bullying and violence, and specify the follow-up to be given to any report or complaint concerning an act of bullying or violence. (Quebec Official Publisher, 2012, p. 2)

The new set of legal expectations and public expectations were outlined for Quebec's population: whenever "any complaint" is made to either a school or a school board employee it must be followed-up, researched, acted upon, documented, and

reported to the board and the MELS. Written into the law was the school principal's responsibility: "The principal shall see to the implementation of the anti-bullying and anti-violence plan, and shall receive and promptly deal with all reports or complaints concerning bullying or violence" (Quebec Official Publisher, 2012, p. 6). It was officially passed into law that school administrators were held responsible for the well-being of their staff and students and would be held accountable as such.

Bill 56 outlines that all school-based anti-bullying and violence-prevention plans were the responsibility of the school administration and must include:

- (1) an analysis of the situation prevailing at the school with respect to bullying and violence;
- (2) preventative measures to put an end to all forms of bullying and violence, in particular those motivated by racism or homophobia or targeting sexual orientation, sexual identity, a handicap, or a physical characteristic;
- (3) measures to encourage parents to collaborate in preventing and stopping bullying and violence and in creating a healthy and secure environment;
- (4) procedures for reporting, or registering a complaint concerning, an act of bullying or violence and, more particularly, procedures for reporting the use of social media or communication technologies for cyber-bullying purposes;
- (5) actions to be taken when a student, teacher, or other school staff member or any other person observes an act of bullying or violence;
- (6) measures to protect the confidentiality of any report or complaint concerning an act of bullying or violence;
- (7) supervisory or support measures for any student who is a victim of bullying or violence, for witnesses, and for the perpetrator;
- (8) specific disciplinary sanctions for acts of bullying or violence, according to their severity or repetitive nature;

and (9) required follow-up on any report or complaint concerning an act of bullying or violence (Quebec Official Publisher, 2012, p. 10).

Bill 56 theoretically had a bearing on school administrators, school communities, and school boards, as it emphasized that the actions of the adults in the educational system were fundamental if children were to be kept safe. Focusing on changing and standardizing the adults' actions in the educational system was a paradigm shift from the traditional focus on changing students' actions and standardizing students' behaviours.

Looking ahead, *Bill 56* offered guidance and may continue to be a source of stress for new school administrators, as it outlined the legal imperative for school administrators, while giving insight into the moral imperative of the MELS:

Documents provide a background and context, additional questions to be asked, supplementary data, a means of tracing change and development, and verification of findings from other data sources. Moreover, documents may be the most effective means of gathering data when events can no longer be observed or when informants have forgotten the details. (Bowen, 2009, p. 30)

Positive School Climate

Social, emotional, intellectual, and physical safeties are all fundamental human needs (Maslow, 1943, 1954). Therefore, feeling safe at school is an extension of these fundamental needs in the school context, that is if learning and a healthy development is to flourish (Devine & Cohen, 2007). Hence, safe school environments are essential for learning (Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Craig, Pepler, Murphy, & McCuaig-Edge, 2010; Greene, 2005; Karcher, 2004; Mayer & Furlong, 2010; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Whitlock, 2006). Therefore, and for the purposes of this study, school climate,

organizational health, school ethos, and school environment are considered as closely aligned in terms of their potential impacts on the health of the students and staff in schools.

The National School Climate Council (2007) defined school climate as “norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe” (p. 4). School climate can also be understood as a by-product of the quality of the interpersonal relationships among students, parents, staff, and administrators. Therefore, a positive and healthy school climate is fostered when there is a shared vision of respect and caring for all people by all people in the school. The National School Climate Center (2007) identified five elements of school climate:

- (1) safety (e.g., rules and norms, physical security, social-emotional security);
- (2) teaching and learning (e.g., support for learning, social and civic learning);
- (3) interpersonal relationships (e.g., respect for diversity, social support from adults, social support from peers);
- (4) institutional environment (e.g., school connectedness, engagement, physical surroundings);
- and (5) staff relationships (leadership, professional relationships). (p. 1)

These elements outlined the complexity of the school environment and the need for building and maintaining positive and healthy relationships with all stakeholders.

As Hoy and Tarter (1997) explained, an important aspect of school climate is organizational health, which includes characteristics such as: emphasis on academic achievement, friendly and collegial relationships among staff, respect for all, supportive administrator leadership, consistent discipline policies, attention to safety issues, and strong family and community involvement. Academic achievement for all students and

their teachers requires equal elements of trust, compassion, patience, and perseverance. Students who have a good relationship with their teachers will work towards a common goal together, and teachers who have a good relationship with their students will work towards a common goal together. Setting the standard for the vision and mission in a school based on healthy and positive interactions with each other can be seen as the beginning to all other conversations in a school setting. The National School Climate Council (2007) explained:

A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing, and satisfying life in a democratic society. This climate includes norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe. People are engaged and respected. Students, families, and educators work together to develop, live, and contribute to a shared school vision. Educators model and nurture an attitude that emphasizes the benefits of, and satisfaction from, learning. Each person contributes to the operations of the school as well as the care of the physical environment. (p. 4)

Healthy relationships are one of the keys to a positive school climate. Transformational leadership in schools succeeds in building trusting and healthy relationships (Avolio & Bass, 1988; Bass, 1995; Hornett, 2001; Hoy & Miskel, 2001; Leithwood, 2007; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1991; Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Bullying behaviours have an impact on the relationships among the victims, bystanders, and the bully. Therefore, an approach to preserving healthy relationships in a school would, for a

school administrator, seem to be the most effective approach to creating a safer school where a positive school climate is a focal point.

As outlined in school effectiveness research, safety and security coupled with healthy relationships provide the groundwork for a successful school. Lezotte (1991) outlined the correlates of effective schools and placed a safe and orderly environment as a first priority. For Lezotte (1991), order, purposefulness, and a climate free from the threat of harm should be primary goals towards achieving learning for all, and the effective school moves beyond banning undesirable behaviour to being a school where students and staff actively seek to help and care for each other. Moving from a reactive approach to student and staff behaviour to a proactive and preventative approach allows schools to focus on the behaviours that build relationships as opposed to focusing on behaviours that destroy relationships. The essence of an effective school is linked to the essence of a healthy and positive school climate, which is the belief that all relationships in a school are important (Hansen, 1991; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Jimerson, Hart, & Renshaw, 2012; Loukas, 2007) and achieving and maintaining a positive climate has an impact on both academic achievement and the prevention of violence in a school (Demaray, Malecki, Jenkins, & Westermann, 2012; Greene, 2005; Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Osher, Dwyer, Jimerson, & Brown, 2012). The research has also suggested that a school that has a goal of graduating a higher number of students and lowering its drop-out rate should begin by building strong and positive relationships among the stakeholders in the school setting.

Impact of Bullying and Violence on School Climate

There has been growing recognition in many parts of the world of the widespread pervasiveness and the sobering and serious harmfulness of bullying in schools (Smith et

al., 1999; Rigby, 2001, 2002b). Unfortunately, bullying and violence continue to appear to be part of the school experience (Lunenburg, 2010). Rigby (2003) concluded:

Whenever the health of children has been related to being bullied at school, findings suggest peer victimization and health status to be significantly associated ... that peer victimization is a significant risk factor and may have a causal role in reducing the health status of school children. (p. 588)

It is important that this peer victimization be a focus for educators in a school and that the school's policies and programs focus on dealing positively and effectively with students who bully and are bullied. *Bill 56* addresses peer victimization by outlining the definition of bullying, mandating the need for intervention and action, and setting a standard of behaviour for all students in the province.

Olweus and Limber (2007) contended that when a school allows bullying to continue:

The entire school climate can be affected. The environment can become one of fear and disrespect, hampering the ability of students to learn.... When students don't see the adults at school acting to prevent or intervene in bullying situations, they may feel that teachers and other school staff have little control over the students and don't care what happens to them. (p. xiv)

A review of the literature reveals that most people involved in bullying situations, the bully, the victim, and the bystander, are negatively affected by their experiences (Anderson et al., 2001; Boulton, Trueman, & Murray, 2008; Connolly, Pepler, Craig, & Taradash, 2000; Josephson, 2004; Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 1993; Rigby & Slee, 1991; Roland, 2002; Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, Kaistaniemi, & Lagerspetz, 1999). The

work of Rothon, Head, Klineberg, and Stansfeld (2011) attempted to reveal the deeper negative influences bullying has on students:

Because bullying has a negative influence on children's health and educational outcomes it is important that healthcare workers and teachers have a good understanding of bullying and its potential consequences.... Based on the literature, the key hypotheses are as follows: (1) victims of bullying will have a greater propensity to exhibit depressive symptoms; (2) victims of bullying will be less likely to reach national achievement benchmarks; (3) social support from friends will be more effective as a protective factor than social support from the family; (4) bullied students with low levels of perceived social support will exhibit poorer outcomes than bullied students with higher levels of perceived social support. (p. 581)

Rothon et al. (2011) concluded that bullying had a strong negative effect on mental health amongst secondary school pupils in East London and that being bullied can have a long-term impact and contribute to poor mental health, trouble with personal relationships, and unemployment risk in adulthood.

The victims of bullying are not the only students we must concern ourselves with. As Craig et al. (2010) revealed, students who bully are also at risk for long-term problems as adults such as anti-social behaviour, gang involvement, and substance abuse, and students who are bullied are at risk for anxiety, depression, and physical symptoms. Given its substantial impact on both victims and students who bully, it seems fundamental that strategies to address the problem are developed to prevent the

development of the most serious consequences such as suicide attempts (Rigby & Slee, 1991).

The Role of the School Administrator in Maintaining a Safe School Environment

Research into whether students are positively impacted or not by anti-bullying programs is well documented (Beran & Shapiro, 2005; Bickmore, 2011; Ferguson, San Miguel, Kilburn, & Sanchez, 2007; Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008; Smith et al., 2005; Smith, Smith, Osborn, & Samara, 2008; Wolke & Woods, 2003). However, much of these data consistently portray anti-bullying initiatives as having a minor significance in impact or a non-significant impact on positive outcomes and do not offer potential solutions and suggestions.

In a 2005 review of anti-bullying policy and practice conducted by the Melbourne Department of Education and Training (MDET) (2006), several effective common practices emerged from the schools that were deemed in good standing in relation to student well-being: (1) effective leadership; (2) effective whole-school behaviour management systems; (3) well-being as a school priority; (4) a whole-school anti-bullying approach; (5) school pride and high expectations; (6) positive student-student relations. The quality of these common practices was linked directly to the policies, focus, and priorities set by the school administrator. These six common practices are often embodied in the practices of a transformational leader who aims to create a healthy and positive school culture by involving the entire school population in the process. If a school leader were to focus on these six practices, there would be a perception that the individuals in the schools, especially the students, would be cared for in the way that they needed to be, as their needs would be directly addressed because there would be a central

focus on building and maintaining positive constructive relationships within the school environment. The literature surrounding effective anti-bullying practices emphasizes the need for a whole-school or community approach. A positive school climate is central and is centered on the community of a school working together.

The Role of the School Administrator in Maintaining a Positive School Climate

School administrators have an important role in the maintenance of school climate (Bulach, Boothe, & Pickett, 1998; Loukas, 2007; Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005; Pepper & Hamilton Thomas, 2002). Smith et al. (2005) concluded that school administrators who invested their time and effort, and allocated funds to anti-bullying initiatives yielded valuable returns by “helping to create school environments that are safer and more peaceful for children, and, by implication, more conducive for learning and healthy development” (p. 753).

Bosworth, Ford, and Hernandez (2011) concluded that “determinants of perceived safety are two components of a school’s climate: organization/discipline and caring relationships” (p. 200). These authors further explained that in a well-organized school where rules are clearly outlined, adults are caring toward the students, and where relationships between adults are respectful, professional, and caring, people in the school feel safer. Similarly Blase, Derick, and Strathe (1986) reported that supportive principal behaviours (e.g., shared vision approach, shared decision-making approach, and a focus on forming positive relationships) affected school climate and working conditions in a positive way (e.g., by making work more rewarding, by making the work environment more positive and effective, and by reducing stress). Further study in the area of school

administrator level of investment is needed but there is literature that reveals some level of school administrators' commitment and competence does impact school climate.

Furthermore, understanding a school administrator's leadership approach is important for the discussions of school climate. Leithwood and Jantzi (1991) reported that a transformational leadership approach impacted a school's planning, goals, and structures, which in turn impacted the classroom conditions such as instruction, policies, and procedures. The implications for the type of leadership that would produce high levels of trust, health, safety, and professionalism are important to consider, especially in relation to working with complex and challenging issues such as bullying and violence. A large amount of literature strongly indicates that effective school leadership, specifically school administrators (principals and vice-principals), is key to achieving success in many areas of school life (Sergiovanni, 1984, 1992, 2005; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002).

Conceptual Framework

This study considered two central concepts related to the role of school administrators in maintaining school climate for both staff and students: the impact of school administrators' confidence (as observed through the lens of self-efficacy) on the performance of their responsibilities, and the impact of transformational leadership on the climate of a school.

Confidence and Self-efficacy

As Bandura (2000) explained, people's confidence in their own abilities is a strong predictor of their future success. In schools this is evident, as schooling itself is a challenging daily experience for many students and educators. Perseverance and a positive mindset are characteristics closely linked to people's beliefs in their own ability

to accomplish a task. It is the confidence in their abilities to effectively implement *Bill 56* that is central to this study of principals in Quebec. Efficacy beliefs are a major aspect of our actions (Bandura, 1997). Beliefs guide our lives because our sense of self-efficacy refers to “the beliefs in our capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Bandura (2000) also explained that, “when faced with obstacles, setbacks, and failures, those who doubt their capabilities slacken their efforts, give up, or settle for mediocre solutions. Those who have a strong belief in their capabilities redouble their effort to master the challenge” (p. 120). As stated in Hollenbeck and Hall (2014), increased confidence can translate into significant performance improvements of leaders while decreased confidence can cause some to fail.

Confidence can be defined as a view that a person has of himself/herself whereby they are certain of their own abilities (Maclellan, 2014). For example, if a school administrator can impact the confidence level of one individual student, thereby allowing that student to better deal with bullying incidents, then that school administrator has achieved a level of success (and so has the student). If a school fails to create a safe school climate for students, students and staff may not feel confident in the school leadership (Blanchfield & Ladd, 2013). It must be especially so when staff and students are faced with the destructive and complex effects brought upon by bullying and violence (Anderson et al., 2001; Boulton et al., 2008; Connolly et al., 2000; Josephson, 2004; Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 1993; Rigby & Slee, 1991; Roland, 2002; Salmivalli et al., 1999; Zubrick et al., 1997). The literature has suggested that the fostering of efficacy, confidence, and competence in individuals and the collective as a whole increases levels

of feelings of security, comfort, support, and optimism. These elements are central in developing and maintaining a positive and healthy school climate and therefore reducing incidents of bullying and violence.

Transformational Leadership

School leadership has been defined as a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes. This leadership role is a central factor in building a collective commitment to the improvement process (Aitken & Aitken, 2008). It is the school leader who sets the agenda for the organization and, if the school administrator's agenda demands that student safety is a fundamental goal, then it will be the school administrator who will have a major impact on the success or failure of achieving that fundamental goal. The success or failure of school initiatives depends heavily on the theory and practice of the school administrator (Marzano, 2000: Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

Transformational leadership was initially proposed by Burns (1978) as an alternative strategy to transactional models of leadership that focused on the exchanges that occur between leaders and their followers. In contrast to transactional leadership, as Burns argued, transformational leadership aims at engaging with others and creating a connection that raises the levels of motivation and morality of members of an organization for a united pursuit of higher-level common goals.

Instead of simply catering to the immediate self-interests of followers, the transformational leader was conceived to broaden followers' interest towards transcending self-interests for the good of the group, increasing awareness about the issues of consequence, and increasing the need for growth and self-

actualization. (Waldman et al., 1987, p. 178)

Bass (1985) expanded and refined the model of transformational leadership, positioning transactional and transformational leadership not in juxtaposition but in a single continuum of leadership approaches available to a leader.

Based on the review of transformation leadership literature, this model of leadership seemed to best fit the desired outcomes outlined in *Bill 56*. The expectations outlined in *Bill 56* could encompass the need for deep compassion and a commitment of all the stakeholders in a school's community to keep all the stakeholders safe from harm. In particular, if a school leader can lead students and staff through a process of "transcending self-interests for the good of the group" (Waldman et al., 1987, p. 178), then it would seem probable that the school would be on the road to creating a safe and positive learning environment and school culture. Similarly, when conflict or bullying arise, the students and staff might be better equipped to deal with the issues because the role-modeling of deep compassion and caring would be central tenets in that school community.

The Potential Impact of the Transformational Leader

According to Tschannen-Moran (2003), transformational leaders can produce important school outcomes such as: (1) stimulating staff and students to view their work from new perspectives; (2) generating awareness of the mission and vision of the organization; and (3) inspiring and empowering staff and students to higher levels of ability and motivating them to look beyond their own interests toward those interests that will benefit the greater good. Bass (1995) explained that transformational leaders:

convert followers to disciples; they develop followers into leaders. They elevate the concerns of followers on Maslow's need hierarchy from needs for safety and security to needs for achievement and self-actualization, increase their awareness and consciousness of what is really important, and move them to go beyond their own self-interest for the good of the larger entities to which they belong. The transforming leader provides followers with a cause around which they can rally. (p. 467)

Bass (1985) and Sergiovanni (1990) acknowledged that transactional leadership practices have their rightful place in schools as they ensure that the day-to-day routines needed in schools are carried out, but that these day-to-day routines do not necessarily stimulate improvement. Transformational leaders are capable of exerting a positive influence on their school culture in a variety of ways that empower the collective (Avolio, 1999; Hornett, 2001; Lynch, 2012; Northouse, 2007). In this respect, the school culture can be built on a shared vision that is guided and articulated by the school administrator, but owned by both the staff and the students in the school.

