

Innovative Curriculum within a New Zealand Low Decile Secondary School: A Case Study

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Abstract

The Ministry of Education has expressed a desire to develop twenty-first century learners through innovative approaches to the New Zealand curriculum, indicating that a move away from traditional subject specific educational practice is envisioned. This study was established through my sense that innovative curriculum practices could be more engaging for today's students and could support increases in academic achievement, particularly for students whose communities experience socio-economic hardship. I sought to understand what senior curriculum innovation could look like in a secondary school, while critically examining the practices and leadership required for such implementation in a low decile context. As a former student of a low decile school and as an aspiring secondary school principal with ten years' experience teaching visual arts in low decile environments, this study aimed to enhance my own teaching and leadership practice.

My research was conducted through a single instrumental case study approach that utilised four semi-structured interviews to collect perspectives of school leaders, teachers and students. This data was used to illustrate and provide insight into my research school's context, its innovative curriculum pedagogies, practices and implementation approaches. My small qualitative study was underpinned by an interpretive paradigm that recognises and acknowledges the strengths in gathering participant's perceptions and experiences to formulate qualitative research. Furthermore, by illustrating this single context, my research intends to highlight some of the perceived barriers to innovative curriculum while understanding what it means to be successful in being innovative.

My study revealed that while this high school had started to significantly shift its curriculum pedagogy alongside traditional constraints such as timetabling, traditional notions and expectations of senior secondary schooling, particularly an over-emphasis on students gaining achievement standards still hindered extensive implementation of innovative senior curriculum design and delivery. All participants emphasised the importance of leadership in encouraging sustained innovative learning environments. The predominant senior leader perspective in my study considered that developing collaborative leadership models that seek to disestablish traditional hierarchies is an effective

leadership approach for implementing innovative curriculum. These leadership concepts along with the struggles of implementing new teaching and learning practice was also evident in my reviewed literature.

Although this study provided a deeper insight into a single context, this research area of innovative curriculum could benefit from more examples and studies being conducted in more New Zealand secondary school contexts, particularly those from low decile communities.

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Firstly, I would like to thank the participants from my research school for providing me with the insightful information that helped formulate my research and gain a better understanding of your experimentation with senior curriculum approaches. I am very grateful that I could work with such a welcoming, open and reflective group of people and I hope that my research will contribute to your evolving exploration of senior curriculum innovation and development.

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Attestation of Authorship

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning."

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'T. Soysa', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

T. Soysa

Ethics Approval

This research was approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) on 24th July 2018, AUTEC reference number 18/260. For a copy of this approval please see appendix A.

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Chapter One – Introduction

While New Zealand's interpretive national curriculum and modular qualification structure enables New Zealand secondary schools' opportunities to develop innovative senior curriculum (Gallagher, Hipkins, & Zohar, 2012), very few schools are extensively applying such approaches (Education Review Office, 2013). Many authors of my reviewed literature commonly consider innovative approaches to curriculum design and delivery as being better suited for developing twenty-first century skills (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013; Bolstad, Gilbert, McDowall, Bull, Boyd & Hipkins, 2012; Education Review Office 2018; Hipkins, 2011; Larmer, Megendoller & Boss, 2015; Robinson & Aronica, 2015; Saavedra & Opfer, 2012; Wagner & Compton, 2012). Furthermore, these approaches are believed to be particularly effective in engaging marginalised or disadvantaged secondary school students (Robinson, 2010). While conducting my literature review there were limited examples of curriculum innovation at a senior high school level, particularly schools of a low decile context. My study aims to contribute to this gap in the literature by providing insight into the practices and implementation approach of one low decile school that appears to be working towards innovative approaches.

This chapter aims to briefly introduce the foundation of my research topic. It identifies my research aims and questions, outlines my rationale for undertaking the study, describes the research context of the single school studied, and outlines the significance of the research for me as a practitioner and for building knowledge regarding senior curriculum innovation. The final section outlines the structure of this dissertation paper.

Research Aim and Questions

The aim of this study is to provide insight into the practice and implementation of innovative senior curriculum by examining a low decile New Zealand secondary school. In particular, my study critically examines innovation in curriculum design and delivery, and the role of leadership practices. This research was guided by the following questions:

1. What approach is this school taking regarding innovative senior curriculum design and delivery, who is involved and what roles do they play?
2. What leadership approach is being conducted within this context to support the delivery of their curriculum?
3. What barriers do they face and what does success look like in being innovative?

Rationale

My interest in this research area stems from my experience as a former decile one high school student and ten years teaching visual arts in low decile secondary schools. Through both these experiences I have often critiqued and questioned whether traditional approaches to curriculum design and delivery was the most effective in engaging students, specifically those from often-struggling communities. During prior studies I identified a lack of research examples that explored innovative curriculum practice at a senior level, particularly within low decile schools. Given my extensive experience as both a student and practitioner in low decile environments, this motivated my choice of research topic.

I entered this research looking for better ways to support disadvantaged students in being successful in secondary education, while ensuring their success is leading to sustainable success beyond high school. While considering my experiences in these contexts, alongside the possible changes to NCEA Level one (Ministry of Education, n.d-a), my choice of research topic aims to enhance my professional development while contributing to the wider educational research in this area.

Research Context

The context of low decile (1-4), state co-educational secondary school was selected as the research context to align with the social equity element of the study, particularly my interest in supporting sustainable success of students from low decile schools. There was no school size preference when establishing the research context, however selection options were limited given the requirement for the school to be accessible to me in order to facilitate multiple visits to the school. After filtering schools to align with these requirements it revealed that there were very few low decile secondary

schools working with school wide innovative curriculum approaches (more detail on the filtering process is outlined in the Recruitment of Schools and Participants section of Chapter Three). The final selected context was a small (less than 500 pupils), semi-rural high school within a small community located near a large city.

Research Significance

Although the study is small, there are several factors that support its significance. As New Zealand develops its understanding of twenty-first century learning approaches and with a large emphasis placed on such development by the Ministry of Education, this study can contribute to further development in that focus area by providing specific insight into a low decile context. Additionally, with the Ministry of Education's focus on priority learners, which includes those from low decile communities, providing examples of possible approaches that may better engage these learners, could be beneficial. This research also concludes my Master of Educational Leadership qualification, which was undertaken with the expectation of building my leadership skills and knowledge, and supporting my future movement into a senior leadership role. The low decile focus of this study is particularly relevant as I aspire to lead in a low decile secondary school and therefore want to improve my understanding of practices that are shown to support long term success and wellbeing of students from lower socio-economic communities.