If the school administrator's agenda demands that student safety and a positive school climate be a priority, a transformational leadership approach may have a major impact on altering the quality and effectiveness of the programming, policy, and environment depending on the approach and the ability to empower and engage students and staff:

Transformational leaders are recognized as change agents who are good role models, who can create and articulate a clear vision for an organization, who empower followers to meet higher standards, who act in ways that make others

want to trust them, and who give meaning to organizational life. (Northouse, 2007, p. 200)

In the case of a healthy school, Hornett (2001) explained that the transformational leader's shared vision includes a philosophy of treating others with respect and care. The potential outcome of this shared vision is to inspire excellence among both staff and students. Further, this caring, respectful climate creates a safe place to build and nurture relationships, both in the classroom and amongst staff. Transformational leaders model these behaviours in their relationships with staff and students. These leaders invest time in getting to know their staff and students and, in turn, they become more aware of the skills, interests, and personal goals of all members of the school environment. Such leaders nurture and support their teachers and their teachers' goals by providing assistance and guidance regarding setting goals and by identifying the strategies needed to accomplish these goals. Transformational leaders are able to engage individual teachers in discussion on a regular basis. In addition to this, they have an open-door policy, whereby they are always accessible and welcoming to students, staff, and parents. They also have excellent listening skills and are able to carefully hear the staff's ideas and respond positively to their initiatives. They are also able to create an environment where teachers feel safe to take risks. Transformational leaders, above all, treat everyone with respect, care, and fairness (Kuhnert, 1994).

The following conclusions from Tschannen-Moran's (2003) study are also important to note: (1) that transformational leadership was not significantly related to organizational citizenship, yet, trust in the principal was significantly and moderately related to the citizenship behaviours of teachers; (2) that the relationship between the

transformational leadership behaviours of the principal and organizational citizenship among teachers was non-significant; and (3) that trust in the principal was significantly correlated to organizational citizenship. This provides insight into how multifaceted the task of building and binding healthy relationships in a school setting is for the school leadership team and that the climate of the school is related to the school administrator's behaviours (Bulach et al., 1998; Kelley et al., 2005). It starts with the school administrator:

Because of the hierarchical nature of the relationships within schools, it is the responsibility of the person with greater power to take the greater initiative to build and sustain trusting relationships.... If schools are to garner the benefits of greater citizenship behaviours among the faculty, fostering a trusting work environment through trustworthy leadership on the part of principals is a good start. (Tschannen-Moran, 2003, p. 175)

Transformational Leadership-Type Behaviours

Transformational leadership behaviours will “stimulate others to view their work from new perspectives, generate an awareness of the mission and vision of the organization, [and] develop colleagues and followers to higher levels of ability and potential” (Tschannen-Moran, 2003, p. 159). Transformational leadership behaviours, in particular the work of school administrators, are linked to motivating and inspiring the school community.

Transformational leaders create an environment where students and staff respond to community values and where they see their actions advancing the health of the collective (Sergiovanni, 2009). As Sergiovanni (2009) stated, transformational leadership

starts with “leadership by building” and transcends into “leadership by binding” as transformative leadership becomes morally centered as it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both the leader and the led (p. 169). Barnett and McCormick (2003) concluded that transformational leaders lead by building a shared vision, which helps to bind people together and establish group ownership and where consensus and commitment to school vision are developed through leadership practices such as communication, leader credibility, and the involvement of the school community in collaborative processes (p. 68).

Transformational leaders serve as role models; are ethical in their language and their conduct; share a common mission and vision; seek first to understand; are transparent, enthusiastic, goal-oriented, committed, optimistic, creative, innovative, and courageous; and communicate clearly and effectively. These leaders can recognize and accept individual differences in needs and values, and create learning opportunities in a supportive climate (Tschannen-Moran, 2003,2004).

According to Tschannen-Moran (2003), one phenomenon inspired by transformational leadership was “organizational citizenship behaviour,” which this author described as the willingness and effort committed by staff for the betterment of the organization. Five specific categories of behaviour were described: altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy, and civic virtue performed in service of the organization (Tschannen-Moran, 2003, pp. 160–161). These five categories are integral behaviour types for school leaders to foster in their own school to help build a positive school culture. In particular, when a principal must implement a new program or new policies, the betterment of the organizational values and practices is essential for the

success of the specific practices and the overall effectiveness of the school leader and school staff.

Successfully implementing new programming in schools usually requires changes in school policies and in human behaviours. This has an effect of making the change process all the more challenging and intense. These programs intend to impact something as complex and, at times, engrained as a school's climate and health. According to the research based on the overall success rates of anti-bullying and violence prevention programs, such programs are not easily implemented nor are they always successful (Melbourne Department of Education and Training, 2006; Rigby, 1997, 2002a; Smith & Schneider, 2004). Implementing change of this kind requires that school administrators be positive, resilient, and diligent because of the complexity of the issues and because positive results are not always evident, achieved, or quick to come.

Kotter (2012) outlined an eight-stage process of creating major change: (1) establishing a sense of urgency; (2) creating a guiding coalition; (3) developing a vision and strategy; (4) communicating the change vision; (5) empowering broad-based action; (6) generating short wins; (7) consolidating gains and producing more change; and (8) anchoring new approaches in the culture (p. 23). Considering Kotter's (2012) eight stages of creating major change, a school administrator's task of implementing challenging and complex programming may require high efficacy related to personal and professional characteristics. In reviewing success stories in the major change process, Kotter (2012) revealed two important patterns: (1) useful change tends to provide the perseverance needed to overcome challenges and (2) the process is never effective unless it is driven by high-quality leadership and "not just excellent management" (p. 22). Therefore, the

challenge for school administrators of being leaders of both organizational and pedagogical change is an intricate and important process if schools are to achieve the desired results.

Transformational leadership in the context of Bill 56

Given the fundamental need for a safe and positive school climate and given that achieving this goal is a challenging and complex process, the model of leadership presented by the theories of transformational leadership seems a perfect fit. This is because transformational leadership “is attentive to the needs and motives of followers and tries to help followers reach their fullest potential” (Northouse, 2007, p. 173). The potential for a school community to work together not just to stop bullying behaviours but to encourage staff and students to be proactively caring and kind by being good organizational citizens is possible when its leader role-models the behaviours desired.

As the literature has revealed, transformational leadership is crucial for inspiring a healthy and safe school environment and central to the effectiveness of transformational leaders is their ability to build and maintain trusting relationships. As Tschannen-Moran (2003) explained:

Trust is the assurance that another will not exploit one’s vulnerability or take excessive advantage [and] trust is one party’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open. (p. 162)

Furthermore, Tschannen-Moran (2004) noted that trust functions as a “lubricant of organizational functioning; without it, the school is likely to experience the overheated friction of conflict as well as a lack of progress toward its admirable goals” (p. xi).

Transformational leadership has the potential to inspire school administrators, staff, and students to be consistent and caring, communicative, competent, transparent, and resilient on an everyday decision basis (Avolio & Bass, 1988; Bass, 1985). These factors play a strong role in the everyday life of a school administrator when dealing with the complex and often conflicting elements related to bullying and violence in schools. If school administrators are held up to the transformational leadership theory ideal, there are seemingly overwhelming expectations of being role-models in the types of relationships that take place within the organization. If transformational leadership can “build commitment to the organization’s objectives and empowers followers to achieve these objectives while increasing individual and collective capacities” (Tschannen-Moran, 2003, p. 159), then school administrators may carry with them the power to create a safe, healthy, and positive learning environment (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1991).

Summary: School Administrators’ Role in Managing Bullying and Violence

The work of school administrators is a difficult, challenging, and complex endeavour, as they are accountable for the transformative academic and social success of their own school as well as having many challenging and complex transactional responsibilities, duties, and expectations. More importantly, as leaders, principals face the challenge of making peace with two competing imperatives, the managerial and the moral; “the two imperatives are unavoidable, and the neglect of either creates problems” (Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 15). Ideally these two imperatives can more than co-exist and the transformational school leader will complete all the managerial tasks not merely to get to the moral imperatives but to enhance the impact of the moral imperatives. *Bill 56* sets managerial expectations for principals in response to bullying and violence. If the

policies and programs put in place communicate clearly expectations, processes, and consequences then, the implementation of these policies (the moral imperative) can be rendered more effective and impactful.

To the extent that school administrators' confidence impacts their perseverance throughout, this process is crucial for success in keeping staff and students safe. If their confidence influences how people act in stressful and challenging times, then a school administrator's confidence may have a central influence on a school's stakeholders. If school administrators do not feel strongly that they have the courage, character, competence, time, and/or resources to effectively deal with the everyday occurrences of conflict (bullying related or not) in a school, how will the school maintain a positive climate? In a school setting, there are many demands on principals' schedules and energy and, as such, their decision making may be impacted by the level of stress placed upon them by these demands.

The literature examined identified the potential effectiveness of anti-bullying programs in general, while also seeking to examine the overall impact school-based anti-bullying programs have on bullying and other violent behaviours in schools, but suggest that it is better to have anti-bullying programming versus not implementing any programming at all. Considering anti-bullying programming and violence prevention interventions, research suggests the programs implemented in schools may have a positive impact and that school administrators can look to the literature for guidance (e.g., Ferguson et al., 2007; Melbourne Department of Education and Training, 2006; Rigby, 1997, 2002; Smith & Schneider, 2004).

Gaining deeper insight into the experience of school administrators in Quebec, who are legally bound to lead their school's campaign against bullying and violence in schools, was a main goal of my research project. The insights were in consideration of: (1) the demands of *Bill 56*; (2) the expectations to be efficient, effective, and transformative school leaders; and (3) the challenges of the changing role of school administrators (Doud & Keller, 1998; Fullan, 2014).

Limited literature exists that links school administrator confidence and/or transformational leadership styles with effective anti-bullying programming and violence-free schooling. Similarly, a dearth of research existed that correlates the effectiveness of implementing anti-bullying programming in schools and the quality of the leadership approach of the school administration. This study presented the opportunity to delve into what appears to be a gap in the literature.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to provide details of the research methods used. A qualitative research design was utilized for this study. In this chapter, I outline: (1) the qualitative method of inquiry; (2) the data collection; (3) the data analysis; (4) the establishment of trustworthiness; and (5) ethical considerations.

Qualitative Methods of Inquiry

This research project was guided by a phenomenological perspective that sought to examine the perceptions of a person in a particular role or position towards a particular event. Phenomenological research follows a human science approach, which emphasizes “discovery, description, and meaning” (Osborne, 1994, p. 168). This phenomenological approach (van Manen, 1990) helped me search for a deeper understanding of the everyday lived experiences of the participants and focused on the primacy of their lived experiences. This methodology also invited the participants to reflect upon their lived experiences and encouraged them to share their reflections in their own way.

This study focused on the phenomenon of Quebec school administrators’ perceptions of their confidence in maintaining a positive school climate within the context of the implementation of *Bill 56*. A phenomenological perspective helped to facilitate an enriched understanding of how school administrators perceived their own ability to protect students and staff within the context of their leadership positions and external legal and policy changes.

This study derived data from two qualitative methods of inquiry: document analysis and interviews. Document analysis (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002) is a

systematic procedure for evaluating documents, both in print and electronic. Data from the documents was examined and interpreted in order to have elicited meaning, to have gained understanding, and to have developed empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). In particular, the main purpose for using document analysis was to analyze *Bill 56* as a document that “can provide data on the context within which research participants operate—a case of text providing context” (Bowen, 2009, p. 29). I conducted an analysis of regulations, policies, and directives related specifically to school administrators as it pertained to the implementation of *Bill 56*. I used this document analysis to gain a better understanding of the requirements and expectations set by law upon school administrators in Quebec. Having gained a better understanding of *Bill 56* through this document analysis, I proceeded to the interview process. Miller and Alvarado (2005)

Data derived from the interviews and during the interviews were examined using inductive analysis. Inductive analysis processes allowed me to take meaning from the data, starting with the development of patterns in the research leading to the development themes and categories. In this way, as McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated, more general themes and conclusions emerge from the data rather than are imposed prior to data collection. During the data analysis I focussed on comparing and contrasting answers to the interview questions. Ultimately, I have focussed my attentions on the similarities of the responses and the lived experiences of the participants. Data analysis in this study did not involve any kind of software but instead, I used “inductive analysis of the raw data” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 347). Therefore, the data collection and the data analysis stages were interwoven and influenced one another.

Stake (2010) outlined the purpose of the qualitative approach as interpretive, experiential, situational, and personalized. Therefore, one-on-one, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used because this process provided opportunities for me to collect rich and meaningful data (Roulston, 2010). The participants were school administrators within one English school board in Quebec who experienced the phenomenon under study. Interviews yielded direct quotations from participants about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge.

Research Setting and Sample

The setting for this study was an English school board in the province of Quebec. The board had 26 schools situated in both rural and urban settings with a diverse socio-economic student population of approximately 6300 total students. There was a mixture of large urban high schools Grades 7 to 11, mid-size urban elementary schools Kindergarten to Grade 6, and small rural elementary schools. There were approximately 23 administrators in the board, which had a territorial size slightly larger than the Province of Nova Scotia; hence many school administrators worked alone and in some cases were isolated geographically from the central office and even other schools.

I met with the director general of the board and asked permission to invite school administrators from the board to volunteer to participate in the in-depth interviews. Once granted permission, I sent a recruitment letter via email to all the school administrators in the board asking if they would volunteer to participate in the study (Appendix A). Once the volunteers accepted the invitation they were sent a consent form (Appendix B). The first six school administrators who expressed interest were subsequently invited to participate in the study. Although further responses to invitation were received, the

sample included six participants. Should there have been a need to further the study, the six participants agreed to return and continue their participation.

Being able to interview school administrators from different schools and varying grade levels allowed for a purposeful and maximized sampling, as outlined in Creswell (2007). School administrators from different grade levels and with varied years of experience highlighted different perspectives on their confidence in dealing with bullying, and violence prevention challenges.

Data Collection

This study involved document analysis and one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interviews.

Document Analysis

An analysis of *Bill 56* provided a social and historical context in which the document was written and implemented: “Documents are not simply containers of meaning. They are actively and collectively produced, exchanged, and consumed.... Documents are produced in and reflect specific social and historical circumstances” (Miller & Alvarado, 2005, p. 349). Based in Miller and Alvarado’s framework, content and context analyses of *Bill 56* was conducted.

Bowen (2009) explained that document analysis could be effectively used to elicit meaning and a deeper understanding of a document. By taking a closer look at the selected data and performing coding and category construction, the process allowed me to uncover themes pertinent to a phenomenon (Bowen, 2009). In this manner, the *Bill 56* document was examined to develop a deeper understanding of the requirements and implications specifically for school administrators. Although *Bill 56* dealt with

requirements and implications for students, parents, and school boards, the focus for the document analysis entailed only the implications for school administrators. *Bill 56* was the sole document analyzed as it stood as a definitive and mandatory guideline for principals released by the MELS regarding bullying and violence in schools. The content analysis of *Bill 56* produced the key mandates proposed for school principals, whereas the context analysis helped reveal patterns and themes in the document that provided a deeper insight into *Bill 56*'s impact on principals. As insight into the worldview and value system of the MELS was gained, document analysis of *Bill 56* affected in part the contents of the interview questions to be asked to school administrators.

Individual Interviews

I conducted one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interviews with six school administrators using a set list of questions (Appendix C). The questions were designed to invite the participants to give insights on the research questions that guided this study.

The central theme of these interviews was to “give a voice” (Morgan, 1996, p. 133) to school administrators, as they were encouraged to share and explore their sense of confidence when dealing with the complex and complicated issues surrounding bullying and violence in schools. The interviews were held in the offices of the participants during the school day in their own schools. The interviews were fluid without many interruptions and a good rapport was maintained throughout the process. It was a point of emphasis made to the participants that at any point they could pass on a question or stop altogether.

The interviews lasted an average of 50 minutes in length and were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim by a third party organization and sent to me via email. The

transcripts are stored on a secured desktop and print copy secured in a locked filing cabinet.

Data Analysis

Data collection and data analysis were ongoing processes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) that began even before all the data were collected. Based on the document analysis approach outlined in Miller and Alvarado (2005, p. 351), I used a content approach to document analysis to analyze *Bill 56* as an independent resource that is static and unchanging but reveals an important aspect of Quebec's social practice as it set a legal standard. I also used a context approach to document analysis that saw *Bill 56* as an actor in a social field impacting Quebec schools, students, staff, and parents. I focussed on the elements of *Bill 56* that were directly related to the principal's roles and responsibilities and did not concentrate on analyzing elements pertaining to students, parents or any other member of the school community.

The "essence" (Creswell, 2007, p. 79) of the interviews was captured, as the interviews expressed authentically the voice of school administrators in relation to the struggles related to managing and leading safer schools. The process of interviewing the participants helped me better understand the context in which my interviewees were living their experiences. I believed that with each interview I better understood the experiences that were being shared with me. In analyzing the transcripts, I reflected on the genuine concern and the compassion with which each participant answered the questions. The data analysis focused on identifying valuable concepts, which were treated as basic units of analysis, and I used open coding to break down the data as I prepared them for further analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Then axial coding helped group the

open codes that appeared to be about similar ideas into categories. The axial codes (categories) were then explored and combined where appropriate according to emergent themes (see Table 1 for an example of coding process for research question 3 below). I placed all of the valuable concepts into an Excel spreadsheet which had a row for each the 6 participants and a column for each of the 4 research questions. Placing the valuable concepts into one of the 24 boxes according to the concept's connection to the research question allowed me to see patterns and group similar concepts and comments regarding the research questions. I was very conscious to focus on the similarities of lived experiences and the resulting themes reflect that approach.

Table 1

Example of Open Coding in Data Analysis

Open Code	Axial Code	Emergent Theme
Misinterpretation of <i>Bill 56</i> by stakeholders; reports come in late or not at all; sometimes the situation is victim-activated; there is a lot of miscommunication in schools between students, which causes ill feelings; the reality that there could be inaction related to reported incidents; surveys are not always reliable; we are suffering from survey fatigue; must have a standard reporting process.	Data are not always reliable	
Personal agendas of stakeholders hinder progress; people have different perspectives on the same situations; the reality that there could be inaction related to reported incidents; people do not read the school's policies and processes; all staff must be vigilant in supervision.	Students, parents, and staff being on the same page.	The challenge of the multifariousness of dealing with bullying situations effectively.
Takes a lot of time and effort to deal with situations, no easy fixes; looking for lasting learning not quick fixes; taking care of students is primary and takes time; we need resources to help victims and students who bully; pressure to properly deal with situations is high; we are under a microscope.	Bullying is a complex inter-personal phenomenon.	

By reflecting upon the data from the participants of the in-depth interviews along with the document analysis, I gave a retrospective account on: (1) the overriding priorities; (2) the concepts and themes that were meaningful, poignant, and common; (3) emerging themes; and (4) the topics of consensus and/or of dissention (McMillan & Schumacher, 2009).