Dissertation Structure

This dissertation is structured as follows:

- Chapter One briefly provides the rationale and foundations of my research project.
- Chapter Two identifies and explores the topic through my reviewed literature, while illustrating the broader concerns regarding innovative approaches in senior curriculum.
- Chapter Three describes and provides reasoning behind my research design, methodologies and chosen methods, while articulating the ethical considerations and limitations.

- Chapter Four has been adapted from a traditional findings chapter to a perceptions and experiences chapter. This allows the school context and its curriculum approaches to be illustrated more clearly without critical or academic analysis.
- Chapter Five deliberates on the reviewed literature in relation to the experiences and perceptions that were provided during the interviews.
- Chapter Six concludes the overall aim of the study by linking back to the original research questions.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

As we move well into the twenty-first century, societies increasing demand for innovation is being fuelled by rapid technological growth which enables increased levels of interpersonal connectivity and collaboration, which is in turn contributing to a more globalised society (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012). As the world grapples with these transformational changes and their long-term impacts, educational academics and institutions are also debating what skills and knowledge are required for the future, and are investigating types of teaching approaches and curriculum design that are most effective for developing the necessary skills for today's students.

This literature review focuses on exploring how innovative approaches to the New Zealand senior secondary curriculum may provide better opportunities for students to cultivate these twenty-first century skills. It will also investigate whether innovative approaches could provide a better platform for students of low socio-economic backgrounds to better engage with senior secondary education. After describing and identifying the topic, this chapter is structured to investigate the above concepts through four key themes. These include:

- 1) Defining senior curriculum innovation
- 2) Possible benefits
- 3) Potential barriers and limitations
- 4) Leading senior curriculum innovation

Although this literature review has a New Zealand secondary school focus, due to the seemingly limited reported examples of senior curriculum innovation in this context, this review will examine literature from a variety of educational settings to draw parallels.

Topic Identification

The twenty-first century has seen innovation become an integral component of society where the value of creativity, critical thinking and entrepreneurial aptitudes are rising, while also being recognised as essential skills for supporting future advancements (Wagner & Compton, 2012). With overwhelming access to information through technology and a need to develop skills for a rapidly changing future, the learning and development needs of today's students appear far more complex than traditional subject-based knowledge (Bolstad et al., 2012). It is believed that today's students will work for a multitude of organisations and move into a variety of roles during their lifetime, suggesting that their educational needs are starkly different from previous generations where it was more common for employees to spend almost their entire working life at a single company (Cullen, 2014). Furthermore, with instant access to global information and growing multi-culturalism, our societal values and culture are rapidly evolving and changing. This suggests that today's learners need to develop the foundational skills and knowledge that will help them contribute and function in this evolving adult society (Bolstad & Gilbert, 2008). Robinson and Aronica (2015) suggest there is a broad global emphasis on innovation, technological advancements, environmental concerns and globalisation, and believes that today's educational practices at a senior high school level seem very disconnected from these concepts. Rather than relying on structure, systems and instructions, students need to explicitly develop the capacity to critically reflect and develop resilience that is necessary to cope with change. Furthermore, in preparing for this advancing future it is believed learners will need to develop key attributes such as; critical thinking, innovation, creativity, adaptability, problem solving, collaboration, effective communication and the ability to apply knowledge (Larmer, Mergendoller, & Boss, 2015; Saavedra & Opfer, 2012; Wagner & Compton, 2012). My reviewed literature suggests that these skills are difficult to cultivate in a traditional secondary education model, and the increasing demand for these skills are placing pressure on educational policy makers and institutes to critically assess and change current teaching approaches. More progressive educational organisations are starting to focus on developing more innovative programmes that are conducive to meeting these needs by prioritising the development of transferable skills, rather than mastering isolated disciplinary knowledge (Robinson & Aronica, 2015; Wagner & Compton, 2012).

Many of the researched authors recognise that the traditional secondary school model was largely developed to meet the needs of a more rigid industrial era, distinguished by compartmentalised subjects, inflexible timetables and an overwhelming priority of standardisation (Bolstad & Gilbert, 2008; Ings, 2017; Nair, 2014; K. Robinson, 2010). Nair (2014) declares that the traditional “cells and bells” model, referring to the solo teacher classroom and structured timetable, as being obsolete for more than thirty years. However, this model continues to be the overwhelmingly common approach seen in New Zealand secondary schools. This suggests that while many institutes are aiming to develop innovative programmes and environments, progress towards this practice is hindered by traditional systems, values and pedagogies (Larmer et al., 2015; Nair, 2014; Saavedra & Opfer, 2012). Robinson (2010) believes that the traditional approach, while being successful for some, has marginalised a large proportion of society, especially those of low socio-economic status. He proclaims that the traditional system fails to value cultural identity and individuality, within a fierce pursuit of measured standardisation and compliance. Indicating that these already marginalised students are further disadvantaged as their cultural values are seemingly dismissed and more significance is placed on a hierarchy of specific subjects. Cullen (2014) shares a similar sentiment as she describes the traditional approach as a constrained, prescribed and achievement focused model that only measures limited components of a learner’s performance. This implies that the traditional approach is too narrowly focussed and is no longer suitable for today’s students and a society that is progressively embracing a multitude of skills, cultures and values. Additionally, as the understanding about the way people learn has evolved, our education system should also reflect this. Bolstad et al. (2012) proclaims that although a range of differentiated teaching and learning practices have been developed, they have had little impact on the senior level of secondary school as schools continue to implement traditional educational models.

Bolstad and Gilbert (2008) explain that New Zealand secondary education in the early 1900’s was a user pays model that was specifically designed to prepare students for university and the professions. They state that the junior curriculum since the 1920’s has been subjected to several major reforms intended to address the broader needs of a more varied secondary school population as the demand and availability for secondary education grew. However, the traditional academic curriculum and notion of preparing students for university continues to have a major influence at the senior secondary

level (Education Review Office, 2013). Most secondary school's junior (years 9 and 10) programmes are directly driven by the current New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) (Ministry of Education, 2007), where there is a focus on students developing a broad, balanced set of common goals that aims to develop key values, competencies and knowledge within a vision to develop "young people who will be confident, connected actively involved, lifelong learners" (p. 7). However, Bolstad and Gilbert (2008) believe that although years 11 to 13 are included in this national curriculum document, the focus often shifts from using the NZC (Ministry of Education, 2007) to utilising the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) Achievement Standards to underpin senior programmes, thus illustrating an emphasis on gaining achievement standards over developing the broader key values, competencies and knowledge that is outlined in the curriculum. While my research literature illustrates differences in specific teaching and curriculum development approaches, most authors advocate for schools to design and deliver a curriculum that develops a range of twenty-first century skills that are essential to communicate, think and problem solve effectively (Cullen, 2014; Larmer et al., 2015; Wagner & Compton, 2012). Many of the researched authors believe that schools need to foster an environment that provides collaborative opportunities and engage students interests and talents to support engagement (Berryman & Eley, 2017; K. Robinson, 2010; V. Robinson, 2011). By engaging the strengths of both students and staff it is believed that more meaningful learning experiences can be delivered, rather than merely striving for standardised achievement targets (Bolstad & Gilbert, 2008; Hipkins & Boyd, 2011).

Defining Senior Curriculum Innovation

Throughout my researched literature, innovation is generally defined by having adaptable and reflective pedagogies where there is contextualised use of teaching methods and educational tools (Larmer et al., 2015; K. Robinson & Aronica, 2015; Wagner, 2015). Austin and Starkey (2016) highlight that educational innovation requires the consistent evaluation and modification of practice to meet the specific needs of learners and their contexts. They go on to explain that when these approaches are effectively conducted, it not only supports improved student outcomes, but also enriches their learning experiences. From the reviewed literature, innovative education generally includes the keys concepts of flexibility, collaboration, differentiation, strength-based, creativity and

contextualisation. For these skills to influence the development of innovative and creative students, it appears that schools must explicitly cultivate, support and exemplify these concepts throughout their organisation (Chemi, Davy, & Lund, 2017). Koch, Binnewies and Dormann (2015) adds educational innovation must be seen not only as the introduction and application of new ideas, it also includes transforming organisational processes and procedures. This suggests that if new approaches to curriculum design and delivery are going to be implemented, organisations must also consider changes to the wider constructs in which the curriculum is bound, including timetables, staffing, student groupings and learning spaces. More integrated drivers of change are needed, where senior curriculum innovation is supported through group solutions and capacity building rather than fragmented strategies (Fullan, 2014).

Innovative school environments encourage and support critical and creative thinking from staff, students and their community (Beghetto, 2015). In a senior high school context, these schools often focus on student-centred approaches, contextualised learning, collaboration, experimentation and teachers as facilitators (Education Review Office, 2018). These concepts are largely encompassed by project based, inquiry or cross curricular approaches and advocate these platforms as effective strategies in developing twenty-first century skills (Larmer et al., 2015; Snyder & Cooper, 2015; Wagner & Compton, 2012). These approaches will often involve learners having greater input and the ability to negotiate learning outcomes with programmes that integrate student's prior knowledge, values, interests and talents (Education Review Office, 2013). Bundrett and Duncan (2011) explain that this can create a more stimulating and engaging learning environment as students become more intrinsically involved in their learning. They go on to state that collaboration is often used as a central driver, where a range of new ideas and methods can be rapidly explored through trial and reflection within interdisciplinary and real-world projects. Stoll and Temperley (2009) suggest that educational environments that are seen as innovative, focus on fostering collective and reflective aptitudes, which is conducive to developing new and adventurous teaching approaches.

In New Zealand secondary schools, the majority of academic senior curriculum is delivered in a traditional fashion. They are often taught through yearlong single subject classes that only use subject specific achievement standards and are taught in a fixed number of compartmentalised lessons by a

specialised subject teacher (Education Review Office, 2013). Austin and Starkey (2016) suggest that the sustained use of such rigid approaches is surprising considering the New Zealand educational system appears rather progressive. They explain the flexible national curriculum can be interpreted and applied in differentiated ways and the modular senior assessment structure of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) provides opportunities for subject integration and curriculum innovation. Together these components enable schools to develop context appropriate or individualised programmes suitable for their specific senior students (Gallagher, Hipkins, & Zohar, 2012). As discussed earlier, Bolstad and Gilbert (2008) recognise that the New Zealand junior secondary school curriculum has undergone many reforms to address the broader needs of the increasingly diverse and evolving student population. However, the New Zealand senior curriculum has seen very little change with the traditional academic curriculum continuing to be a significant influence on senior secondary education developments. To achieve more school-wide, rather than subject specific curriculum development at a senior level, the Ministry of Education (2007) suggested that schools carefully consider developing innovative curriculum approaches. This could be achieved by shifting the focus to the front end of the New Zealand Curriculum, where there is an emphasis on developing skills and key competences (Morrison & Cooper, 2008). Such a shift could see the development of a more future focussed senior curriculum where students are building new skills and producing new knowledge, rather than merely mastering fragmented pieces of knowledge as an end in itself (Bolstad & Gilbert, 2008).

Possible Benefits

Designing and delivering a curriculum that integrates a variety of subject skills, creative practice and key competencies can present learners with a stimulating educational experience that develops their essential life skills, whilst engaging them academically and socially (Snyder & Cooper, 2015).

Contextualised programmes that build on clear cross-curriculum links could also allow students to gain a stronger understanding of academic concepts. Brundrett and Duncan (2011) believe that such approaches give students the chance to make connections across traditional subject boundaries, critically explore ideas and openly consider outcomes. By providing better opportunities to effectively apply the NZC and utilise the adaptability of NZQA achievement standards, allows the learning to be

driven by concepts rather than content (Morrison & Cooper, 2008). Such approaches could lead students to gain a variety of NCEA achievement standards by exploring a range of academic concepts through a singular project. This could ease the excessive and relentless assessment pressures that both students and teachers are currently experiencing. When working with integrated and project-based models it is suggested that providing bigger blocks of time offers students the opportunity to work more deeply and at a sustained pace. Therefore, increasing the chances of students completing work and attaining achievement (Brundrett & Duncan, 2011). Furthermore, the added benefit of students having more self-managed time allows them to explore and critically reflect on ideas and outcomes, alongside making learning connections across the traditional subject boundaries. Providing students with these opportunities to explore and think critically within managing their own time is believed to positively contribute to their personal development and effectively prepare students for life beyond high school (Brundrett & Duncan, 2011; Cullen, 2014; Thomson, Hall, & Jones, 2013).