Establishing Trustworthiness

I had good working and personal relationships with all six of the participants. Establishing trust had already occurred naturally as we were colleagues, and these relationships preceded this research project. My goal was to conduct a study where the participants experienced a non-judgemental and professional tone (Munby, 2003). Along with a non-judgemental and professional tone there was an emphasis placed on communicating an ethical code regarding their personal and professional safety. These were the cornerstones on which I wanted to build the trust of the participants in this research. I believe I was successful in engaging the participants in meaningful and honest conversations, and the anonymity of the participants in the subsequent reporting of findings was a key to allowing them to feel safe and free from judgement.

I chose to perform my inquiry in the school board where I am employed for two specific reasons. First, it was the organization I had worked with for 20 years, and, as a current employee, I continued to develop authentic and trustful relationships with colleagues. These relationships enhanced rapport and participation and provided credibility to this study. Second, having worked with *Bill 56* since its introduction and having worked closely with many school administrators to implement the expectations associated with *Bill 56*, I had a strong familiarity with the school board's organizational

health and the established common language in the board, as well as an understanding of the board's common policies and practices. I believed this familiarity with the culture of this school board allowed school administrators to trust my intentions and my methods of inquiry, and empathize with the need for such a study to be conducted. Certainly, given my experience as both a school administrator and someone who is experienced in dealing with *Bill 56*, I felt strongly that having supports available is an integral ethical consideration. This support was communicated as a part of the agreement to participate as an ethical consideration but also as an authentic attempt to establish trust. Knowing the participants was crucial in establishing trust in this process.

My goal was to gain authentic insights into the lives and experiences of school administrators. I was conscious to ensure that my written and oral communication showed no bias and I acknowledged that there was an appreciation for divergent and varied perspectives on the research topic. The interviews did not include any uncomfortable interactions. This may have been because the participants and the interviewer comprehended that bullying was an issue in their own schools and that improvements and insights were a main objective of this project. I focused on providing a safe and non-judgemental environment by reviewing and emphasizing the confidential nature of this process, by reiterating at the beginning of the interviews that my goal was to give school administrators a voice, and by communicating my respect for the work of school administrators. My intent was to create an opportunity for the participants to feel they could speak openly without any fears of being judged for their comments, convictions, and work.

In order to establish research trustworthiness, I developed a plan to address potential challenges and biases related to this research. After making sure the participants were comfortable and had enough time to meet with me, we spoke briefly about the process and about the main purpose of the interviews. I wanted to convey to the participants my respect for the work they do and that I believed a principal's role is a challenging one. I thanked them for their time and reminded them they could stop or they could withdraw at any time.

Two points of emphasis were made before each interview started. First, it was acknowledged that school administration is a challenging and rewarding experience and a discussion about transformational leadership could be difficult to imagine for some. Containing my belief in the importance of transformational leadership was not a major challenge and posed no potential bias as I had lengthy discussions with my thesis supervisor about my potential biases and I had time to reflect upon the role of a researcher and the need for open-mindedness and fairness during this process. Second, the participants and I agreed that we were going to share openly and honestly with each other and that the questions were going to be challenging because they were being asked to reflect upon their own personal beliefs and actions. After some reflection and certainly after each completed interview, I fully recognized that asking school administrators to reflect upon their own confidence levels was a complex, challenging, interesting, and enlightening process.

As I was the sole interviewer and insurer of verbatim transcription services, credibility issues could have arisen. Necessary steps were taken to ascertain that my written and oral communication showed no bias, and that I appreciated divergent and

varied perspectives on the research topic. Moreover, I had lengthy discussions with my thesis supervisor about the possibility of researcher bias and reflected on my role as a researcher. In addition, the credibility of this research is further enhanced through my faith in the truth of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My perspectives on the topics uncovered by the interview findings have grown in understating and appreciation. I was better able to understand the purpose of *Bill 56*, the impact of *Bill 56*, the challenges felt by committed principals, and the passion of professionals wanting to work with *Bill 56* to create a safe school environment. I have tried to communicate these findings without bias.

Ethical Considerations

As this study involved the acquisition of personal information, ethical principles were considered during the data collection process. Protecting the rights and welfare of the participants was a primary goal during this study. Protecting their confidentiality and maintaining participant anonymity were considered in all aspects of the interview process and the data collection.

The process of gaining informed consent was considerable as it took the form of written consent but also took the form of an introductory conversation preceding the beginning of each interview. Participants were asked if they were comfortable and whether they felt any concern over this process before the recording of interviews began.

Certainly, a central strategy in protecting the participants was my focussed efforts on being fair and caring in all aspects of the research process and this effort was enhanced because these were my esteemed and respected colleagues. I worked with, as

school board colleagues, all the participants and knew them on a professional and personal level.

Ethical guidelines were followed to ensure that all the participants of the study were treated with respect and consideration. Before proceeding with the data collection and analysis, clearance was sought from the Queen's University General Research Ethics Board (GREB). Ethical clearance letter for this study was granted on May 14th, 2014 (Appendix D). Permission was also obtained from the school jurisdiction where the research activities were conducted.

Chapter 4

Research Findings

This chapter presents insights into Quebec school administrators' perceptions of their work in maintaining a positive school climate within the context of the implementation of *Bill 56*. Following the presentation of the participants' demographic information, the findings are organized according to the four research questions of this study:

1. What are the goals and mandates of the anti-bullying legislation *Bill 56* in the province of Quebec as stated in the document and perceived by Quebec school administrators?
2. How do Quebec school administrators see their responsibilities and roles changing in regards to the mandates of *Bill 56*?
3. What are school administrators' perceptions of challenges and supports of the anti-bullying legislation *Bill 56* in the province of Quebec?
4. What is the impact on school administrators' confidence as they attempt to maintain a positive school climate within the context of the implementation of *Bill 56*?

Within each of the sections, I have intertwined document analysis findings and the interview findings and have categorized these findings by emergent themes in the order of their frequency of mention by the participants.

Demographic Information

Table 2 provides information about the six school administrators who participated in the one-on-one interview process.

Table 2

Study Participants

Administrator	Elementary or Secondary	Rural or Urban	School Size	Administrative Experience
Emily	Secondary	Urban	Over 500	Over 15 years
Bob	Secondary	Urban	Over 500	Over 15 years
Elias	Elementary	Urban	Over 500	Over 10 years
Olivia	Elementary	Rural	Under 500	Over 5 years
Anna	Elementary	Rural	Under 500	Over 5 years
Tara	Elementary	Rural	Under 500	Over 10 years

The six school administrators who volunteered to participate all had at least five years experience as school administrators. All six participants were administrators in schools before and after *Bill 56* was passed into law. Each of the participants was assigned a pseudonym. Four female administrators, Emily, Olivia, Anna, and Tara, and two male administrators, Bob and Elias, participated in the study. Four of them represented elementary school contexts, while two worked in secondary schools. The table above gives limited demographic data regarding the participants in order to protect their confidentiality, given that the school board was relatively small with a total of 23 school administrators. In the presentation of the data, I have used direct quotations from the participants and I marked each quotation by the school administrator's pseudonym.

Research Question 1: What are the goals and mandates of the anti-bullying legislation Bill 56 in the province of Quebec as stated in the document and perceived by Quebec school administrators?

When asked about the goals and mandates of *Bill 56*, the participants expressed perceptions that were predominantly concurrent with the defined purposes stated in *Bill 56* itself. There were three main themes that emerged: (1) common language and vision; (2) structure and plan; and (3) accountability.

Common Language and Vision

As evident from the document analysis, the purpose of the Act is outlined as follows:

This Act makes amendments to the Education Act and the Act respecting private education in order to prevent and stop bullying and violence in schools. The duties and responsibilities of the players concerned are set out, and school boards are put in charge of seeing to it that each of their schools provides a healthy and secure learning environment which allows every student to develop his or her full potential, free from any form of bullying or violence. Every public and private educational institution will be required to adopt and implement an anti-bullying and anti-violence plan. The plan must include prevention measures to put an end to all forms of bullying and violence and measures to encourage parents to collaborate in preventing and stopping bullying and violence and in creating a healthy and secure learning environment, specify the actions to be taken and the supervisory or support measures to be offered when an act of bullying or violence is observed, determine the disciplinary sanctions applicable to bullying and

violence and specify the follow-up to be given to any report or complaint concerning an act of bullying or violence. (Quebec Official Publisher, 2012, p. 2)

The interview findings revealed that the participants felt that, although there had always been a focus on school safety, *Bill 56* formalized a common language and common vision for all schools. All participants acknowledged the need for the province to clearly and formally outline its mission and vision for all schools. Participants cited a “positive impact of such a formal declaration” (Emily) and that it sets the “serious tone” (Anna) for conversations with students, staff, and parents at all levels of education, as it legally formalizes the responsibilities and expectations of all school community members (including parents and students). With this “serious tone” there is the “added weight” (Tara) of the bill as a legal document that gives principals the duty and power to enforce the requirements of the Act. The interview findings revealed the participants’ belief in the importance and positive impact of the common language *Bill 56* produced. Also expressed by the participants was the benefit of the common understanding that comes from a common language/definition: “Whether you are a parent, student, or staff member and whether you agree with the definition or not, it’s there for everyone to benefit from” (Emily). The participants acknowledged that potential ambiguities of having individuals work from their own definition of this complex phenomenon “complicates an already complicated and complex emotionally charged situation” (Anna) and makes these difficult situations even more problematic to resolve. But, once a common language and understanding was established, the door to a standard approach was opened.

Structure and Plan

The document analysis exposed the mandates dictated by *Bill 56* as a set of formal

guidelines and directives specifying that every Quebec school had to: (1) have a written plan; (2) share that written plan; (3) have a formal reporting process that is monitored by the school boards; and (4) have a formal data collection process in its school to monitor progress. This formal structure has given participants: (1) a “framework” from which to start that included developing a “committee approach” to plan development; (2) the mandate to “emphasize procedural and pedagogical” interventions; and (3) a set of legal obligations and structures that must be followed.

The interview findings revealed that the participants felt that “the emphasis on safety in schools has always been a priority” (Emily). There was consensus that *Bill 56* formalizes a reporting process, sets a structure for a plan, and sets expectations for all schools, and sets a legal element to responsibilities that did not exist before. As Olivia stated,

Bill 56 was passed to ensure that schools are following a standard law and all schools in Quebec are supposed to be on the same page. They have to follow the same requirements and school boards have to regulate it and we follow.

Developing a “whole-school approach,” “forming committees,” and “creating policy documents” were all cited by the participants as parts of the work and “pressures” of transitioning from a pre- to a post-*Bill 56* context. But, the participants also acknowledged that with this “pressure” came the distinct power of the principal and “school leaders” to enact real changes in the policies that govern school life. As Anna stated, “*Bill 56* is part of our legal obligation as a principal. I see it much like I would the Basic School Regulation or Education Act. It’s now part of how we have to do business with kids.”

A central concern that emerged within this theme was related to the potential that *Bill 56* could be used “as a checklist to complete” with the assumption that once completed, obligations would be fulfilled. For example, Emily stated that *Bill 56* is “not a program or something that you’re going to fix all bullying [with], it has to become a way of being in the school where this is just how we carry ourselves.”

Ultimately, the interview findings revealed that the participants acknowledged that *Bill 56* is a lens through which they must view their role as leaders in their schools. As Tara shared,

Bill 56 frames it or defines it or refines it in a way that it gives us [principals] a framework and boundaries to operate within.... Perhaps we didn’t look at it through that lens before or in that perspective.... They [principals] have a guide with probably one of the more complex issues of schools.

Accountability

The document analysis revealed that *Bill 56* clearly defines a set of requirements where schools must take action with specific interventions, policies, and practices that must be in place every year. It is also clear that the principal is considered responsible for making certain all of these requirements are in place.

The interview findings revealed the sense from the participants that the level of accountability of the principal had increased with the implementation of *Bill 56*. Principals are responsible for “everything that goes on in their schools with regards to violence” (Anna) and therefore, accountability is heightened because *Bill 56* has made principals legally accountable. It was acknowledged by all participants that principals are

“the captains of a ship, we are the principals of our schools so therefore when things go wrong in the school we are held accountable with or without this legislation” (Tara).

Cited as a concern is that *Bill 56* states that the principal is responsible for formally reporting every incident of bullying and explaining the interventions used, which “as a concept makes sense but in practice adds another layer of bureaucracy that may take away from daily practice” (Anna). Similarly, Emily stated, “Initially I had a concern when it seemed that I would have to write a formal report to the Director General every time there was a reported incident of bullying.”

Research Question 2: How do Quebec school administrators see their responsibilities and roles changing in regards to the mandates of *Bill 56*?

The document analysis revealed that *Bill 56* brings a new set of obligations and responsibilities to the principals of all schools in Quebec. Based on the document analysis findings, these directives seem to be clear and concise in their explanation of what steps principals have to take to: (a) prevent violence and bullying; and (b) deal with incidents as they occurred. The document analysis exposed the directives specifically set to prescribe the actions of the principal in these matters. The interview findings revealed that the participants believed part of the difficulty of dealing with *Bill 56* was that these specific directives for principals are prescriptively laid out.

The principals emphasized that they had already been practicing the strategies outlined by some of the directives, such as “The principal shall see to the implementation of the anti-bullying and antiviolence plan, and shall receive and promptly deal with all reports or complaints concerning bullying or violence” (Quebec Official Publisher, 2012, p. 6) and “The principal shall inform the student’s parents of the reasons for the

suspension and of the assistance, remedial and reintegration measures imposed on the student” (Quebec Official Publisher, 2012, p. 7). Similarly, they outlined that they had been practicing the following directive more often than not:

On receiving a complaint concerning bullying or violence, and after considering the best interest of the students directly involved, the principal shall promptly communicate with their parents to inform them of the measures in the anti-bullying and anti-violence plan. The principal shall also inform them of their right to request assistance from the person specifically designated by the school board for that purpose. (Quebec Official Publisher, 2012, p. 6)

The participants outlined the following directive as something that was not a new strategy but they felt strongly that this guideline, as Tara stated, “gives us formal authority and mentions the ‘bully’ as a person of need of care,” which has had a positive impact on the process:

The principal may suspend a student if, in the principal’s opinion, such a disciplinary sanction is necessary to put an end to acts of bullying or violence or to compel the student to comply with the school’s rules of conduct. When determining the duration of the suspension, the principal shall take into account the student’s best interest, the severity of the incidents, and any previously taken measures. (Quebec Official Publisher, 2012, p. 7)

The participants acknowledged that there were directives that they had not practiced before. The following directive was not a strategy they had practiced before: “For each complaint received, the principal shall send the director general of the school board a summary report on the nature of the incident and the follow up measures taken.”

(Quebec Official Publisher, 2012, p. 6) This requirement was portrayed as “difficult” and an “inaccurate form of collecting data” (Bob) that required the participants to electronically report on every socially, physically, or emotionally harmful behaviour under the umbrella of bullying. The information sent to the school board for the summary report, it was considered, an exercise that was seen as “not having a positive impact on the school itself and took time to do” (Emily).

The participants acknowledged that the following directive was a new strategy they had not practiced before and felt strongly that it had a positive impact on the process and their school overall: “The principal shall set up an anti-bullying and anti-violence team and designate a school staff member to coordinate its work as part of his or her regular duties” (Quebec Official Publisher, 2012, p. 6). As Elias stated, “...we now have a team to work with us who, by law, have to form and work together at establishing a safe and secure school...that team is invaluable.” Similarly, the participants felt that the following directive was a new strategy that, if encouraged, would have a positive impact on the process and their school overall: “The institution shall, on the recommendation of the team established under section 63.5, support any group of students wishing to conduct activities conducive to preventing and stopping bullying and violence” (Quebec Official Publisher, 2012, p. 12). The participants acknowledged the this directive was a new strategy that they, as Anna stated, “had not necessarily practiced with such depth and precision” before and felt strongly that it had a positive impact on the process and their school overall:

The principal shall see to it that all school staff members are informed of the school’s rules of conduct, safety measures and anti-bullying and antiviolence

measures, and of the procedure to be followed when an act of bullying or violence is observed. (Quebec Official Publisher, 2012, p. 7)

The next directive was acknowledged by the participants as something that was also a new strategy they had not practiced before but felt strongly that it had a positive impact on the process and their school overall:

The principal shall also inform the student's parents that, in the event of any further act of bullying or violence, on a request by the principal to the council of commissioners under section 242, the student could be enrolled in another school or expelled from the schools of the school board. (Quebec Official Publisher, 2012, p. 7)

The participants also acknowledged the directive: "The principal shall inform the director general of the school board of the decision to suspend the student" (Quebec Official Publisher, 2012, p. 7), they perceived as a new strategy which had little impact on the overall process and because of the "lack of practicality and, in fact, clarity of process" (Elias):

When asked about the changing roles of administrators in relation to the given legislation, the participants expressed sentiments similar to ones found in the document. Overall, three main themes emerged from their responses: (1) principals as essential to the success of a whole-school approach; (2) changes in the formal reporting process to the MELS; and (3) the increase in required day-to-day bullying-related interventions.

Principals is Essential to the Success of a Whole-School Approach

The content-oriented document analysis revealed that *Bill 56* requires principals to take many aspects of school life into consideration when developing their school's

plan. Based on the findings from the document analysis, principals are required to lead the way in: (1) creating a committee; (2) developing a comprehensive plan the impact of which can be measured; (3) creating a policy and a code of conduct that must be communicated to the school community; and (4) reacting to all reported incidents and follow-up in writing to the school board. *Bill 56* states:

The main purpose of the plan must be to prevent and stop all forms of bullying and violence targeting a student, a teacher or any other school staff member. In addition to any elements the Minister may prescribe by regulation, the plan must include:

- (1) an analysis of the situation prevailing at the school with respect to bullying and violence;
- (2) prevention measures to put an end to all forms of bullying and violence, in particular those motivated by racism or homophobia or targeting sexual orientation, sexual identity, a handicap or a physical characteristic;
- (3) measures to encourage parents to collaborate in preventing and stopping bullying and violence and in creating a healthy and secure learning environment;
- (4) procedures for reporting, or registering a complaint concerning, an act of bullying or violence and, more particularly, procedures for reporting the use of social media or communication technologies for cyber bullying purposes;
- (5) the actions to be taken when a student, teacher or other school staff member or any other person observes an act of bullying or violence;

- (6) measures to protect the confidentiality of any report or complaint concerning an act of bullying or violence;
- (7) supervisory or support measures for any student who is a victim of bullying or violence, for witnesses and for the perpetrator;
- (8) specific disciplinary sanctions for acts of bullying or violence, according to their severity or repetitive nature; and
- (9) the required follow-up on any report or complaint concerning an act of bullying or violence. (Quebec Official Publisher, 2012, p. 10)

According to *Bill 56*, the principal is responsible for the overall development and implementation of such a plan. Interview findings revealed the understanding by the participants of the need for a whole-school approach led by the principal. As Elias stated:

We begin the school year...going through our general rules and regulations, we go through the process of how to report bullying, what we consider to be acts of bullying or intimidation, we clearly outline things.... So that part is a shared responsibility and the staff take it on wholeheartedly.