Orr and Cleveland (2015) highlight that while incorporating the strengths of students is important to curriculum innovation, utilising the strengths and interests of teachers is also essential in fuelling educational change. Morrison and Cooper (2008) suggests that providing opportunities for teachers to share their passion for projects or topics from both within and outside their specialist learning area can be beneficial as teachers who are more passionate and confident will more likely be able to engage and motivate their students. When these passions are used to collaborate with both students and other staff members, innovative approaches are more likely to be explored. Teachers working collaboratively means they are likely to work alongside others outside their specialist subject area, which gives them the opportunity to think through new educational approaches as they are more exposed to various ways of thinking and problem solving (Stoll & Temperley, 2009). Knight (2014) describes how collaborative practice provides the opportunity for teachers to explore these new approaches as they share knowledge and work towards a shared outcome, while offering the added benefit of sharing responsibility and accountability. Ord et al. (2013) explains that when a school has this collaborative focus, it ensures that the needs and strengths of staff and students are recognised, utilised and celebrated which more effectively supports positive outcomes and transformational change. Innovative senior programmes rely on the variety of stakeholder's strengths and differences

to work in complementary ways and as a result become the foundation in further developing strategies that meet the need of their context and students (Orr & Cleveland-Innes, 2015).

If schools developed a senior curriculum that focused on making meaningful contextual connections and collaborations, schools could creatively utilise wider community resources and provide opportunities for students to engage in these (Nair, 2014). This could allow students to connect with and better understand the social issues within their community and authentically enhance their own social development (Willness & Bruni-Bossio, 2017). Building connections with the wider community helps establish positive relationships and helps the school become less insular and in turn promote better community support, especially if schools are trialling innovative approaches (Koch et al., 2015). When the community, particularly the learner's families, are exposed to different ideas towards curriculum innovation and given opportunities to be involved, the more likely they will consider and support new approaches (Larmer et al., 2015). The benefit of building these wider connections for students is they gain more networking opportunities and real-world exposure. Innovative curriculum approaches that effectively fosters these connections can improve achievement and increase student engagement and enjoyment of education (Brundrett & Duncan, 2011; Larmer et al., 2015; V. Robinson, 2011). The long-term benefit of students being exposed to positive learning experiences until the end of schooling, is that they are more likely to be constructively contributing citizens who would support future generations engaging positively with education. Signifying that a more systemic change could be possible, particularly for those in low decile contexts where there are often significantly reduced levels of student engagement at a senior level (Ministry of Education, n.d.).

Potential Barriers and Limitations

Achievement focussed and target driven policies that are often set by educational policy makers tend to work against innovative approaches to teaching and learning (Chemi et al., 2017). These policies often have an emphasis on measurability, learning goals and assessment, which can detract from developing the more holistic competencies and social development that are outlined in the front end of the New Zealand Curriculum (Bolstad & Gilbert, 2008). Cullen (2014) states that the prevailing political perspective that focusses on measuring certain aspects of a student's performance has a

constraining effect on the contextual curriculum opportunities given to students. Suggesting that these external demands to meet standards and goals does not encourage teachers to go beyond these factors or critically think about the broader concept of student's holistic development. Stoll and Temperley (2009) explain that such external pressures constrain innovative teaching practice and tends to compel teachers into applying target driven methodologies in their classroom. Resulting in more linear thinking within educational settings and many teachers conforming to an agenda that is not entirely conducive to meeting today's learners long-term learning and development needs (Cullen, 2014). The New Zealand Ministry of Education has demonstrated a commitment towards innovative senior curriculum approaches through the NZC, developing NCEA, building twenty-first century schools, the recent addition of the technology curriculum and the implementation of the Communities of Learning (COL). However, they still have a large emphasis on prescribing academic NCEA achievement targets for secondary schools to meet, which as Chemi et al. (2017) explained as being non-conducive to innovative learning strategies. Stewart-Weeks and Kastle (2015) are critical of the public sectors conflicting policies between innovation and measurability and suggest that although policy makers go through the notion of implementing innovative directives, they are not always ready to go through with the consequences and often fail to identify the systematic limitations that currently exist. This is seeing educators attempting to manage the complexity of these directives, while attempting to provide learners with dynamic twenty-first century learning within the limitations of a bureaucratic system, which is seemingly leading to superficial and unsustainable educational innovation (Willness & Bruni-Bossio, 2017).

Traditional constructs in senior secondary education such as timetables, subject disciplines, student grouping, staffing and physical space have only marginally evolved and are often seen as constraints of educational innovation (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013; Nair, 2014; Wagner & Compton, 2012). Stewart-Weeks and Kastle (2015) believe that public sector organisations, such as education, are not set up for change and are expected to provide stable and predictable services. Therefore, an inherent resistance to change and uncertainty creates a prevailing defence against change makers and innovative initiatives in these environments. For example, Thomson, Hall and Jones (2013) explain that subject disciplines are deeply entrenched into secondary teacher's identities and often act as territories where allegiances are formed, and specific positions are promoted. Such tendencies have a

negative effect on school wide initiatives as loyalties and commitments to subject areas are often prioritised and is likely to indirectly discourage wider educational innovation and collaboration (Morrison & Cooper, 2008). Ings (2017) draws a similar parallel to the concept of student's groupings such as year levels and streaming and explains that these divisions are indicators of what is expected and what will be made available to students, which seemingly does not align well with the innovative definitions that values differentiation and individual approaches that values the strengths and talents of students. This suggests a need for educators to critically analyse these various traditional concepts seen as constraints and actively deconstruct and reconstruct them (Thomson et al., 2013). Disestablishing such traditional structures would likely raise concerns with Stewart-Weeks and Kastle (2015) emphasising that innovation almost always disrupts vested interests, control, authority and notions of power. Traditional constructs need to be debated if education is going to move towards more innovative models and will require people to be taken out of their comfort zones and be willing to push the boundaries of what is possible (Stoll & Temperley, 2009). Stewart-Weeks and Kastle (2015) highlight that organisations such as education are expected to provide a predictable and constant service, which hinders their innovation. They go on to suggest that the implication of these social expectations to stay the same, means that there is an intrinsic resistance to change that often means that innovative initiatives are met with unyielding opposition.

Throughout the reviewed literature many authors particularly highlighted that teacher's philosophies and resistance to change was often a key barrier to the successful implementation innovative school-wide practices. Morrison and Cooper (2008) indicated that teachers do not intuitively welcome change initiatives and such change requires effective leadership with the resilience and determination to affect the deep-seated teaching culture of a school. However, a teacher's resistance to rapidly changing innovative curriculum directives can be rather justified as such initiatives are often seen as an additional workload for teachers who are already struggling with the demanding admin and procedural requirements already driven by assessment targets and other policy agendas (Stewart-Weeks & Kastle, 2015). Teacher's lack of experimentation with their practice or curriculum delivery can often stem from a fear of being critically scrutinised by superiors (Stoll & Temperley, 2009). Chemi et al. (2017) adds that teachers who are anxious in the classroom tend to minimise their emotional commitment, effort, risk and experimentation and will commonly focus on maintaining

classroom control through instructional and behavioural regulations. This notion could be exacerbated by the rigorous teacher appraisal processes that is currently experienced in most schools and the large emphasis that many schools are placing on achievement targets.

Leading Senior Curriculum Innovation

Morrison and Cooper (2008) state that the principal's leadership of a school is a critical factor in school-based curriculum transformation. Cultivating innovative learning environments requires a passionate, appreciative and strength-based focus where the learning needs of students are central drivers for change (Robinson, 2011). These leaders often account for the interests, needs and capabilities of students together with the expertise and strengths of staff to effectively facilitate change (Brundrett & Duncan, 2011). Orr and Cleveland-Innes (2015) believe that appreciative leaders inspire teaching innovation and cultural transformation through a flatter hierarchical system where collaboration and co-construction is encouraged and utilised to empower teachers. By identifying and utilising teacher's strengths and expertise, leadership and staff can develop networks that are able to assist those who are exploring practice and provide a support system to encourage innovative experimentation (Javis, Bell, & Sharp, 2016). Austin and Starkey (2016) state that leadership plays a key role in this support system by influencing the perspective of flexibility and by supporting and leading the process of change through encouraging trust and building strong network ties. Brundrett and Duncan (2011) explain that throughout innovative curriculum development, effective leaders will ensure that staff who are struggling with the change are supported sensitively. They add that this support and guidance is more effective when it is delivered through structured training programmes rather than an ad hoc approach to teacher development. An effective innovative leader will be relationally focussed and will facilitate communal forums where positive inquiry is encouraged leading to new and multiple future realities (Orr & Cleveland-Innes, 2015). This focus on positive encouragement, caring about the stakeholders and developing shared understanding of the change motives, fuels efforts for effective innovative change.

Throughout my researched literature many authors revealed that leaders' effective communication plays an integral role in the successful implementation of innovative curriculum. Austin and Starkey

(2016) believe that leaders need to clearly articulate the purpose of curriculum innovation by identifying how it will fit with the core values of their context and clarify its alignment of the school's strategic direction. This provides an opportunity to integrate the innovative initiative into the wider vision of the organisation, where all the school stakeholders can clearly articulate and take ownership of this vision, while also becoming an essential part of the school process and procedures (Morrison & Cooper, 2008). As collaboration and trust have been established as key elements to innovative curriculum approaches, effective innovative leadership will reflect this by prioritising transparent and clear communication. Morrison and Cooper (2018) believe such communication supports the development of systems and processes within a school that encourages the development of a collective capacity which is essential in effectively implementing and maintaining curriculum change. When school leaders can build a collective culture that not only provides clear communication, but also seeks and values their various stakeholder's opinions, means that implemented initiatives are more likely to serve the interests and needs of their specific context and their learners (Brundrett & Duncan, 2011; Ings, 2017; Morrison & Cooper, 2008). Morrison and Cooper (2008) explained that collaborative whole staff professional development approaches, where teachers could experiment and share ideas, philosophies and good practice while also unpicking educational research, was important in shaping ideas around innovation and curriculum change. They believe that leadership needs to place high value on cultivating these conditions where schools can evolve into "a high trust model where small self-formed critical enquiry groups set their own agenda, investigate an aspect of practice and present their findings to the principal as part of the appraisal process" (p. 112). Stoll and Temperley (2009) express that exposing people to others who think differently or have different ideas, provides staff with more opportunities to consider new ways of approaching work and they will then tend to become more adventurous.

When working towards more innovative curriculum approaches Morrison and Cooper (2008) suggests that it is critical that leaders are actively involved and role model innovative practice for it to be successful and sustainable. They believe that it is important that leaders actively lead, support, monitor and model learning, especially through school wide professional learning. Stoll and Temperley (2009) explain that in order for staff to experiment with new ideas, leaders must demonstrate that they are not averse to risk-taking themselves and will nurture conditions that

encourage innovative approaches. Such leaders will demonstrate a passion for innovation and will exemplify a commitment to exploratory practice (Koch et al., 2015). Morrison and Copper (2008) found that effective secondary school leaders had an enthusiasm of school culture change, which involved fundamental shifts in educational thinking and behaviour. In their study principals believed that focussing on the 'front end' of the New Zealand curriculum provided opportunities to essentially re-evaluate the disposition of teaching, learning and knowledge while allowing them to consider completely new curriculum models to align with this new thinking. Stoll and Temperley (2009) assert that this change in thinking and promoting innovation at the top of the school was a catalyst in develop a wider culture that expected people to think differently about education. These type of enthusiastic and risk averse leaders are more likely to be able to manage unforeseen situations by employing more critical and broader thinking approaches. Beghetto (2015) explains rather than ignoring or quickly attempting to resolve issues by force-fitting into established processes and procedures, innovative leaders saw these occurrences as a signifier that new thinking was required. Koch, Bennewies and Dormann (2015) describes innovative leaders as often possessing qualities of high energy, optimism and intrinsic work motivation which they define as "work engagement" (p. 506). They believe that teachers that are working with work engaged leaders are more likely to adopt an innovative practice because these leader's actions provide positive reinforcement. This suggests that although the Ministry of Education is providing strong directives for secondary schools to implement more innovative curriculum approaches, school leadership, particularly senior managers in secondary schools are a key instigator in the development of innovative curriculum change.