The context-oriented document analysis determined that *Bill 56* outlines requirements that promote a plan of interventions through the lens of a whole-school collaborative approach that is to be led by the principal. As Tara stated,

The plan is important but it's got to be complemented with the ongoing work of the principal, the ongoing work of the relationships with staff, parents, and students to keep promoting and building a positive and safe culture. It is a daily [effort], and to do it effectively, you can't take your eye off it for a second.

The interview findings suggested a consensus among the participants whereby there was an acknowledgement of the benefits of the standardization of school plans and policies regarding bullying in schools. This point resonated in statements such as the following from Bob:

Having the *Bill* as a backup from the Government through the school system is a great tool to have in the school setting. People know we are all on the same page and have the system backing us up in terms of priorities.

A similar statement was made by Olivia:

Bill 56 passed to ensure that schools are following a standard law and all schools in Quebec are supposed to be on the same page. They have to follow the same requirements and, well, the school boards, they regulate it and we would follow.

Tara also concluded:

Bill 56 is part of our legal, legal obligation as a principal. I see it much like I would the basic school regulation.... Now it's part of how we have to do business with kids, with respect to anti-violence and anti-bullying.

The interview findings disclosed that the participants believed that principals have always been responsible for the safety of the students and staff and that these responsibilities of the principal changed in that *Bill 56* made specific demands of principals and held them publically accountable. This did not seem to be perceived as a negative change but as a change nonetheless, in that, as Emily stated,

Although we have always been responsible we now have a blueprint for a comprehensive approach.... That requires me to be more creative and develop a more across-the-board plan than I had ever done before, and that's a good thing.

Although the team approach to dealing with reported incidents was common for all the participants, Emily iterated that, in the end, the final word comes from the principal:

Typically reports come to a staff member or even the principal, and there would be a follow-up in that the administrator would want to either deal with it himself/herself, but [would] usually assign it to a counsellor to deal with the situation, interview the students, and then separately try and collect all the actual information to share what has been collected. If there's a consequence to issue, and there usually always is, that would come from an administrator.

Changes in the Formal Reporting Process to the MELS

The document analysis revealed that one process that had been imposed on principals through *Bill 56* was the mandatory reporting of all potential incidents of bullying and violence to the school board and to the MELS. This new requirement had a ripple effect at the school level. The interview findings revealed that the participants believed they had to create an efficient in-school process for the reporting and documenting of incidents of any kind in order to comply with the new law. According to the participants, although the reporting of incidents had always been an important aspect in their school setting and was a required practice for school staff, the process took on a new level of rigour after *Bill 56* was implemented.

The interview data revealed that the participants believed that, in the case of bullying or incidents of violence, documenting the details was prudent and a practice that would serve all principals well. Therefore, as decision makers in schools and in the light of *Bill 56* expectations, principals' reporting processes must be adapted to be able to: (1) get as comprehensive a picture of the incident as possible and therefore be better able to

explain and describe the incident and the inevitable interventions that they will need to make; (2) highlight the reasons behind consequences they need to prescribe (especially in cases where these decisions are challenged and are likely taken to another level such as the police, the school board, and/or the Ministry of Education); and (3) track repeat offenders and repeat victims to aid in deciding future consequences and interventions.

The context-oriented document analysis revealed that principals in Quebec are to be held accountable, especially when there was a formal process through which they could be taken to task or challenged regarding their handling of bullying incidents. Principals are now expected to report to their immediate supervisor, the Director General, all incidents are reported regardless of their validity or scope. Participants indicated that this new element added some stress and, at the time of the interviews, had still not been fully worked out in terms of processes. Participants expressed concerns about the ambiguity surrounding the written expectations of the reporting by the principal of all incidents of bullying. As Bob noted, regarding “the school board system for tracking all information on students, whether or not it’s a bullying incident or not ... we must enter the perpetrator and victim, event type, dates.” *Bill 56* required principals to report to the school board “all incidents of bullying and this is a new step in the process as reporting all incidents [has] historically not been transmitted to the school board” (Emily).

Several participants acknowledged that the new reporting process had a positive impact as,

It allows us to do a lot more pinpointing of where the event occurred, who would be involved, and what type it was [and] anything new that you’re undertaking and putting into your system or your routine there is an adjustment period.... The

reporting is time consuming yet I see it [as] necessary ... and excellent data that we can use. (Bob)

But the reporting process also presented a change. Elias explained,

I think the idea of it being law, whereas before it was your personal judgment. But the fact that the reporting system seemed to be so much more formal, I guess that that caused a bit of anxiety for sure but [I am] probably more effective now as a result as I get more comfortable with the process, probably.

The emphasis that all incidents must be reported according to the processes established by the school was echoed by the participants as a potential positive outcome of a successful plan put into action. The participants acknowledged that, in schools, there will always be the challenge of ensuring students, parents, and staff feel confident and safe enough to report incidents happening to themselves, to their friends, to their children, or even to strangers:

An increase in reported incidents is not a bad thing.... [It] means that people are trusting me to be able to help. If there's no reporting of incidents, there's no trust in the adults to help and that's a challenge. (Anna)

The challenges of persuading people to report are complex and not always easy to overcome. As Bob stated,

I believe there's still a percentage that is not being reported that is a true bullying situation. But it's very hard to deal with kids that constantly either say "We were joking" or they're too afraid or they don't want to be socially stigmatized by saying "It was a bullying situation."

Some of the comments were as follows: "I now think the students have a grasp of what

[bullying] looks like and bystanders are better able to identify it and better prepared to deal with it” (Elias) and “I think it [*Bill 56*] has opened up a line of communication for people who have been a victim of intimidation in a way that it just wasn’t there before” (Elias).

The context-oriented document analysis of *Bill 56* highlighted the education provided by the bill to the school community about the negative effects of bullying and the need for all school community members to speak up as an effective method to deal with the phenomenon in schools. Olivia expressed the importance of everyone “being on the right page,” as when that is accomplished, then issues would be properly reported in a timely manner. Increased reporting was one issue mentioned by participants, regardless of the quantity of the reports.

The Increase in Required Day-To-Day Bullying-Related Interventions

Overall, participants experienced the general pressures and challenges of being a principal. This reality was augmented by the fact that the interviews took place in their own schools where there were serious issues being dealt with either before or after our interview. The participants emphasized the considerable effort and time required to accomplish their daily tasks and responsibilities. Participants expressed the belief that the expectations of their roles after the implementation of *Bill 56* increased their workload. In particular, the day-to-day conversations and interventions required to properly deal with reported incidents increased as sensitivity to potential bullying behaviours became a focal point for students and staff.

The interview findings showed that participants saw increased interventions, ultimately, as a positive outcome of *Bill 56*. The participants also added the pressure of

carving out the appropriate amount of time to investigate and intervene, being competent enough to effectively deal with situations, and having resources for support and follow-up for both victims and perpetrators. As Bob noted,

Well, some days I can spend an entire day on one report. Not to say that *Bill 56* is responsible for that per se. I could receive it just as a student concern and spend the same amount of time.

This amount of time, the interviews findings revealed, can lead to stressors related to managing the rest of the school's daily needs, real deadlines, and the regular daily requirements of a school leader. The participants emphasized the importance of taking the time to properly deal with student needs but that the time spent nevertheless caused pressure in other areas as they tried to manage all their related duties.

With more of a focus on promoting the reporting of all incidents, the participants noted an increase in day-to-day interventions. They also were required to follow up the process that was established by communicating to the board and the MELS, which was a step added with the implementation of *Bill 56*.

The interview findings revealed that, as the participants continued to learn more about their roles and responsibilities, they developed a better understanding of what the process, when properly carried out, required of them:

It's not in a negative way but there are a lot more phone calls and a lot more conversations with parents. There's a lot, because I am more educated and I see the importance of it, there's a lot more time being spent talking to students.... The core to dealing with bullying is creating relationships with an adult and the adult helping them [the students] make the right decisions.... That takes time to create

that relationship when you're dealing with students that are in a very negative place. They don't trust a lot of people. (Olivia)

Elias elaborated that there is a complex process of dealing with each report and that more reports are being filed after the introduction of *Bill 56*:

You are constantly in the position when you're making sure that any reports that reach your desk are valid, categorized properly.... And the challenge is you have to follow up with a sometimes large group of people after an incident occurs. So, you're reporting to the victim's family, the perpetrator's family, staff, other students, the students involved in the incident. I think the challenge is a time issue.

The interview findings revealed that the participants believed that there was an overall increase of bullying reports since *Bill 56*, and they acknowledged that this fact was a sign that staff, parents, and/or students were not accepting the role of passive bystander but that attention was being paid to victims. As Olivia stated,

I think it's [bullying is] always in schools.... I think we have a better handle on it; we see it faster.... It's just the time and trying to juggle what you know is the right thing and with all the managerial stuff you have to do and I think having the right people in the right place is key.... But it does come down to the administrator.

As effective interventions and strategies emerged, they developed within a context of strong relationships having been built between the students and adults. As Tara stated:

In schools ... we know behaviours won't be compliant. Behaviour and learning take place when a child doesn't want to let down a caring adult whether it be a teacher or the principal.... But when the relationship isn't there, it doesn't matter what the teacher does, what your plan is, learning will not happen.

The participants acknowledged the increased time and energy needed to properly address reported incidents was a by-product of a more developed understanding of the nature of bullying, a more educated school community with higher expectations for successful outcomes, and the imposed pressure on themselves to get it right and make lasting and impactful problem-solving decisions.

Research Question 3: What are school administrators' perceptions of the challenges and supports of the new anti-bullying legislation *Bill 56* in the province of Quebec?

When asked about their experiences with the challenges and supports related to the implementation of the *Bill 56* guidelines, the participants shared comments regarding challenges and supports that could be broadly grouped into the following seven themes: (1) the challenge of the multifariousness of bullying situations; (2) the challenge of "getting it right"; (3) the challenge of staff, parent, and student "buy-in"; (4) the challenge of building trust in the school; (5) the support from a proven program such as that developed by Olweus (Olweus & Limber, 2007a; Olweus & Limber, 2007b); (6) the support from the school board when principals' decisions were challenged by parents; and (7) the support from *Bill 56* itself. The interview findings provided insight with regards to the supports brought on by the reactions to implementing *Bill 56* but there were a few comments made with regards to the supports that were created after the participants were exposed to and reflected upon *Bill 56*.

Challenge of the Multifariousness of Bullying Situations

The interview findings revealed that the most common theme was the participants' belief that bullying situations in schools are a multifarious and multi-layered process. Given that principals in schools are responsible for the success of their anti-bullying outcomes, the pressure to learn to deal with bullying situations effectively and efficiently is a reality the participants mentioned. Anna described the process as

pretty complex, like if it's a real situation and it's complex and ongoing, like it doesn't get fixed. And that's probably one of the only times that I say to people "This might not get fixed right away, you know." Like it takes a long time to get all of the pieces in place.... You're ... trying to change a person's mindset, right. So, it doesn't happen overnight or just because I give out a consequence or just because I speak to the person.

Dealing with an emotional and intricate social phenomenon is a considerable challenge and can become even more complicated when the conflict is

sometimes victim-activated so that the students are doing things that cause others to retaliate and it's working through that whole miscommunication. Some students need support in developing skills when integrating with others that with just a little bit of extra help and support we can curb these situations. (Bob)

The interview findings revealed that participants acknowledged that dealing with bullying reports could impact an entire day's workload, because dealing with the actual reports requires sifting through the data and details, which is a multi-layered process. There was also a common thread regarding the added complexity of dealing with parents

“that don’t believe their child was a bully or ... was involved in a situation where a consequence had to be applied” (Bob).

The interview findings also revealed that adding to the multifariousness of the process for principals was dealing with conflicting interpretations of *Bill 56*. This occurred when members of the population become entangled in the situation and use sections of the school policy or *Bill 56* to forward their own agendas without acknowledging that students (both victims and perpetrators) need to be considered individually. Following the processes in place meant that the participants (as principals) are the final decision makers. Emily highlighted a phenomenon of when parents have “latched onto *Bill 56* as a default, and so I’ll receive phone calls every now and then, parents say, ‘*Bill 56* says this kid should be thrown out of the school’ or ‘*Bill 56* says that and this.’” Participants described the pressure generated by the amount of situations to be dealt with outlined in their respective school policies (which are tied to both school board and *Bill 56* policies). These policies are focused on taking care of their students, and adequately dealing with both victims and potential perpetrators. The multifariousness of every singular situation where children are involved was a central point made by the participants. As Anna explained:

Those problems don’t just go away. It takes a while.... Part of the frustration for me is that if you’re not really, kind of, given the time that it needs. Well, and you worry about doing it right, too, because it’s kids. It’s, you know, it’s not like ... something that you just get over. That’s like a permanent scar on a lot of kids. So you don’t just fix it quickly. That weighs on you, I would say.

To Emily, the challenge of dealing with these multifarious situations is not new to the post-*Bill 56* era, but has changed with the implementation of *Bill 56*.

The interview findings also revealed that participants felt pressure regarding the potential for interventions put in place by the school staff to be ineffective. Part of the nature of bullying situations is that they involve complex interpersonal interactions that are not always easy to make healthy. Some of the concerns voiced by participants were regarding the experience that potential inaction to reported incidents was never considered to be okay. For example, Bob noted:

If I lose just one student because we don't do this, if I have one student even make an attempt of suicide then we have to continue this. This, whatever the toll on me as an administrator would be, or I daresay administrators, that is something we have to do. We can't lose one kid by not doing something.

Challenge of “Getting it Right”

The context-oriented document analysis revealed that the primary strategic goal of *Bill 56* is to enhance the safety of students in the school setting. The interview findings revealed that the participants argued that school safety has always been one of their top priorities with or without *Bill 56*. Certainly, it was expressed that the perception from parents that the safety of students had not been a priority until *Bill 56* was a frustrating experience.

Participants discussed this omnipresent pressure of keeping children safe before and after the introduction of *Bill 56*. They agreed that *Bill 56* heightened the awareness and seriousness of the issues surrounding bullying and its impact on children. Hence a common thread among all participants was an emergent pressure related to the increased

stress on “getting it right” or else students would suffer. As Anna explained, the pressure providing effective and timely support exists:

I think initially I did have the mindset that it was just kind of like a lot of other problems. You just deal with it. I mean, it is in a way but it isn't. It's more complicated. They're always more complicated. It's like ... because you're trying to shift people it takes a lot longer. And it's people's emotions, right. And sometimes I think we don't even understand how much hurt they've inflicted ... like how deep that is.... We don't understand ... like how hard that is on them [the victims].

Anna talked about the process of increasingly understanding more of what the victim deals with and understanding the need for perseverance to keep students feeling safe and supported when issues are not resolved after the first, second, or third interventions. The participants believed that creating the safe environment intended by *Bill 56* was dependent on students, parents, and staff interventions before and after a student is victimized. The participants expressed a concern that some students would never come forward and be supported. For Elias, this fact was a difficult one to deal with directly, “I am concerned that someone will slip through the cracks. Something will be misinterpreted, reported incorrectly, we don't see something coming and as I said at the end of the day it is students' safety.”

The participants described that the pressure of dealing effectively with every reported violent or bullying situation can sometimes turn to a stressor. Elias explained,

And when the process falls apart I know who I blame. It would be me. Because I am in charge of the process.... So any misinterpretation of a situation that would

cause harm to a child later on is probably my biggest anxiety. As far as the law itself goes, I believe that I am doing the best I can. But it would be that that would make me anxious.

On a larger scale, the interview findings revealed the participants' understanding that there needed to be a change in the culture of a school to ensure safety and security for long-term progress. This understanding seemed to add to the pressure of "getting it right" as a necessary element to achieve the long-term expectations set forth in *Bill 56*.

The interview findings revealed that the impulse of "getting it right" was a persistent pressure for principals at both elementary and secondary levels of schooling. The qualitative data gathered by Tara and Elias in their schools began to paint a picture that amplified their concerns for students who had been living with bullying experiences for years without intervention and support. Although *Bill 56* brought issues to the forefront, the perseverance and dedication of the staff were cited as necessary elements for future success:

My concern is that some people think just having the Bill [*Bill 56*] and therefore the plan is enough. And again ... the framework and everything you are doing is building from the plan. The only problem I have is that if you haven't created the positive culture, you haven't created a safe school and you haven't got healthy relationships with parents and staff. (Tara)

The interview findings revealed that all participants echoed a pressure they felt to keep students and staff safe. The participants not only accepted that the work is hard and stressful but that they preferred that the responsibility to "get it right" be on them. "Getting it right" was revealed to be a major concern for the participants because of the

nature of the impact of bullying on children, which they understood well. The interviews revealed that the possibility of bullying situations going unresolved and the ramifications of that were a relevant stressor. The participants showed the most emotionality during this portion of the interviews, which was aptly characterized by Emily's response:

I could be stressed about a lot of things when it comes to my job but nothing keeps me up all night like when a child in my school is hurt and I can't seem to find a solution.... I feel like I let them down even though I tried everything I knew to do. It sucks to fail at this aspect of my job.

Challenge of Buy-In

The context-oriented document analysis of *Bill 56* revealed that the expectations for schools were clearly outlined and therefore implementing the law is what school staff are required to do. It may be argued that *Bill 56* does not require any buy-in in a literal sense, as *Bill 56* is legislation and members of the school community must abide by the rules and policies. But, if the expectations are to be fulfilled and the ultimate goal of a safe school is to be achieved, the interview findings revealed that participants acknowledged more diverse human collaborations must be well managed. Therefore, buy-in, in the context of *Bill 56* (and through the discussions with the participants) could be defined simply as the acceptance as worthwhile of the idea that adults must keep kids safe. The participants emphasized that the process of getting staff, students, and parents to actively support the idea that schools need to be bullying free and violence free is multi-layered, yet it falls within the primary aspects of a principal's responsibility.

Overseeing the actions of the students is one part of the expectations laid out in *Bill 56*, but the emphasis of *Bill 56* is on what the adults do. Just as participants

understood that they were expected to put in place structures and interventions, they also realized that they could not do this alone, and that the teaching staff were important in evolving a school's culture by role-modeling desired behaviours and by implementing the essence of the plan by reporting potential issues.