Critiquing Connections, Themes and Gaps

Throughout my researched literature, authors commonly believed there is a critical need to move beyond traditional educational models and substitute them for curriculum design and delivery methods that where more conducive to this innovative era (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013; Benade, Gardner, Teschers, & Gibbons, 2014; Bolstad & Gilbert, 2008; Hipkins, 2011; Hipkins & Boyd, 2011; Ings, 2017; Larmer et al., 2015; Nair, 2014; K. Robinson & Aronica, 2015; Wagner & Compton, 2012). These authors were generally critical of traditional teaching approaches and endorsed more holistic and creative methods as more effective in engaging and meeting the needs of today's learners. The

literature emphasised that there should be an educational focus on developing student's skills such as adaptability, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving (Larmer et al., 2015; Saavedra & Opfer, 2012; Wagner & Compton, 2012). Several authors believed that these twenty-first century skills could be explicitly developed through inquiry, project-based or collaborative learning models and believed that these approaches are a more suitable platform in developing learners of this era (Cullen, 2014; Larmer et al., 2015; Snyder & Cooper, 2015). Although, throughout my reviewed literature there is significant support for more innovative educational practice, it isn't without its challengers. McPhail and Rata (2016) highly criticise twenty-first century Learning approaches as being too subjective and believe that its design fails to recognise the importance of objective knowledge structures. They believe that twenty-first century approaches rely too much on externally organised knowledge, which they consider as a less effective form of knowledge sequencing, compared to their suggested "Powerful Knowledge" approach which prioritises the gradual sequencing of objective knowledge categorised by discipline areas. McPhail (2018) adds that he believes that unless disciplinary concepts are understood first it is unlikely that students will be able to make the connections that are emphasised by twenty-first century learning approaches. Considering these criticisms and the skills emphasis of those who support twenty-first century learning approaches, perhaps having more disciplinary structure in the earlier years of education could mean that senior secondary students could explore the twenty-first century skill concept focus more effectively. However, my researched literature also suggested that the traditional disciplinary approaches did not prioritise individuality and student-centred philosophies that are conducive to engaging students (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013; Berryman & Eley, 2017; K. Robinson, 2010; V. Robinson, 2011). This suggests that while the theory of the Powerful Knowledge concept is well considered and twenty-first century learning approaches have limitations, the value of effectively engaging students through innovative learning approaches should not be discounted. Additionally, it could be suggested that a less structured sequencing of knowledge approach is more reflective of what students will experience beyond secondary education.

New Zealand Statistics (Ministry of Education, n.d.) shows secondary schools from low decile areas have lower rates of student achievement and retention compared to the national averages. This is concerning as these contexts largely represent Māori and Pasifika students who specified by the

Ministry of Education as priority learners. Researched authors suggest that traditional educational approaches, while it is not beneficial at engaging today's learners, it is particularly failing to engage and meet the needs of these minority groups (Berryman & Eley, 2017; V. Robinson, 2011; Taleni, MacFarlane, Macfarlane, & Fletcher, 2017). Berryman and Eley (2017) explains that building relationships, collaborating and building on student's individual strengths is integral to Māori success. As these key elements have been identified within the innovative curriculum approaches and with Lamar et al. (2015) indicating that such approaches support better student engagement and retention, perhaps such models are specifically better equipped to meet the needs of students in low decile context. However, the examples illustrated in the researched literature of schools did not specifically reflect a low decile context or were merely implementing low levels of innovative programmes, such as one course for specified learners rather than school wide approaches. McPhail and Rata (2016) criticise that twenty-first century practice in New Zealand has been implemented without scholarly criticism, which could be relative to the Ministry of Education's intentions for implementations, however my researched literature suggests that the depth of this implementation at a senior secondary level has been limited. The conflict between innovative directives from the Ministry of Education alongside the entrenched values of academic achievement targets that was highlighted in this review, could be contributing to the lack of innovative senior secondary innovation that was outlined by the Education Review Office (2013) report. Hipkins and Spiller (2012) found that many secondary educators felt that an assessment driven focus at the senior level constrained curriculum innovation, suggesting that this complex tension needs some extra consideration at a government level.

Although digital technologies, physical environments and resourcing were acknowledged as contributors to implementing innovative approaches (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013; Nair, 2014; Saavedra & Opfer, 2012), the reviewed literature recognised effective collaboration, relationships and philosophies as the key components to this transformation. There was a particular emphasis on developing teacher's pedagogy and influencing changes to traditional teaching philosophies to effectively implement innovative curriculum approaches (Stoll & Temperley, 2009). While several authors discussed the importance of school wide professional development in establishing collaboration and innovation amongst teachers within a context (Austin & Starkey, 2016; Brundrett & Duncan, 2011; Morrison & Cooper, 2008), there was limited discussion about the continued University

training of secondary teachers in distinct disciplines in New Zealand. Thompson, Hall and Jones (2013) along with Morrison and Cooper (2008) both discussed how the structures of discipline areas often worked against innovative and collaborative approaches, as teachers often became rather territorial and built strong teacher identities around their specialist learning area. In considering this perhaps if the training of pre-service teachers was reconsidered there could be more movement to reducing these constraints. However, with Brundrett and Duncan (2011), Morrison and Cooper (2008) identify school leadership as an integral element of school-based curriculum change and Thompson, Hall and Jones (2013) highlighting that school leaders often understood educational pedagogy's in defined subjects, it could take a while for this innovative philosophy to be implemented widely.

Conclusion

Innovative approaches to senior curriculum design and delivery are largely focussed on building learner's twenty-first century skills that are often defined as adaptability, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking and problem solving. The prominent suggestion is to move away from traditional compartmentalised schooling models and work with project-based, inquiry or cross-curricular approaches. It is believed that these methods support better engagement, retention and academic achievement while providing a better platform to explicitly develop twenty-first century skills. A strength-based focus for both students and educators, where learning experiences are contextualised, appears to enhance student's educational engagement and supports better development of learner's social citizenship. Critics of twenty-first century learning highlight the need for students to have a base understanding of fundamental concepts in order to systematically develop knowledge, which aligns with more traditional approaches. However, it could be argued that the less structured sequencing of twenty-first century learning approaches will better prepare students for the complexities of an increasingly globalised, connected and rapidly changing environment.

There is not a lot of evidence in the literature of curriculum innovation having been implemented in senior secondary school programmes, especially in New Zealand low decile contexts. While it appears widespread implementation of innovative curriculum design in New Zealand is hindered by traditional educational values and conflicting educational policies, the structure of the New Zealand

Curriculum and NCEA assessments offers educators with an opportunity to explore new options. However, the research suggests that more fearless and innovative leaders are required in secondary schools to challenge traditional educational philosophies, practices, environments and systems so that innovative approaches can be fostered effectively and sustainably.

Chapter Three – Methodology and Research Design

When considering the various qualitative research methods, I chose a single instrumental case study given my study's focus on innovative curriculum and the limited researched examples of low decile schools conducting these approaches. This approach allows the experiences and thoughts of participants to provide insight through a first-hand account of the practices and implementation strategies for innovative senior curriculum approaches in a low decile context. This chapter identifies and provides a rationale for the research design, while explaining the underpinning paradigms and methodologies that inform my research decisions. The first two sections specifically illustrate my positioning and methodology, followed by the explanation of my processes for recruitment, data collection and data analysis. The final two sections outline the ethical considerations and the study's limitations.

Research Positioning

A researcher approaches their study with established positions and views that can determine the way they make sense of the research information they collect (O'Toole & Beckett, 2013). This highlights the importance for me to describe the personal experiences that have shaped my epistemology and ontology, alongside the paradigm that underpins my research project. My epistemology reflects my beliefs about how people come to understand the world they live in, whilst my ontology reflects my beliefs about the nature of being and existence (Hammond & Wellington, 2012).

Having taught visual arts for nine years teaching in low decile secondary schools and as a former decile one secondary student, my focus and interest in my topic area is largely established through these experiences. During these times, I have often analysed traditional curriculum approaches and considered whether these deeply established methods are the most effective for engaging students, particularly those from already marginalised, low socio-economic communities. As a New Zealand Pākehā woman who has gained my high school qualifications from a tikanga Māori rich, yet economically poor community, places me in a relatively insightful position. I acknowledge in many

respects the privileges I have inherited as a Pākehā but have also witnessed closely the disparity and issues that low socio-economic community's face. This cultural and social awareness feeds into my passion to support low decile students and their communities, which I have presently been doing through teaching visual arts and as a head of department. I aspire to become a senior leader of a similar context, which has informed my decision to study a Master of Educational Leadership degree at the Auckland University of Technology. I believe my studies and research project will not only develop my own leadership practice, it may also provide an insight that could strengthen general understanding of ways to better support these communities in educational success.

My experiences and philosophies have contributed to working on this study within an interpretive paradigm. This paradigm strives to understand the subjectivity of the human experience and for the researcher to acknowledge and appreciate differences between people (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 1993). The research intention to gain insight into innovative curriculum design and delivery also lends itself to interpretivist approaches. This recognises that while my participants are from the same context, they may have had slightly more unique experiences. Additionally, the fact that all data is collected and analysed by me as the sole researcher indicates that my relative interpretation of the collected data is informed by the ontological and epistemological experiences I have had. Brigg, Coleman and Morrison (2012) highlight that researchers working within an interpretive paradigm must recognise that they are part of their investigative research topic, and therefore as a researcher I will have an impact on the participants as well as the participants having an impact on me through the information they share. The interpretive epistemological position acknowledges the complexity of what is perceived as reality and those who work with this approach needs to be willing to develop new knowledge informed by their participants.

Methodology

Methodology is often described as the system of methods and overall approach employed by a researcher to conduct their study, including justifying the specific tools and techniques used. However, Briggs et al. (2012) explains that methodology goes beyond merely describing the tools and techniques employed; it provides the researcher and readers with an underpinning rationale for the

application of these selected methods. Methodologies are informed by the ontological and epistemological assumptions of social research, while being a consequence of the posed research question (Hammond & Wellington, 2012). Considering this notion, since my study is grounded in an interpretive paradigm, while seeking insight into participants lived experiences, it aligns to qualitative research approaches. Mutch (2013) explains that qualitative research utilises procedures and methods to collect participants descriptive accounts of their own experiences that improve understanding of a specific subject area. A quantitative research approach, on the other hand uses methods of numerical data collection in order to generalise to a broader population, which in this particular study would not provide sufficient in-depth insight, especially within the scope of an academic dissertation paper.

This research examined one low decile high school who appeared to be experimenting with innovative approaches to the senior curriculum. Punch (2009) highlights the importance of connecting the methodology with the research question and explains when a study strives to provide descriptive accounts of participants experiences, it is often associated with methodologies such as phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory or case study. Although my research questions present elements from these various methodologies, the case study approach was selected, as it more effectively aligned with the qualitative nature of the question and the interpretive paradigms in which it was working within. Hammond and Wellington (2012) state that case study research is suitable for researchers with established knowledge of a context or subject and go on to explain that although case studies are frequently criticised as merely descriptive, they provide specific value when a topic is uncommon or marginalised. This is particularly relevant given that my initial research found that very few low decile schools are taking innovative approaches to the senior curriculum and my research intention to investigate a single low decile context. However, O'Toole and Beckett (2013) suggest that case studies are more accurately a choice of the subject or context rather than a methodology and warn that those who use the approach must clearly define the case boundaries as definitions of what constitutes a 'case' can be broad. Stake (2005) share a similar opinion, however he distinguishes case studies into three categories which include:

- Intrinsic: focusses on gaining a better understanding of a context in general.

- Instrumental: examines a specific context to refine a theory or gain specific insight into an issue.
- Collective: where multiple instrumental case studies are conducted to learn more about a phenomenon.

Since my research has been developed for the purpose of gaining insight into the practice of innovative curriculum approaches, along with an underpinning interest in why a limited number of low decile schools are taking these approaches, it more effectively aligns with Stake's instrumental case study definition as it examines a specific context. Briggs et al. (2012) highlights the strengths of a case study is that it is a first-hand account from participants conducted in their natural environment which can be very illustrative and insightful.