You'd like to say it is all of your teachers, but not all the teachers embrace all the ideas at the same level.... But if you can get at least the very minimum for all the teachers to convey the importance of not getting frustrated with children, supporting children, looking after social and emotional wellbeing as one of our first jobs, and creating that context for teaching and learning through a deeper relationship, then other things will come after that. But without that as a starting point, or a common denominator within a school, I think it is always going to be hit and miss. (Tara)

The interview findings emphasized the participants' reliance on the importance of changing adult behaviours as the first way to achieve whole-school buy-in. This was emphasized by Bob and Elias, who spoke about the necessity that the principal and the staff be role models for the students: "But, definitely adult staff in the building are the ones that should lead by example.... Sometimes if maybe a student sees a teacher do something then they think it's okay to do it" (Bob); "I insist that the staff, myself included, we model the behaviours we expect to see from the students. It is key" (Elias).

The participants all took on the responsibility to lead the school community in the endeavour to create a school culture that would support all the expectations of *Bill 56*. It was also clear that the participants believed that they could not achieve the expectations set forth in *Bill 56* without the buy-in from the staff. As Elias stated, this endeavour was a

challenging one, “My goal is to have my staff more implicated in adapting the plan because I feel like I kind of have dictated it to this point.” Emily spoke of the transition in a school setting when not everyone buys in immediately regardless of whether they believe it is a good idea or not:

A particular emphasis was put on the fact that a lot of this stuff isn’t new, and that’s not to say it’s not important. Obviously it’s very important but ... any time something new is introduced, people do feel stress and anxiety, and it was important to speak to the staff. And speaking to them about *Bill 56* and [making] them aware that, look, this, the expectations are not changing.

Olivia noted that the role of the principal is that of a leader who must lead an environment where buy-in, trust, respect, and caring are at the forefront of every conversation. Olivia had been conducting end-of-year interviews with staff and found that the changes implemented in keeping with *Bill 56* were being embraced, and, by some, for the first time. She explained,

I think, right now I’m doing my end of year reviews with the teachers and it’s very evident that they respect, you know, that you hold true to your word. They can trust you, hold true to your word, the students can trust you.

One of the main challenges, as expressed by Emily, is the level of buy-in a principal can generate in a school by the students. Although *Bill 56* explains the expectations for students, staff, and parents, the participants reiterated they wanted more than just compliance with the law. Participants acknowledged that ensuring parent buy-in was a priority for principals’ work:

I need to educate parents. They need to know what social media is doing, what's happening. A lot of parents are just not aware and not ready and not helping keep track of things and I am talking elementary, not only high school. (Elias).

Essentially, as Emily explained when speaking about how principals can go about ensuring students comply, "I try to remember that they are students, they're not adults. By treating people with dignity and respect, I think you fold all of that in. That's how you get people to buy in."

The document analysis revealed that *Bill 56* sets expectations for the principal to create a formal committee of adults (staff and parents) and students mandated to lead the development and implementation of the anti-bullying plan. This new committee was something that needed to be embraced by staff and students. As Emily stated, "I think one lesson that I've learned is that I don't need to tell everybody what to do.... Then they have buy-in and now that the parents are involved, now the parents will have some buy-in."

Challenge of Building Trust

An initial impact of *Bill 56* was the emergence of the data from students. The data that were gleaned from qualitative surveys done in Bob's school revealed that students did not trust the school adults to be able to deal with bullying situations effectively. Bob spoke of the information gleaned from surveying the students as part of *Bill 56*-related initiatives and learning about the lack of faith and trust students had in the adults in their own school. The challenge of building trusting relationships and gaining the trust of students and parents in the context of bullying incidents was a recurring theme throughout the interviews.

The interview findings revealed that participants believed that the challenge of developing trusting relationships in a school was central to a principal being an effective leader. Whether in the context of *Bill 56* or in a general sense, when trust does not exist in a school, people will not feel safe and a lack of trust, the participants stated, could lead to less reporting of incidents, possible increase of incidents, a resentment building in students towards schooling, staff and students feeling unsafe, and a host of other negative possibilities. The participants stated that the challenge of creating trust in the school staff to properly deal with bullying and violence-related situations was a central role of the principal and this understanding was a direct result of the implementation of *Bill 56*.

The participants spoke of the importance of building trust in relationships within the school in relation to being able to create a healthy school environment where the expectations set forth in *Bill 56* can be efficiently and effectively implemented. A necessary element to enact the spirit of *Bill 56* and give meaning to the legislation is the importance of building the trust of the students so that they (1) trust an adult to report issues to and (2) respond to adult interventions.

My feeling, the core to bullying is creating a relationship with an adult and the adult helping them [the students] make the right decisions or influencing them. So that takes time to create that relationship when you're dealing with students that are in a very negative place. They don't trust a lot of people. (Olivia)

In the interviews, the participants spoke about how important building trust was as an essential element in all healthy relationships and they believed that the relationships developed in schools were no different. The participants spoke about how challenging it is for school leaders to cultivate trust and to maintain trust once it is established. The

interview findings revealed that participants overall believed that the notion of building trust was essential if schools were going to achieve the requirements of *Bill 56*. The focus for the participants of building trust was that, in doing so, their schools were going to become safe, positive, and healthy environments:

Because when there is trust and there is an actual relationship, when there is a problem, we can talk about it together and we can work together. And we feel we are partners, we are not opposing one another.... The more good healthy, good relationships you have with the parents, the more civil the discussion and the more understanding both sides are. (Tara)

The participants discussed the challenges of establishing a school culture where everyone, especially the adults, must follow the written expectations set forth in *Bill 56*.

It's hard though when you walk into a traditional staff. Here, I'm talking about spending time with a bully and making sure you put things in place for them and it's not always a hard enough consequence for them. But if you have that trust, then they're willing to go with you and wait it out until they see the positives because now it's starting to come to fruition. I think I need to keep doing what we're doing but to make sure we meet a little bit more often by being right on top of it, which is hard but you know, just keep doing it. Otherwise, it does get out of control, right? It just blows up. Being on the right page, I need everybody to be on the right page. (Olivia)

The participants acknowledged that building trust was an essential element for the success of their anti-bullying and violence prevention programming efforts and they

admitted that building trust was multifaceted. There was consensus that *Bill 56* indirectly created a focus on trust building by mandating priorities such as:

(1) an analysis of the situation prevailing at the school with respect to bullying and violence; (2) preventative measures to put an end to all forms of bullying and violence, in particular those motivated by racism or homophobia or targeting sexual orientation, sexual identity, a handicap, or a physical characteristic; (3) measures to encourage parents to collaborate in preventing and stopping bullying and violence and in creating a healthy and secure environment; (4) procedures for reporting, or registering a complaint concerning an act of bullying or violence and, more particularly, procedures for reporting the use of social media or communication technologies for cyber-bullying purposes; (5) actions to be taken when a student, teacher, or other school staff member or any other person observes an act of bullying or violence; (6) measures to protect the confidentiality of any report or complaint concerning an act of bullying or violence; (7) supervisory or support measures for any student who is a victim of bullying or violence, for a witness, and for the perpetrator; (8) specific disciplinary sanctions for acts of bullying or violence, according to their severity or repetitive nature; and (9) the required follow-up on any report or complaint concerning an act of bullying or violence. (Education Act, 2014, c. 75.1)

The participants saw these mandates as a package and as goals to be accomplished that would in fact build the trust needed to make these very mandates effective.

The interview findings revealed that the participants acknowledged they found that students began to trust that the adults were focusing more on their safety. This “trust

building is an ongoing process that will increase [if principals and the] school follows through with their *Bill 56* mandated plans” (Elias).

Support of a Proven Program such as Olweus²

The interview findings revealed that the participants appreciated being exposed to a program such as Olweus. Tara commented:

Olweus ... gives people a guideline and the framework to follow so they can at least identify what to do when someone might be a victim or someone might be a perpetrator ... or bystander. I like the idea we are trying to be consistent and implement something proven.

Emily referenced Olweus as a support: “I think it’s important that the way we’re looking at it is trying to be proactive, trying to educate students, so we use these resources to target and educate students. We have access to the Olweus Program.” Anna commented:

There’s also the Olweus programming.... The teachers have all been through the training so I think that’s pretty, you know, it’s a good support system. It seems to be like an ongoing, like it’s not just a one shot you have to fill out this plan. It’s a regular part of the conversation at the admin table, I would say. So that’s a good thing as opposed to just ... another form or template you have to complete. Like

² As a support for schools and principals in the school board and in reaction to *Bill 56*, the Olweus Program (Olweus, 1993; Olweus & Limber, 2007a; Olweus & Limber, 2007b) was introduced to all schools and school principals (and, in June 2014, was made mandatory for all schools in the school board). At first, involvement in principal training in the Olweus Program was voluntary but, as the effectiveness of the program became evident amongst the principals in the board, it became mandatory for all principals and schools to adopt the program. At the time of the interviews, all schools in this school board were considered “Olweus” schools but all of the schools were at different stages of implementation. All the participants were familiar with the Olweus Program, and compulsory elements of the program had been implemented in each of the participating schools.

there's an expectation that it's part of your dialogue at your school level, I think, from the board level.

The interview findings revealed that the participants viewed Olweus as effective and Bob and Anna cited sources that revealed the very positive impact on school climate and school safety of the Olweus Program (Bauer, Lozano, & Rivara, 2007; Black & Jackson, 2007; Pagliocca, Limber, & Hashima, 2007; Ttofi, Farrington, & Baldry, 2008).

The context-oriented document analysis revealed that *Bill 56* mandated increased overall accountability and a by-product of this focus on accountability was a more data-based approach. Participants spoke of the Olweus Program's impact on their practice and noted that a significant benefit of the Olweus Program is its focus on qualitative surveying of students, parents, and staff. Therefore, if the by-product of the implementation of *Bill 56* was the need for accountability, then Olweus "helped supply useful strategies to survey the community" (Emily) and "provided a nice structure to standardize our data collection" (Bob).

One of the main strengths and by-products of implementing Olweus and committing to the program in its entirety is the building of organizational trust, especially among the students, as the school staff become better accustomed to dealing with bullying issues (Bob; Emily).

School Board Support When Principals' Decisions Were Challenged by Parents

There was pressure on principals to make certain they were fulfilling the legal requirements of *Bill 56*. Bob expressed that a form of support can come from a better understanding of *Bill 56*, and, in particular, that knowledge has an impact and can be a support when decisions are challenged:

Definitely within the school board we are constantly helping each other, updating each other on what information we bring back from other management meetings. The school board has been very supportive, helping clarify if necessary a report of an incident or how to proceed with something that we would be unclear of. Helping with parents that don't believe that their child was a bully or did a situation, was involved in a situation, where a consequence had to be applied.

The interview findings revealed that the participants understood that their decisions made in dealing with situations might be challenged and that the process for officially appealing decisions was outlined in *Bill 56*. Therefore, there was an understanding that their decisions must adhere to *Bill 56* standards, school standards, and/or school board standards. When challenged by parents, students, and even staff, a principal can look to *Bill 56* and established policies for support, which becomes the basis for board support.

Support from Bill 56 Itself

Overall, there was a consensus that *Bill 56* and its by-products (.e.g., Olweus, open dialogue, standard expectations) have been an overall support for principals. First, *Bill 56* creates a common language for making expectations and consequences formal and standard with regards to violence and bullying. Tara spoke of the overall benefit of *Bill 56* as a form of support and reference point:

And I think when there is a new legislation or a new initiative you really need support of an administrator. You have to have something to work from. That framework was invaluable at the beginning because at least it allowed us to have a starting point. We were in the dark at first, where do you go with this.

The participants commented that *Bill 56*: helped their schools move in the “right direction” (Emily); made all schools set a standard and made them follow “the same requirements” (Olivia); was to be seen by everyone as law and as important as the Education Act in Quebec (Anna); set guidelines, a framework, and a structure “that we didn’t have before” (Tara); is a “tool and a backup from the government” to help us (Bob); and is a “law which supports our decisions,” debunking the myth that principals act solely on “personal judgment” (Elias). *Bill 56* ultimately was seen as a support that came to schools from the government and was embraced as such. As with all things imposed on educators, “there have been worthy and challenging implications of *Bill 56*” (Elias).

Research Question 4: What is the impact on school administrators’ confidence as they attempt to maintain a positive school climate within the context of the implementation of *Bill 56*?

The impact of the implementation of *Bill 56* on the principals’ confidence in maintaining positive school climate was reflected in three emergent themes: (1) framing principal’s role as an educator and a lead learner; (2) developing as a caring, committed, and competent leader; and (3) observing increased understanding translating into increased success. While the former two themes referred to the process of establishing confidence, the latter theme referred to the outcomes of the growing confidence. These emergent themes have been linked to the participant confidence because they were aspects the participants felt were within their own circle of influence. The confidence gained by focussing on aspects of school life the participants had some control over allowed, I believe, them to feel as they were making short-term progress but also creating

long-term success as they were working toward building more positive schools in term of climate and safety.

Principal as Educator and Lead Learner

The role of the principal as instructional leader is not explicitly stated or defined in *Bill 56*, but the context-oriented document analysis of *Bill 56* revealed that an argument could be made that the sum total of the stated expectations of the principal frame the role as that of an instructional leader. The expectations of *Bill 56* require that principals plan, instruct, socialize, and share with the school community the ways in which bullying and violence will be dealt with. In this way, principals are expected to be the schools' instructional leaders of a curriculum that centers on anti-bullying and violence prevention.

Interview findings revealed that “principal as lead educator” was a key concept that emerged from the participants' responses. The participants saw their roles as educators as key to successfully fulfilling the expectations and interventions set forth in *Bill 56* and the school-established plan. Educating parents, students, and staff was spoken of as the cornerstone of building a learning environment that is safe and healthy. As Olivia stated, “Education is key” and the example of everyone being a learner starts with the principal. Furthermore, Emily mentioned that the key to a successful “role out” (a play on words instead of using “roll out”) of the plan to address the expectations of *Bill 56* is the role of the principal as lead learner. She added, “I think it's important that the way we're looking at it is trying to be proactive, trying to educate students, so we use these resources to target and educate students [and staff].”

Tara reiterated that a principal's role-modeling of being a pedagogical leader in terms of anti-bullying initiatives and being a leader in relationship building in the school was central for lasting success:

Creating a positive learning environment is the key. As I said before it's the foundation; it's the underpinnings; it's the culture of a school. And it is the daily interactions, staff member to staff member, staff member to child, to parent, the bus driver. It is the relationships that are being created. It is the role-modeling from the principal to the secretary, to everybody in the building, but it's making people realize that to provide the context for teaching and learning, there has to be a deeper level of relationship. If the relationship isn't there, learning won't take place.

As members of the school that principals work with daily, students and staff can influence this process. Parents are not always near to be able to influence the process in the same way; yet, they were deemed important: "We've got to improve definitely on ... how we are educating parents. Because we don't all share the same set of values or morals or ethical standards, so whatever vision we create for our school sets a standard" (Elias).

Understanding the challenges and taking these challenges on as lead learners was a prevailing theme among the participants, as they understood the importance of growing confident in their role as educators of the entire school community made up of students, staff, and parents.

Educating staff is another key component of principal acting as lead learner and educator, as not all staff who work with students have adequate training. In some cases

there are staff who have an impact on the safety and security of the school climate who are not teacher trained nor do they have an education background: “We need the bus drivers and supervisors outside who don’t have teacher training ... the noon supervisors ... to be on the same page so we all deal with things in the same manner” (Olivia).

The participants’ confidence was being strengthened as they led concerted efforts to create a team atmosphere where staff and students learn and work together to overcome the complexities of bullying incidents. The participants referred to “building a culture” in a school where the pedagogical aspects of the implementation of *Bill 56* aligned with the practical and relational aspects of working with students in these situations. Principals, it was acknowledged, were considered the key elements in educating, not only through the written plan and policies but also more importantly through the tone and tact in which the plan was unfolded:

We are working together so if there is an incident, we have a plan to start with. And we are doing many different things to try and ensure that the kids understand their role and understand you can’t just say, “Don’t bully” or “We’ve got a safe school” because it is too abstract. You have to reduce it to the simplest concepts: to be kind, to work together, and to tell an adult if there is a problem. When you build that kind of culture in a school, kids start to get it. So the plan is again, it is not just a piece of paper, not just a 1, 2, 3, 4 steps, here you go. It is something you are always working on with kids, with parents, with staff, and again you get different levels of success with different parents, different staff, and different kids.

(Tara)

Embracing the role of an educational leader “starts right at the top with the admin team” (Bob). It was also communicated that *Bill 56* aided principals to commit to addressing the school safety issues.

Developing as a Caring, Committed, and Competent Leader

A common theme that resonated throughout the interviews was the acknowledgement of the importance and centrality of the principals’ approach, the principals’ level of expertise, and the principals’ level of commitment to role-modeling of what is expected from all members of the school community. This was reflected in such comments as:

I think the best way to generate enthusiasm through empathy and role-modeling ... if it’s going to be sincere and genuine, is to make people understand exactly what it is we’re talking about and putting people in a position where they almost experience that themselves. (Emily)

The expectations of *Bill 56* led the participants to develop research-based anti-bullying plans. But, it was argued, that these established plans had to be accompanied with a caring and patient leader who chooses to be a “proactive advocate” of anti-bullying and beyond that, an advocate for a safe and secure school culture.

Well, it’s “lead by example” first and foremost. We need to make sure that we are open and accepting and we do not pre-judge in situations where students will either feel that they will not be listened to or we will make a decision against them immediately. I think in our school system parents, staff, and students are all aware that we take adequate time to investigate all concerns and we do come to a final

resolution that is amicable for everyone, not necessarily the best one for everyone.

(Bob)

A continued theme throughout the interviews was that principals' impact on the staff and students in a school was central to moving people forward and to the success of fulfilling the expectations set forth by *Bill 56*. As Emily phrased it:

I think role-modeling as an individual who is genuinely caring and empathetic and who is very much an advocate for all students, an advocate for a safe school environment [is pivotal] through my actions, through the way that we conduct ourselves as a staff, through the way I lead staff meetings, through the way I run assemblies, through the way I deal with students when there are behaviour issues.

There was a thread of statements that embodied a belief that the responsibility for successes in a school setting belonged first to the principal. The participants committed to owning this responsibility whole-heartedly due to a moral obligation of the leader of a school. Elias explained, "I believe it is my responsibility to set a tone and make sure that staff buy in and students buy in, and it rolls out that way. So, I believe it is completely my responsibility." Participants spoke about how they felt their confidence grow with time and experience in the general sense as school leaders. As challenging as the bullying phenomenon is in schools, the participants expressed a resolution to grow and be more effective every time they encountered a bullying situation. (Although the term confidence did not directly occur in all comments, it was evident implicitly in the passion and conviction with which principals discussed the matters in the interviews).

Increased Understanding Translating into Increased Success

These interviews occurred two years after the implementation of *Bill 56*. The participants expressed a positive growth process related to their continued focus and work on their overall plan and approach:

I think that's why I'm very comfortable with our plan ... and I'm very comfortable following it and holding true to what it says. So I am proud that, you know, [I'm] very open. I speak to parents, of course not with confidentiality things but you know, very open with the process, open with what's going on. I have a good feeling of what's going on in this school and I think parents would like me to totally get rid of bullying but I don't think that's a possible task, just being able to deal with things when they happen. (Olivia)

Growth over time requires patience and diligence, as there was an acknowledged concern that mistakes in implementing anti-bullying measures negatively impact children's lives. The participants expressed a belief that, as their experience and expertise increased, their confidence and competence did as well. This was expressed by Bob in the following way:

I think I approach everything differently now because I'm reading a lot into what I'm seeing or reading from students...I'm trying to be more vigilant on my own to educate students or staff on what to me is not cool in terms of student behaviour.

The interview findings indicated that participants were deeply committed to the processes and policies they themselves had put in place and their belief that they could successfully lead their schools was strong and determined. Anna talked about the need for a concerted response to all reports and the belief that if students "have your support with

that they'll keep reporting to you." Tara acknowledged the "complexity of the phenomena" of bullying and the importance of recognizing that "kids aren't coming to school to be bullies," which puts into context the approach taken and how policies are meted out. It is this type of leadership that the participants explained was necessary for lasting change and success:

And I think through all of that, it is transformation that can build a healthy school climate and that in turn builds a safer school.... There are so many layers, so many levels of looking at anti-bullying or bully prevention or safer programs that you can never just think you have one program, therefore you are going to have a safe school. [It is] just too deep, too complex, so therefore you have to have many levels of support. (Tara)

Participant commitment was evident in their responses and in the conviction of their responses throughout the interviews. As experienced administrators, the participants' perceptions were characterized by Anna's relaxed but focused statements, "there are no quick fixes" to this complex issue and "I am beginning to be okay with that process." Ultimately, I believe the participants realized that bullying and violence were going to exist in schools in some form or another. This hard fact, it was acknowledged, created some resignation and discouragement but also the participants seemed to have developed a resolve in knowing they would continue to improve their approach and overall effectiveness.

The interview findings showed that participants felt that their confidence in dealing effectively with bullying situations had increased with every experience. Elias stated:

I felt overwhelmed earlier on and now feel at least more capable as I move forward.... I was frightened to make a mistake in my first year because of the seriousness of the situations.... I know now how we should proceed and follow the processes in place and that helps.

Olivia also iterated:

My confidence has changed because now I feel that I am taking care of things and I am taking care of things in the right manner.... We're making a difference and I have to believe we will continue to improve every day.

The participants acknowledged that their confidence also increased because of the support systems they have around them. As Bob explained:

I now have the right people in my life professionally and personally to help. I know anytime I've reached out for help in my building, to the school board, wherever, other principals, we've always been supported. So, I think, even within our own school board, we're very fortunate to be able to lean on each other and I am lucky to work in a situation where I have two other people I can look to for support. That makes the difference in tough times.

Summary of the Findings

In this chapter, I presented the findings from the analysis of the documents and interviews in the context of each of the four research questions. First, using both context- and content-oriented approaches to document analysis, I discussed the goals and mandates of the anti-bullying and violence prevention legislation in Quebec. The document analysis of *Bill 56* revealed elements of the document to outline the specific expectations of schools and principals. The focus was on the mandates, specific to

principals, outlined in *Bill 56*.

Second, I discussed how Quebec school administrators regard their responsibilities and roles changing in relation to the mandates of *Bill 56*. Overall, three significant themes were evident in participants' responses: (1) the participants noted that dealing with bullying issues has always been important to them but that *Bill 56* thrust the topic into the forefront of the school safety conversations, with an overall positive effect; (2) the participants highlighted that their workload had increased as reports of bullying had increased but also because their approach to dealing with issues became more holistic as their expertise and understanding grew; and (3) the interview findings revealed that *Bill 56* increased participant understanding and allowed for growth in expertise and effectiveness in dealing with bullying issues and in developing more effective anti-bullying practices while giving the phenomenon the serious tone it deserves with regards to student, parent, and staff perceptions of it. This chapter outlined the specific directives that the participants felt were strategies they had and had not practiced before, as well as the change in impact or authority in these strategies because of the implementation of *Bill 56*.

Third, I presented the document and interview findings that revealed the participants' perceptions of the challenges and supports presented to them in the context of *Bill 56*, which centered on the importance of bringing their community together by building strong relationships. Overall, four significant themes were evident in participants' responses: (1) the participants distinguished that the major challenge of "getting it right," the pressures they felt as the principal agents of the implementation of *Bill 56*, and the success of implementing the measures of *Bill 56* are all contingent on the

building of positive and healthy relationships in a school amongst the students, staff and parents; (2) the participants acknowledged that *Bill 56* increased pressure on them to be more effective as they planned and implemented their plans; (3) the participants called to attention that major challenges were centered on the complexities of dealing with a major phenomenon such as bullying and violence in schools and that the essential elements of building trust and buy-in by a caring, committed, and competent principal was crucial to accomplishing the needed building of relationships among students, parents, and staff; and (4) the findings revealed that, even though their understanding, expertise, and effectiveness in dealing with bullying issues were developing, they felt the pressure to get it right as soon as possible coupled with the discouraging reality that bullying will always exist in schools.

Fourth, I provided an overview of the impact on participants' confidence as they attempted to maintain a positive school climate within the context of the implementation of *Bill 56*. Within these research question groupings, the findings were categorized into the following themes organized in their order of their frequency of mention: (1) the participants realized the need to establish themselves as a strong and committed educator and lead learner in schools; (2) the participants acknowledged that caring, committed, and competent leadership was crucial to accomplishing the very possible goal of having safe and secure schools; (3) the findings revealed that *Bill 56* had increased their understanding and ability to develop their expertise and effectiveness in dealing with bullying issues and in developing more effective anti-bullying practices; and as a result, the participants noted that their confidence increased as they gained more experience dealing with the situations that arose while consistently reflecting on their practice.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings from the analysis of the data in relation to the relevant literature. Each research question is linked to the pertinent literature. I conclude this chapter with implications for theory, policy, practice, and further research, as well as personal reflections on the research journey.

The data analysis presented an opportunity to explore the divergences and convergences of the findings with the existing literature. Each interview placed an emphasis on the commitment and care with which the participants watched over their respective schools. Participants eagerly discussed their insight into their perceived sense of self-efficacy in maintaining a positive school climate within the context of the implementation of *Bill 56*. The findings from the interviews were congruent with the previously discussed research literature; at the same time, the unique understandings conveyed by the participants were valuable and insightful. I share these insights from the analysis below, organized according to the four research questions in this study.

The Goals and Mandates of the Anti-Bullying Legislation *Bill 56*

In *Violence in the Schools: Let's work on it together* (Quebec Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2009), the MELS concluded that a mandatory plan to ensure all Quebec schools were working on developing positive school climates was needed. This document stated that schools must be committed to reducing the negative experiences with bullying and violence that students in Quebec deal with, along with improving overall student achievement. Therefore, it should be no surprise to educators that the passing of Quebec's *Bill 56* mandates that school administrators are responsible

and accountable for the safety of their students. According to *Bill 56* the school administrators' accountability for their school's climate requires the production of a plan and identification of effective resources that will be adopted by the school to combat bullying and violence. It is expected that school administrators invest time, thought, effort, and resources to create a plan that will yield valuable returns to create school environments that are safer and more peaceful for children and, by implication, more conducive for learning and healthy development.

The interview findings revealed that the participants expressed a deep understanding of the defined and implied purposes of *Bill 56*. The participants perceived *Bill 56* to have formalized a common language and common vision for all schools with an overall positive impact on practice. They pointed to the erroneous impression of some members of the school community that *Bill 56* implied that such environments have only been prioritized after the implementation of the bill. Although the emphasis on safety in schools had always been a priority for participants personally, they acknowledged the positive impact of having a clear and formal mission and vision with regards to bullying and violence for their own school communities. This aligns with current literature regarding effective schools (Lezotte, 1991) and the work focusing on the centrality of clarity as an antecedent to organizational health (Lencioni, 2012). Participants cited that there was a positive impact of this province-wide declaration and that it set the "serious tone" for conversations with students, staff, and parents of all levels of education as it legally formalizes the responsibilities and expectations of all school community members. Furthermore, the participants recognized that these elements assisted them in fulfilling their duties as school leaders.

Overall, participants acknowledged the positive impact of a well-defined policy document such as *Bill 56*. This perspective converged with Caldwell and Spinks (1988), who described the positive impacts of policy implementation by providing a framework for planning; fostering stability and continuity; eliminating ambiguity; and showing community members that the leaders are willing to be held accountable. Based on the interview findings, these directives were, for the participants, clear and concise in their explanation of what legal steps a principal had to take to prevent violence and bullying and to deal with incidents as they occurred. However, it was noted that *Bill 56* does not offer a set of pedagogical interventions to actively deal with bullying and violence and that ways to achieve the goals and expectations set forth in *Bill 56* are not explicitly explained or detailed. Therefore, participants saw potential imbalance that might occur when a set of expectations was outlined without providing an explanation of how to achieve those expectations.

The document analysis findings showed that *Bill 56* has a distinctly defined set of requirements whereby schools must ensure that specific interventions, policies, and practices are in place every year and principals are accountable to ensuring the basic requirements are met. Furthermore, every school principal has to: (1) have a written plan; (2) share that written plan; (3) have a formal reporting process that is monitored by the school boards; and (4) have a formal data collection in the school to monitor progress. Yet, as Fullan (2010) and Reeves (2009) stated, a plan is only as effective as the person leading the implementation of change. The participants acknowledged this last point as crucial in their understanding of what it takes to be an effective leader who transcends a plan by fostering greater citizenship behaviours every day (Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

Researchers (Kotter, 2012; Marzano, 2000; Marzano et al., 2005; Sergiovanni, 2009) demonstrated that principals are far more effective if they are organized and are competent leaders who have a structured and standards-based approach to school leadership.

A central concern that emerged in the interviews was related to the potential of mandates to be used by schools “as a checklist to complete and move on.” In this way, participants were concerned that while legal obligations would be fulfilled, moral obligations would not be. The literature review findings identified a difference between transactional and transformational leaders (Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1985; Hornett, 2001; Lynch, 2012; Northouse, 2007; Sergiovanni, 1990; Waldman, Bass, & Einstein, 1987). The transactional leader might theoretically make sure the checklist was completed and oversee the process, making sure its requirements were being met. On the other hand, the transformational leader might make certain the list and the processes were fulfilled and then work to create a shared sense of ownership, whereby the list was understood as the responsibility of the collective. Similarly, transformational school leaders might provide the services mandated under the law while also planning to “stimulate others to view their work from new perspectives, generate an awareness of the mission and vision of the organization, [and] develop colleagues and followers to higher levels of ability and potential” (Tschannen-Moran, 2003, p. 159).

Research suggested that the success or failure of school initiatives depends heavily on the theory and practice of the school administrator (Marzano, 2000; Marzano et al., 2005). Participants in this study showed concerns regarding the level of accountability of the principal according to *Bill 56*. The level of their commitment to the

value of leadership converged with Fullan (2014), who dismissed the notion that accountability is an effective motivator for change. The interview findings revealed that the accountability aspect of *Bill 56*, for the participants, existed as a reality of the legislation but did not act as a transformational motivator in their approach to student health and safety. Although the participants acknowledged added stress, their concerns went beyond the heightened levels of accountability and even liability as a school principal associated with *Bill 56* and focused on doing what they were mandated to do.

The participants stated that *Bill 56* created a sense of urgency within the educational system. This sense of urgency, Kotter (2008) explained, is a necessary element for change. Kotter (2008) described the need for a sense of urgency to combat complacency and to motivate leadership to embark on a path of change. This is important as an alignment can be made between the participants' view of their own buy-in of *Bill 56* and Kotter's (2008) argument that a sense of urgency can lead to meaningful change. The interview findings revealed that the participants expressed the realization that without this sense of urgency, as Kotter (2008) described, people (although very motivated to be the best they could be) might not give the needed extra push of hard work to accomplish this very complex task of keeping schools safe.

Participants cited the benefits of an Olweus Program as an example of a whole-school anti-bullying approach. Similarly, scholars (Bauer et al., 2007; Black & Jackson, 2007; Pagliocca et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2005; Ttofi et al., 2008) acknowledged that Olweus programming seemed to have provided more effective positive outcomes than other anti-bullying efforts. Smith and Schneider (2004) recognized that a whole-school approach might have a significant impact on school climate but warned that there were no

guarantees that a whole-school program would have a significant and/or immediate impact on bullying issues. In 2002, Barbara Coloroso wrote to parents:

Ask for a copy of your child's school's antibullying policy. Check to see that it has the four principles (from Olweus)... In the end, you want to know that your child's school has a strong antibullying policy that is clearly articulated, consistently enforced, and broadly communicated. Along with the policy, you will want to be sure that there are procedures and programs that back up and reinforce the policy as well as create a safe and caring environment for students. It is one thing to have a policy; it is wholly another to make sure the policy is on the school wall or an inspirational piece of writing at the beginning of the student handbook. It is the school culture and social environment that these policies, procedures, and programs create as well as reflect. (p. 178)

Without referring to Coloroso directly in the interviews, the participants indirectly expressed agreement with this message. The participants acknowledged the effectiveness of *Bill 56* in making anti-bullying and violence a prominent public priority. They also acknowledged that they had not dealt with bullying in the ways that Coloroso described in her work in 2002, as their school board or schools did not have, on record, specific anti-bullying policies until after *Bill 56* was enacted. Yet, Coloroso's (2002) visionary work outlined exactly what *Bill 56* attempts to address.

Changes in School Administrators' Responsibilities and Roles under *Bill 56*

Overall, there were three main themes that emerged from the principals' responses. First, they recognized the renewed emphasis on principals' leadership role in the success of school's anti-bullying undertakings. Second, they emphasized that the

changes in the reporting of incident processes that existed to track and to hold principals accountable were a major change. Lastly, the participants acknowledged that there was an increase in required day-to-day interventions as a direct result of implementing *Bill 56* in their schools.

The participants acknowledged the benefits of the standardization of school plans and policies regarding bullying in schools and the renewed focus on the role of school principal as the leader in this process. Based on the findings from the document analysis, *Bill 56* requires principals to lead the way by: (1) creating a committee; (2) developing a comprehensive plan the impact of which can be measured; (3) creating a policy and a code of conduct that must be communicated to the school community; and (4) reacting to all reported incidents and follow-up in writing to the school board. As stated before, principals had to choose a path of developing an effective school anti-bullying programming. Yet, it can prove a difficult choice for administrators. Although there is a wealth of anti-bullying and violence prevention programs, there is no consensus in the literature on which program or approach is the most effective (Howard, Flora, & Griffin, 1999). Similarly, despite some studies that outlined programs that may have had a positive impact on students (Ferguson et al., 2007; Melbourne Department of Education and Training, 2006; Rigby, 1997a, 2002a; Smith & Schneider, 2004), others question whether there can be such a definitive stance of positive impact of anti-bullying programs (Beran & Shapiro, 2005; Bickmore, 2011; Ferguson et al., 2007; Merrell et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2008; Wolke & Woods, 2003). Regardless of the program choice, the participants expressed that, without effective leadership by the principal, initiatives of any kind would not be as effective or effective at all. This perspective

aligned with a 2005 review of anti-bullying policy and practice conducted by the Melbourne Department of Education and Training (2006), through which several effective common practices emerged from the schools that were deemed to be in good standing in relation to student well-being, and first on the list of the effective common practices was effective leadership. Other studies strongly indicated that effective school leadership, and specifically school administrators, are key to achieving overall success in many areas of school life (Blase et al., 1986; Bosworth et al., 2011; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1984, 1992, 2005; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002). Through the content- and context-oriented document analysis, it was noted that, although *Bill 56* does not explicitly use the term “whole-school approach,” it does promote this approach by the sum total of its mandates, which require a whole-school approach. Terms such as “whole-school approach,” “forming committees,” and “creating policy documents” were all cited by the participants as parts of the work and “pressures” of transitioning from pre- to post-*Bill 56* contexts. But, it is also acknowledged that with this “pressure” comes the distinct power of principals as “school leaders” to enact real changes in the policies that govern school life. Overall, *Bill 56*’s structure and focus aligned with the research about the need for effective school anti-bullying programming (MDET, 2006; Smith et al., 2005; Smith & Schneider, 2004).

The participants stated that the role of the principal changed in a legal sense with the implementation of *Bill 56* because of the added responsibilities and expectations listed in *Bill 56* encompassed by the following statement: “The principal shall see to the implementation of the anti-bullying and anti-violence plan, and shall receive and promptly deal with all reports or complaints concerning bullying or violence” (Quebec

Official Publisher, 2012, p. 6). The responsibility of the principal to execute such a plan was regarded to have changed because of the public nature of the implementation of *Bill 56* and the heightened awareness of students and parents. Indeed, principals are considered to have a major impact on school culture and a safe school environment (Bulach et al., 1998; Kelley et al., 2005; Loukas, 2007; Pepper & Hamilton Thomas, 2002). Yet, participants expressed concerns about the ambiguity of the written expectations regarding the reporting of all incidents of bullying by the principal. Fullan (2010) and Reeves (2009) warned educators against over-planning on paper, as this can render “fat plans” immovable. Fat plans, according to Reeves (2009), were elaborate plans which might not have the desired impact once implemented. The participants discussed certain aspects of *Bill 56*, “...like trying to report every incident whether its bullying or not to the Ministry...can take away from my time to deal with important details” (Elias), that have the potential to take away from the primary focus of the legislation which was keeping kids safe.

The participants also acknowledged the importance of having parents, students, and staff reporting all potential issues, as it signified to the participants that attention was being paid to victims. The need to build trust among all members of the school environment has also been emphasized by researchers (Booren & Handy, 2009; Hoy & Feldman, 1987; Kutsyuruba et al., 2011; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). As a result of trust, effective interventions and strategies were emerging and stronger relationships were developing between students and adults. This understanding converges with Tschannen-Moran (2014) who noted, “studies of resilience among adolescents who have succeeded despite living in highly adverse and difficult circumstances found that they frequently

credited a supportive relationship with an adult, usually a teacher, as crucial to their success” (p. 173).

The participants believed that the expectations during and after the implementation of *Bill 56* increased their workload in part because of the need to provide an increased number of interventions. Although there was a consensus that the increase in interventions was a positive outcome of *Bill 56*, respondents added that they felt the pressure of ensuring there was adequate time to investigate and intervene, of being competent enough to effectively deal with situations, and of providing appropriate and timely resources for support and follow-up for both victims and perpetrators. These functions required considerable effort and time in addition to accomplishing their other daily tasks and responsibilities. Fullan (2014) noted that principals’ responsibilities have increased enormously over the past two decades: “They are expected to run a smooth school; manage health, safety, and the building; innovate without upsetting anyone; connect with students and teachers; be responsive to parents and the community; answer to their districts; and above all, deliver results”(p. 6).

Challenges and Supports of the Anti-Bullying Legislation *Bill 56*

Challenges

The participants shared comments related to the following challenges: (1) the challenge of the multifariousness and complexity of bullying situations; (2) the challenge of “getting it right”; (3) the challenge of “buy-in”; and (4) the challenge of building trust.

The principals in this study recognized that bullying situations are complex and that it may be much more challenging to resolve them than it would seem at a first glance. Olweus and Limber (2007a) maintained that bullying is a complex issue that

needs to be addressed at all levels of a student's experience and explained that the entire school climate is impacted when adults at a school allow bullying situations to continue. Most people involved in bullying situations, the bully, the victim, and the bystander, are negatively affected by their experiences (Anderson et al., 2001; Connolly et al., 2000; Josephson, 2004; Nansel et al., 2001; Roland, 2002; Salmivalli et al., 1999). Participants acknowledged that dealing with emotional and intricate social phenomena can be a considerable challenge. Coloroso (2002) described the multi-layered process of stopping violence:

Breaking the cycle of violence involves more than merely identifying and stopping the bully. It requires that we examine why and how a child becomes a bully or a target of a bully (and sometimes both) as well as the role bystanders play in perpetuating the cycle. (p. xvi)

Principals commended *Bill 56's* focus on educating the school community on the negative effects of bullying and requiring that all school community members speak up to deal with the phenomenon of violence in schools. They also felt the intensity of the pressure of effectively dealing with both victims and potential perpetrators. This pressure does not seem generated by the number of situations to be dealt with, but more by the confidence and competence of the staff who work with bullying situations where children are involved.

As noted before, principals considered that *Bill 56* has heightened the awareness and understandings of the seriousness of the issues surrounding bullying and its impact on children. Social, emotional, intellectual, and physical safeties are all fundamental human needs (Maslow, 1943, 1954). Feeling safe at school is an extension of these

fundamental needs in the school context, if learning and healthy development are to flourish (Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Craig et al., 2010; Devine & Cohen, 2007; Greene, 2005; Karcher, 2004; Whitlock, 2006). Therefore, damages done by a negative, threatening, and hurtful school climate can rob students of their spirit; their educational, physical, and mental health; and, sadly, sometimes their lives (Wessler & Preble, 2003). Because of the ever-present pressure of keeping children safe, school administrators experienced the overwhelming challenge, and associated with it stress, of “getting it right” or else students would suffer. As Hoy and Miskel (1978) explained, “too often administrators define problems quickly and narrowly and, in so doing, restrict their options and treat only the symptoms of the problems” (p. 270). Similarly, “bullying, forms of discrimination, harassment, and others may fall under the radar of an unobservant school leader who is focusing exclusively on management rather than what is happening in the climate of the school” (Blanchfield & Ladd, 2013, p. 4). Although *Bill 56* outlines the responsibilities of principals with regards to responding to all reported incidents of bullying and violence in their schools, the participants worried that some students would never come forward and they would never have the whole picture of the situation. The challenge of “getting it right” was seen as a persistent and startlingly real pressure as they began to gather the data through polls and surveys of their students and staff. What was promising is that principals showed leadership in dealing with this hard and stressful issue in their schools and actually preferred that the responsibility to “get it right” was on their shoulders. As Kotter (2012) noted. the change process is never effective unless it is driven by high-quality leadership and “not just excellent management” (p. 22).

In order to be successful in their efforts, principals emphasized the importance of the process of getting staff, students, and parents to “buy in” and actively support the idea that schools need to be bullying free and violence free. Although it seemed natural that the participants expect this from everyone, they acknowledged that bullying was a multifarious phenomenon and admitted that not all members of their school community were on board with the processes they were trying to put in place. This reality shows that the challenge for school administrators to be leaders of both organizational and pedagogical change is an intricate and important process if schools are to achieve desired results in all areas of school life. Kotter (2012) explained that school administrators’ task of implementing change processes and policies requires high confidence and competence related to personal and professional characteristics. Although it may be argued that *Bill 56* does not require any collective buy-in in a literal sense, the participants noted that for it to be effective legislation, members of the school community must go beyond just abiding by the rules and policies. The participants recognized that if the expectations are to be fulfilled and the ultimate goal of a safe school is to be achieved, much more complex interactions must take place. The discussions with the participants revealed that effective buy-in, in the context of *Bill 56*, could be defined simply as the voluntary acceptance of an idea as worthwhile and recognition that adults must keep kids safe. According to Kotter and Whitehead (2010), effective leaders help others understand the necessity of a desired change, help others accept a common vision and mission, and inspire them to take action to achieve the desired outcome.

Finally, participants noted the challenge process of developing trusting relationships in a school. Based on the information gleaned from surveying the students

as part of *Bill 56*-related initiatives, some participants learned about the lack of faith and trust some students had in the adults in their own school. As they pointed out, whether in the context of *Bill 56* or in a general sense, when trust does not exist in a school, people do not feel safe. A lack of trust, the participants stated, could lead to: less reporting of incidents, a possible increase of incidents as a result, a resentment building in students towards schooling, feelings of lack of safety among staff and students, and a host of other negative possibilities. This challenging perspective was described by Tschannen-Moran (2014):

Principals and other school leaders need to earn the trust of the stakeholders in their school community if they are to be successful. They need to understand how trust is built and how it is lost. Getting smarter about trust will help school leaders foster more successful schools. (p. 8)

A necessary element to enacting the spirit of *Bill 56* and giving meaning to the legislation is establishing the trust with the students so that they trust the adults to report issues and they trustfully respond to adult interventions. Fullan (2014) noted, “spreading trust entails mastering directness and honesty about performance expectations; following through with actions on commitments made; ensuring clear understanding of key communications; and being comfortable in dealing with conflict” (p. 130). Similarly, Lencioni (2012) posited that a leader is responsible for establishing an environment of transparent trust where people are completely comfortable, honest, and vulnerable with one another. Furthermore, principals expressed how challenging it is for school leaders to cultivate trust and maintain trust once it is established. It was encouraging to see trust being described by respondents as essential if their schools were going to achieve the

requirements of *Bill 56*. Therefore, they vowed that their schools were going to become safe, positive, and healthy environments and that as role-models they were committed to this promise to follow the written expectations set forth in *Bill 56*. As Tschannen-Moran (2014) wrote, “being a positive model is never more necessary than when it comes to cultivating a culture of trust. Discontinuity between word and deed will quickly erode a principal’s ability to lead” (p. 256). Similarly, principals in Kutsyuruba et al. (2011) believed that trust restoration efforts are to be undertaken despite considerable amounts of effort and time dedication and all the hurdles and disappointments.

Supports

Participants regarded the following as supports brought on by *Bill 56*: (1) the support of the school board in challenging cases; (2) the support derived from developing an effective anti-bullying team and program; (3) the support through personal reflection on their practice and learning together with other principals; and (4) the legislation’s framework support as a change agent.

The support from the board office provided participants with more confidence when making difficult decisions in the context of handling future bullying cases. Of particular value was the support they received from their director of education after complaints were made about school-level decisions; it gave them the feeling of validation in the work they were doing. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2005) cited district support as a significant contributor to principal self-efficacy. In particular, their study revealed that the support afforded to principals from the superintendent had significant impact.

The participants appreciated the Olweus Program training afforded to the schools and principals of the entire school board. The school board mandated that all its

principals be trained in the Olweus Program as one of the leading international authorities on bullying. They credited this opportunity for providing principals with a practical framework from which they could draw ideas, interventions, and policies. Participants noted that *Bill 56* attempted to mandate schools to include in their approach key principles that are parallel to those in the Olweus Program (Olweus, 1993; Olweus & Limber, 2007a): (1) positive and involved adults; (2) firm limits on unacceptable behaviour; (3) fair, clear, and consistent discipline and consequences vs. punishment; and (4) behaviour by adults that do not lead to authoritative adult-child interactions. The participants appreciated that one of the strengths of having had to work with Olweus was the fact that the directives for adults were strictly laid out. As found by Tschannen and Gareis (2005), district-level support with regards to resources shared with principals contributed to principals' self-efficacy and confidence.

Interview findings indicated that participants gave considerable praise to the teams that have formed in their own schools and the impact these committees have had on the culture of the school. This is congruent with the findings of Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2005), who explained that the most “strongly related support variable in principals' self-efficacy... was the perceived support from constituent populations at the building level” (p. 107). The authors stated that this “bottom-up” support from teachers and students mattered the most to their participants. The principals in this study mentioned the importance of school board support of their work as important but repeatedly referred to the importance of teamwork from the school community to make *Bill 56* work.

The participants were a closely-knit group of principals, as their school board was a small one in terms of size with a culture of positive principal collegiality. This finding linked to what the participants considered as an important factor contributing to their support system. The participants' experiences of working together to share plans and discuss best practices was congruent with Fullan's (2014) claims and the concept principals must be open to working with each other for the betterment of all the schools in the board. Fullan (2014) argued that being a "district team player" is key to that principals' effectiveness. Finally, the participants revealed that the process of being interviewed about *Bill 56* and reflecting on their own personal leadership practices were very positive experiences that affected their understanding, practice, and consequently their resiliency towards the challenges.

Through the context-oriented document analysis, it could be inferred that *Bill 56* is a change agent in the educational scene in Quebec. As such, *Bill 56* brought to principals the requirement that a team be formed and the intent, one could concur, was to legislate a team-oriented approach. It was clear that supervising and managing the actions of students was one component of the expectations laid out in *Bill 56*; however, it could also be inferred that the emphasis of *Bill 56* was mainly on the actions of adults. Participants realized that they could not put in place structures and interventions alone and that the teaching staff was important in evolving a school's culture by role-modeling desired behaviours and implementing the essence of the plan by reporting potential issues. This belief in the importance of staff buy-in converged with the work on distributed leadership (Harris, 2012, 2013a, 2013b), a model that is focused on collaborative work of administrators, teachers, support staff, and students as leaders.

Hargreaves (2007) described distributed leadership as central to system reconfiguration and organizational redesign that necessitates lateral, flatter decision-making processes. Although it is not without its risks, for those “genuinely seeking transformation and self-renewal, this is a risk well worth taking” (Harris & Spillane, 2008, p. 33).

Overall, *Bill 56*'s policy framework support is evident in the intent to create a long-term positive and healthy school climate. Well-written and disseminated policies, Caldwell and Spinks (1988) stated, provide clarity, stability, continuity, consistency, and an overall feeling that decisions will be made according to a standard policy. Moreover, school administrators are positioned as key leaders in the process of successful policy implementation (Sergiovanni, 1984, 1992, 2005; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002). The *Bill 56* framework's scaffolding is intended to fulfil this role by requiring principals to invest time, efforts, and funds and to maintain cooperative relationships and teamwork in order to create school environments that are safe and conducive for learning and healthy development (Smith et al., 2005; Yukl, 1994).

School Administrators' Confidence in Maintaining a Positive School Climate within the Context of *Bill 56*

The guidelines within *Bill 56* present schools with expectations for legal and moral imperatives that involve complex and complicated social, emotional, procedural, and pedagogical decisions of a school administrator. The impact of the implementation of *Bill 56* on the principals' confidence in maintaining positive school climate was expressed in three main themes. First, a principal's primary role was seen as an educator and a lead learner. Second, it was recognized that an effective principal must be a caring, committed, and competent leader who builds trust in school. Third, an increased and

deeper understanding of the phenomenon of bullying and violence prevention by the staff was perceived as translating into increased successes for students.

The first two themes referred to the process of growing one's own confidence while working to establish student and staff confidence in the school's leadership. The third theme referred to the outcomes of the growing confidence. Furthermore, it seems that *Bill 56* challenged school administrators to grow in confidence and go beyond transactional leadership and towards a transformational leadership approach. Inherent in the latter is the building of relationships based on trust and respect (Kutsyuruba, Walker, & Noonan, 2011; Walker, Kutsyuruba, & Noonan, 2011). It is in this context that an understanding of school administrators' perceptions of self-efficacy and confidence in the face of the challenging task to contain, reduce, and overcome bullying and violence in schools is important. School administrators were cognizant that successful fulfilment of the set of expectations outlined in *Bill 56* would necessarily mean maintaining successful outcomes in other aspects of school life.

Although *Bill 56* does not explicitly state or define the type of leadership role of principals, the sum total of the stated legal expectations of the principal appear to align with the role of an instructional leader. *Bill 56* outlines expectations requiring principals to plan, instruct, socialize, and share with the school community the way in which bullying and violence will be dealt with. In this way, principals were mandated by *Bill 56* to be the school's instructional leader focused on anti-bullying and violence prevention course content. As Fullan (2014) posited,

Success at the school level is the function of the work of principals, themselves acting as lead learners, who ensure that the group focuses on a small number of

key elements: specific goals of students; data that enable clear diagnosis of individual learning needs; instructional practices that address those learning needs; and monitoring overall progress and making adjustments accordingly ... all carried out in a developmental climate. (p. 63)

Therefore, the responsibilities of principals are multifaceted and are not exclusively limited to teaching academic course content but rather include more layered pedagogical learning goals. It was evident that the participants understood the need for their roles to be educative and learning in nature in order to successfully fulfill the expectations and carry out interventions set forth in *Bill 56*. The participants spoke of educating parents, students, and staff as the cornerstone of building a learning environment that is safe and healthy.

This responsibility goes above and beyond just being good managers who ensure that basic school life domains such as budgets, scheduling, and health and safety are successful; it also requires careful attention to essential learning priorities (Fullan, 2014; Kirtman, 2013; Leithwood, 1999; Robinson, 2011; Timperley, 2011). Beyond the principal's role-modeling of the characteristics of a positive school citizen is the pedagogical role-modeling of the principal as a lead learner about anti-bullying initiatives. The participants expressed that, if the legal expectations of *Bill 56* were well managed, pedagogical and long-term school culture would be transformed for all members of the school community. First and foremost, the transformational leader, by definition, is a good manager: "Show me a transformational leader who is not a good manager, and I will show you a failed organization" (Fullan, 2014, p. 56).

Educating staff is a key component of the role of the principal as a lead learner and an educator. The participants understood that not all staff had been afforded adequate training or had a background in education but nevertheless had been tasked with the safety and security of the school climate. However,

If a principal and their school staff have a positive rapport, and teachers feel empowered in their positions to adequately and actively participate in their own professional development, it is more likely that the relationships between teachers and students will be healthy. Bullying incidents and other incidents related to violence in schools are the outcome of unhealthy relationships. (Kutsyuruba, Klinger, & Hussain, 2015, p. 23)

The participants committed to leading concerted efforts to create a team atmosphere where staff and students learn and work together to overcome the challenge of bullying incidents. *Bill 56* mandates a team effort through its focus on committee-building requirements. The participants described being committed to “building a culture” where the pedagogical aspects of the implementation of *Bill 56* aligned with the practical and relational aspects of working with students in these situations. Lencioni (2005) noted, “when people come together and set aside their individual needs for the good of the whole, they can accomplish what might have looked impossible on paper” (p. 4). Similarly, participants argued that principals’ thoughtful establishing of teamwork was crucial for overall and lasting success of the policy implementation.

All participants had been well-versed in the document of *Bill 56* and chose to become familiar with developing research-based anti-bullying plans. Going one step further, they realized the need for caring and patient leader who chooses to be a proactive

advocate of anti-bullying and beyond that, who advocates diligently for a safe and secure school culture. This ideal is detailed in Kotter (2012), who observed that success stories of organizational change had two important patterns in common:

First, useful change tends to be associated with a multistep process that creates power and motivation sufficient to overwhelm all the sources of inertia. Second, this process is never employed effectively unless it is driven by high-quality leadership, not just excellent management—an important distinction ... as we talk about instituting significant organizational change. (p. 22)

The participants agreed that *Bill 56* mandated a significant organizational change and that this change was complex, complicated, and necessary. The participants relayed the concept that owning this responsibility whole-heartedly was not only a necessity for success but also a moral obligation of the leader of a school. Out of this understanding, their confidence as school leaders seemed to grow with time and experience. As moral leaders, participants expressed a resolution to grow and be more effective every time they encountered a bullying situation despite potential obstacles and challenges.

The data collection occurred two years after the implementation of *Bill 56* and the participants expressed a belief that as their experience and expertise increased, their confidence and competence in school safety work did as well. Growth over time requires patience and diligence, as there was an acknowledged concern that mistakes in implementing anti-bullying measures negatively impact children's lives. School principals were deeply committed to the processes and policies they themselves had put in place and their belief that they could successfully lead their schools was strong and determined. Participants acknowledged how hard it was to deal with the pressure of

certain situations but stated that they were determined to be more effective and more efficient by learning from each experience.

Although I sensed different levels of confidence among the participants I did not probe deeper. There were different levels of confidence and different manifestations of transformational leadership traits among the participants. The interview data provided insight as to how the participants perceived their impact on their own schools but I believe that their confidence levels were not always congruent with their level of impact. I believe that the participant who showed the most transformational leadership traits and also exhibited a lower self-confidence in their abilities to keep their students safe.

Research Implications

In the section below, I share recommendations based on the key learning points that could be of benefit to developing a better understanding of school leaders tasked with *Bill 56* expectations and present implications for theory, practice, policy, and further research.

Implications for Theory

The findings of this project suggest that *Bill 56* had an overall positive impact on schools. The participants acknowledged the gains they had made as principals tasked to lead their schools and recognized the growth they had made focused on building a healthy and safe school climate. If *Bill 56* were the catalyst to begin a whole-school, team-oriented approach to anti-bullying and violence prevention, then the quality of the approach is dependent on the competence, character, and courage of the principal (Blase et al., 1986; Bosworth et al., 2011; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Sergiovanni, 2005; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002). The success of the legislation, envisioned in a positive,

healthy, and safe school climate, hinges upon the type of leadership in schools. The type of leadership needed to lead schools to overcome a complex and destructive phenomenon such as bullying may need to go beyond just being an excellent manager but be extended into the realm of transformational leadership (Kotter, 2012; Marzano, 2000; Marzano et al., 2005; Sergiovanni, 2009). At the heart of such a leadership approach is relational trust. Principals are to be cognizant of their pivotal role in establishing, maintaining, and sustaining the culture of trust in their schools (Kutsyuruba et al, 2010). Moreover, to develop trust that will allow a team of adults to implement effective anti-bullying initiatives, principals must be patient and consistent with their plan of action. In the province of Quebec, principals must also be the instructional leaders and knowledgeable architects of such a plan, as little guidance exists in the way of how to implement *Bill 56* even years after the legislation was passed.

Implications for Practice

As Hoy and Miskel (1978) stated, principals must approach complex school problems as decision makers, and “decision makers need relevant facts” (p. 272). The primary responsibility to lead the way is on the principal. The following is a list of potential implications for principals, students, school anti-bullying committees, school staff, and schools boards that the results of this study alluded to based upon the data from the participants and *Bill 56* itself:

- Use *Bill 56* to your advantage. *Bill 56* should be used as the starting point for all Quebec schools.
- Schools can work to publicize their school strategy on “how to” report all incidents of violence or bullying. Students, in particular, need to be well-informed

so they understand what will happen, step-by-step, if they choose to report an incident. How the adults will approach each incident as it is reported by students needs to be explained such that students feel comfortable knowing exactly what the process will entail and what risks they are taking coming forward. This is not just a public relations strategy but also a trust building initiative.

- School leadership should focus its attention on the effectiveness of staff implementation of written plans and ensure there is consistent and diligent evaluation of the unfolding of that plan. At the school level, it is recommended to stay away from “fat-plans” and to make the plan a living document that allows for check-ins, survey, feedback, and revision.
- Schools could benefit from support from school boards with regards to dealing with parents who dispute principal responses to bullying incidents and with regards to the amount of training afforded to principals (e.g., Olweus Program training).
- Schools require specific, standard, province-wide professional development and resources relating to best practices in leading safe and positive schools for the purpose of effectively and efficiently implementing the mandates of *Bill 56*.
- Schools and school boards require a standardized data collection process that could be recognized province wide for the purpose of evaluating the implementation of *Bill 56*.
- School boards should acknowledge that principals require time in their schools to develop the trusting relationships needed to create positive school climates. This would impact succession planning timelines and principal assignments from school to school (Hargreaves, 2005). Support is needed if school administrators

are to grow in confidence in not only fulfilling the legal expectations of *Bill 56* but also of moral leaders responsible for the safety and health of their students and staff. As Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2007) argued, principal self-efficacy can be strengthened by quality professional training resulting in better practice and continuous growth. Such “growth” in self-efficacy, I would argue, would translate into “growth” in the confidence of principals, which could very well be strengthened through reflective practice, support from the school board, and working with colleagues.

- Ultimately, in light of the lack of consensus in the literature regarding which program or approach is the most effective, principals and schools must collaboratively set the criteria by which the impact of their local plans will be judged. The province, school boards and schools must set the timelines and develop criteria for evaluation of the progress and the impact of *Bill 56*.

Implications for Policy

This study facilitated an enriched understanding of how school principals perceived their own ability to address bullying and violence in a school setting. The following is a list of potential implications on how policymakers (at the school, school board and provincial levels) and school leaders can play a role in developing and implementing anti-bullying legislation effectively:

- The provincial government should develop an audit system/data collection process to give feedback to school principals and school anti-bullying committees on the effectiveness of their anti-bullying and violence prevention programming (an evaluation for learning and reflection).

- Participants viewed *Bill 56*'s requirements of formal reporting of incidents of bullying to the board by the principal as overplanned and underutilized. The province must clearly outline what exactly must be reported (e.g., not all violent incidents are technically bullying) to the school board and the mechanism through which principals are to report incidents. This is still a gray area that creates anxiety and less effectiveness as it stands. *Bill 56* is a thorough document but there is a need to clarify the processes of reporting to the Ministry.
- Similar to Hargreaves (2005), it is recommended that succession planning policies would allow principals to remain in schools “longer than five years when improvement efforts are doing well” (p. 172).
- At the school level, follow-up is recommended with students who are bullied, as is gathering evidence as to whether staff and interventions are having the desired results.
- I suggest that proper, relevant, ongoing training by committed individuals who have opportunities to implement their training, reflect upon the implementation, and reinvent themselves are more likely to have strong self-efficacy beliefs. The implementation of *Bill 56* came with little overall training from the Ministry of Education in Quebec; however, training was provided, as noted by the participants, by their school board.

Implications for Further Research

I chose a phenomenological perspective that sought to examine the insights of principals within the context of their experiences dealing with the phenomenon of bullying in Quebec schools. This phenomenological research project followed and

focused on *Bill 56*, the challenges it presented the participants, the participants' perceptions, and the impact on the confidence of principals in Quebec schools. This methodology also invited the participants to reflect upon their lived experiences and encouraged them to share their reflections in their own way (van Manen, 1990). The following is a list of potential implications for further research:

- Further study using different approaches to methodology (quantitative and mixed methods) would enhance our understanding of the school safety issues that principals deal with in their everyday interactions and interventions. Data collection that mixes anecdotal, quantitative, and qualitative methods may lead a school or district to create a more in-depth understanding of the level of safety the students feel. The data collected internally in a school on this topic could lead to more effective interventions while also tracking progress.
- Further study is required to link the impact of the importance of the pedagogical approach to anti-bullying initiatives in schools (e.g., classroom and school-wide lessons). Little research exists on the impact of classroom teaching, which focuses on anti-bullying curriculum and its impact on a school and its population.
- Further study is required to explore the link between leadership approaches and the effective implementation of anti-bullying initiatives in school settings.
- Further study is required to better understand the impact a principal's confidence has on the implementation of anti-bullying plans.
- As this study selectively focused on the aspect of confidence, further study is required to better understand how to support other aspects and a principal's overall sense of efficacy.

- Further study is required on how trust is built, maintained, and sustained by principals in the context of addressing school safety, violence, and anti-bullying issues.

Concluding Remarks and Reflection on Research Journey

Postman (1982) wrote, “If one cannot say anything about how we may prevent a social disaster, perhaps one may also serve by trying to understand why it is occurring” (p. xii). *Bill 56* has helped school principals understand the phenomenon of bullying and violence. Based on the data collected, there is a belief that the participants strove to be more effective every day and that they approached their daily duties with empathy, diligence, competence, and a focus on school climate where the adults take full responsibility for their students.

Having lived through the implementation of *Bill 56* as a school principal, I began to better understand my role as an administrator in Quebec and developed from the research a much deeper understanding of the true impact of the legislation on my work. It allowed me to reflect on my initial reaction to the legislation, and the inevitable growth process a person can experience after deep discussion with truly thoughtful, humble, committed, and competent people. I was careful to be objective and to not go into the interviews with a bias against *Bill 56* considering the pressure it had placed on the profession. Thankfully, the research process led me away from any initial biases to a growth mindset that allowed me to view the legislation with a balanced view with nothing to prove except capturing the essence of what we as administrators experienced. I believe we have done so.

During the process of this research project, I discovered how fortunate the schools are that have committed principals, as they are more likely to become learning organizations that are forward-moving entities ready to tackle the challenges of everyday educational experiences of staff, students, and parents. The concern for their students and the understanding of the challenges and the crucial role they play in their schools was an enlightening and encouraging experience.

The participants spoke freely about the stresses of being responsible for the well-being of students in their schools. They were also very concerned about the challenge of dealing with such a complex and complicated phenomenon as violence and bullying in their schools. The participants were also very articulate about their belief in the positive impact of multi-layered and multi-purposeful anti-bullying plans, which would move away from the traditional (defined as pre-*Bill 56*) and one-dimensional approach (or relying on *Bill 56* alone). They spoke of former stand-alone approaches such as: hiring guest speakers; lengthy written plans; automatic suspensions or zero-tolerance initiatives; focus on the victim's experience only; pink t-shirts; and strictly principal-led initiatives. The participants articulated the strength that *Bill 56* has given schools in terms of dealing with bullying in schools and the need for whole-school programming with regards to anti-bullying and violence prevention.

With all the positive feelings expressed about the impact of *Bill 56*, including an increased level of their own growth and understanding, the participants expressed discouragement surrounding certain aspects of the implications relating to the accountability of the principal and the required reporting of all incidents of violence and bullying. The difficulties of such a plan have not been clarified almost three years after

the enactment of *Bill 56*, as they still exist as of the writing of the project. It was also made clear that the challenges of the principal of a school with regards to achieving buy-in and developing trusting relationships were closely tied to the challenges linked to the expectations of *Bill 56* as well as to the inherent role of a principal as a transformational leader in all aspects of school life.

I also discovered that the true stresses lie within the success or conceived failure of the principal to intervene in cases of bullying. The participants echoed the complexities of dealing with parents, students, and staff with regards to the process of receiving reports; working with all the individuals involved; documenting the data; and putting in place an intervention plan that must include consequences, supports, and follow-up. The time, energy, and expertise it takes to get these situations fairly and effectively dealt with is sometimes in conflict with a principal's daily schedule of events and daily responsibilities (e.g., assemblies, meetings at the board, other situations, fire drills), and the pressure to accomplish all of these responsibilities must be prioritized and executed with precision and care.

Bill 56 and the research that followed, the media attention it garnered, and the continued professional development surrounding it has made educators, students, and parents acutely aware of the inflicted damages on children by bullying and violence. The participants shared that they worked very hard and thoroughly enjoyed the work they did. There was also mention that the interview process was a learning process for them as they reflected upon their work before and after *Bill 56*. Poignant moments of satisfaction in that progress had been made, coupled with the understanding that more effective work must be done every day to ensure all students and staff are safe and feel safe.

Finally, I have been reminded about the importance of trust in the work of school principals. In fact, I have been reminded about the centrality of the role of trusting relationships in the context of schools and schooling. Much of what transpired during the interviews is owed to the participants' trust that their participation was ultimately beneficial to students. The participants' honesty and openness to discussing such a complex topic revealed trust in themselves that they were genuinely trying to be better every day. The participants also revealed that trust in their own abilities to find solutions to complex problems was crucial to the success of their students. Trust, therefore, must be seen as the essential element in implementing any program or policy. It is, as Tschannen-Moran (2014) described, the quality that differentiates a leader from someone without the potential for positive impact:

Developing the will and ability to deal with problems successfully is where having a framework of trust can help school leaders to both monitor their own behaviour and communicate in a straightforward manner. Part of the art of trustworthy leadership is the ability to speak hard truths in a way that communicates caring as well as valuing the other person and the relationship. This takes courage, but is more likely to produce constructive change than laissez-faire leadership. Trustworthy leaders model norms of conduct that promote the well being of all members of a school community and explicitly invite others to abide by those norms as well. They defend those norms in ways that make clear that disrespect is not an option, even in their own approach to the person whose disrespect they are challenging. (p. 257)

Again, I am reminded of Postman's (1982) comment that some cultures are "hostile to the idea of childhood. But it is a comforting, even exhilarating thought that children are not" (p. ix). *Bill 56* puts the onus on the adults who are trusted to get it right.

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Appendix A: Research Interview Recruitment Letter

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF QUEBEC'S *BILL 56* ON SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' WORK IN MAINTAINING A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

I am writing to invite school administrators in Quebec to take part in a Research Interview that will be the main data collection process for a Master's Thesis I am completing at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. This research is being conducted by Terry Kharyati under the supervision of Professor Ben Kutsyuruba in the Department of Education at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario.

What is this study about? The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of *Bill 56* on Quebec school administrators' perceptions on their work in maintaining a positive school climate.

If you agree to participate in this study: you will participate in a conversation at (place, date, and time to be determined by your availability and preference). Each one-on-one interview will be a guided conversation. The interview will be 60 minutes in length and be facilitated by the below. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. There are no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with this study.

Is my participation voluntary? Yes. Although it be would be greatly appreciated if you would answer all material as frankly as possible, you should not feel obliged to answer any material that you find objectionable or that makes you feel uncomfortable. You may also withdraw at any time with no effect on your standing in school.

What will happen to my responses? We will keep your responses confidential. Only I will have access to this information. The data may also be published in

professional journals or presented at scientific conferences, but any such presentations will be of general findings and will never breach individual confidentiality. Should you be interested, you are entitled to a copy of the findings.

Will I be compensated for my participation? No, but parking costs/miscellaneous will be covered if needed. Lunch will be provided.

What if I have concerns? Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or 613-533-6081. *This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines and Queen's policies.* If you have, any questions call Terry Kharyati, at 819-360-9329 or email me at tkharyati@wqsb.qc.ca. By signing below you agree that: (1) you have read this form; (2) you have been told the reasons for this study; (3) if you had any questions they have been explained to you to your satisfaction; and (4) you agree to follow the procedure that is outlined above. Please return this (a scanned signed copy) letter confirming your attendance to Terry Kharyati tkharyati@wqsb.qc.ca or you can mail the signed copy to T. Kharyati, 80 Daniel Johnson, Hull, Quebec, J8Z 1S3. Again, thank you. Your interest in participating in this research study is greatly appreciated.

Respectfully,

Terry Kharyati
Graduate Student
Queen's University
Department of Graduate Studies in Education
Kingston, Ontario, Canada, K7L 3N6

Appendix B: Consent Form for Principals Participating in a Research Interview

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF QUEBEC'S *BILL 56* ON SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' WORK IN MAINTAINING A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

Principal Investigator: Terry Kharyati, Master's Student, Faculty of Education, Queen's University, Kingston, ON, Canada, (819) 360-9329, E-mail: tkharyati@wqsb.qc.ca

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Ben Kutsyuruba, Associate Professor, Faculty Supervisor, Queen's University, Kingston, ON, Canada, (613) 533-3049, ben.kutsyuruba@queensu.ca

Administrator Name (Please print clearly):

1. I have read the Letter of Information and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I will be participating in the study called UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF QUEBEC'S *BILL 56* ON SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' WORK in MAINTAINING A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE.
3. I understand this means I will participate in a Research Interview where I will be asked about my role in dealing with bullying in my school while managing the provincial anti-bullying legislation. I understand that the interview will be digitally recorded and take approximately 60 minutes.
4. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without consequence. I understand that I may request removal of all or part of my data from the study. I understand that the researchers will maintain

confidentiality to the extent possible. Only researchers involved in this study will have access to these data. The data may be used in a graduate studies thesis, but any such paper will be of general findings and will maintain individual confidentiality to the extent possible. Should I be interested, I am entitled to a copy of the findings.

5. Any questions about study participation may be directed to the research investigator, Terry Kharyati, at tkharyati@wqsb.qc.ca; 819-360-9329. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or 613-533-6081.

I have read the above statements and freely consent to participate in this research.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

I would like to request a copy of the results of this study sent to the following email or postal address below.

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return to Terry Kharyati.

Retain a second copy for your records.

Appendix C: Research Interview Questions

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF QUEBEC'S *BILL 56* ON SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' WORK in MAINTAINING A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

Each one-on-one interview was a guided conversation.

The interview was approximately 60 minutes in length and facilitated by the below questions.

The interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

- 1) Thinking about anti-bullying initiatives in your school, who are all the stakeholders and individuals responsible for managing and implementing these initiatives?
- 2) In your current role as vice-principal/principal, what challenges do you face implementing the provisions of Quebec's anti-bullying legislation or *Bill 56*?
 - a. What supports have you been afforded to help you implement aspects of *Bill 56*?
 - b. How has this support been effective in alleviating any of your frustrations/concerns?
- 3) How are students, parents, and/or staff notified about the process by which they may make reports of acts of bullying?
 - a. How often are they notified?
 - b. Tell me about your feelings of the effectiveness of this process.
 - c. What do you think might improve the process?
- 4) Tell me about the process for receiving and investigating written reports of suspected bullying in your school.

- a. Can you tell me about who is responsible, e.g., at the various stages?
 - b. Has this process been effective in producing desired results?
- 5) In your current role as school administrator, how can you generate enthusiasm for a shared vision of a bullying and violence-free school?
- a. How have you been able to promote a positive image of your school to the members of your school community?
- 6) In your current role as school administrator, how has *Bill 56* impacted your daily schedule?
- a. Has *Bill 56* added pressure, confusion, or anxiety to your already busy schedule?
 - b. What aspects of implementing *Bill 56* create the highest level of anxiety?
 - c. What aspects of implementing *Bill 56* take up most of your time?
- 7) In your current role as in-school administrator, tell me about your implementation plan.
- a. Tell me about how effective you perceive it to be.
 - b. Tell me about your frustrations, revelations, and sources of pride and accomplishment.
 - c. Tell me about specific interventions.
 - d. Which have been effective? How do you know they have been effective?
 - e. Which haven't been effective? Why would you say they have not been effective?
- 8) What is the current state of bullying and violence in your school? What data lead you to this conclusion?

- 9) What are the current data collected with regards to bullying and violence in your school?
- a. Are the data reliable?
 - b. Who collects the data?
 - c. What have you learned from the data (what actions have you taken)?
- 10) Going forward, what do you need to prevent and reduce bullying while supporting your initiatives in creating a safe learning environment in your school?
- 11) Do you ever feel the victim of bullying? By whom do you feel bullied? Where have you gone for support?

Appendix D: Ethics Clearance Letter



May 28, 2014

Mr. Terry Kharyati
Master's Student
Faculty of Education
Queen's University
Duncan McArthur Hall
511 Union Street West
Kingston, ON, K7L 3N6

GREB Ref #: GEDUC-732-14; Romeo # 6012834

Title: "GEDUC-732-14 Understanding the Impact of Quebec's Bill 56 on School Administrators"

Dear Mr. Kharyati:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GEDUC-732-14 Understanding the Impact of Quebec's Bill 56 on School Administrators" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D.1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB, of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Adverse Event Report). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To make an amendment, access the application at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Amendment to Approved Study Form. These changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services or irvingg@queensu.ca for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joan Stevenson".

Joan Stevenson, Ph.D.
Chair, General Research Ethics Board