Recruitment of School and Participants

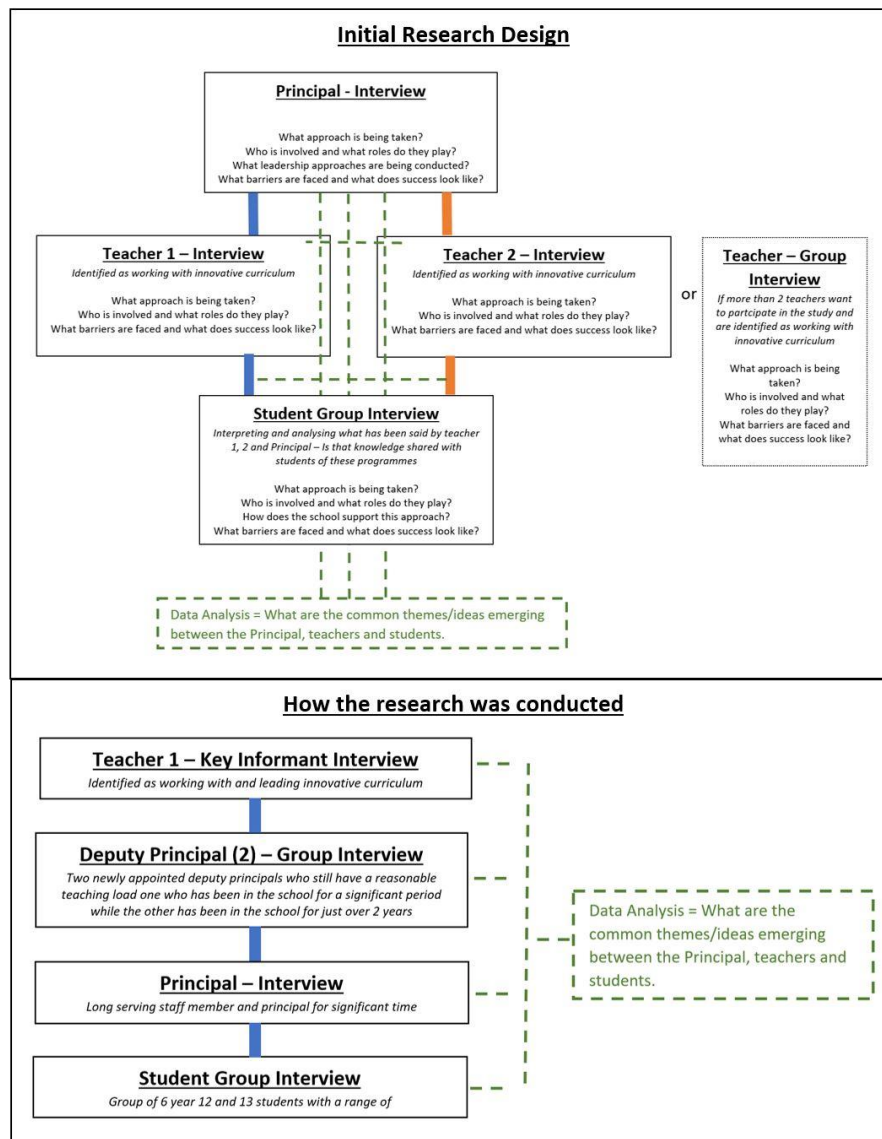
Cohen et al. (1993) believes that when researchers are deliberating on sampling and recruitment decisions, they should consider aspects such as the purpose of their research, methodologies and data collection approaches, alongside the time constraints and other limitations of the project. As I had selected to conduct an instrumental case study, which aims to explore a more in-depth understanding of innovative approaches to senior curriculum in a low decile context, elements of a purposive approach are evident in my recruitment processes. Qualitative research usually utilises elements of purposive sampling where the selection of a specific context or participants are selected to understand specific experiences or topics and is regularly evident in research that does not seek to make generalised claims (Mutch, 2013). To identify a school that met my research criteria, I used the schools' directory found on the Education Counts (Ministry of Education, n.d-b) website. I used the available spreadsheet to narrow down decile 1-4 co-educational state high schools that are within 120km proximity to my location in Auckland. After narrowing down the high schools using the spreadsheet I viewed all these school's websites and used professional contacts to further refine the selection to schools' who appeared to be experimenting with or applying innovative approaches to the senior curriculum. This revealed four schools that were taking such approaches at varying degrees. These schools were then ordered from those who in my opinion seem to be working more intensely, or for a longer period with such approaches based on information available on their websites. Contact

details were obtained by the school's website to make initial contact with the principal. As I was conducting a single case study, I approached the first school on my list that best met my criteria. The principal of this school agreed to participate, including agreeing to a semi-structured interview, so I did not need to contact any other schools. I also met with the school's Board of Trustees to present my project and formally gain permission to access their staff and students.

In order to gain multiple perspectives of this single context, this research was conducted through four various sets of participants. This included a single interview with the Principal, a group interview with two Deputy Principals, a single interview with a Key Informant teacher and a group interview with six senior students. My first step in recruiting staff was to present my project and design to all staff at their morning staff briefing and provided them with an information sheet and my contact details.

Immediately after presenting, the Key Informant teacher approached me and indicated that they would like to be involved in a single interview. I had identified this person as possible a Key Informant before the staff meeting from my BOT meeting, talking with the Principal and examining the teaching roles found on the school website. As this Key Informant had limited availability and requested that their interview would be at the beginning of the following week, this was the first interview I conducted. The two Deputy Principals had also talked to me after the meeting and discussed that they would like to do an interview together giving their perspective. I had hoped to gain a group interview with a range of teachers, however there were no other staff members who contacted me. Although I still had four interviews as I had originally intended (see figure 1), these interviews were heavily weighted towards senior leaders as a result of the two Deputy Principals participating. The limited participant uptake from teachers not in senior leadership positions could reflect the timing of my study, which was conducted during a traditionally busy time of year, as well as their usual busy workload which may have impacted their availability. However, with both the Key Informant and Deputy Principals having large teaching components to their roles, and both Deputy Principals having recently moved into senior leadership, I believe they were able to provide sufficient valid perspectives to provide a rounded view of innovative practices within the school. It is worth noting that that their leadership roles are, however, likely to mean they will have a positive bias towards the practices of the school.

Figure 1



The recruitment of students for my study was restricted to senior students that were over the age of sixteen, to meet the senior focus of this study and to ensure the participants were able to give personal consent. Recruiting students for my study was challenging. I had to balance the time constraints, limitations of student availability and the intention to foster confidentiality that was outlined in my original ethics proposal. While I had intended to meet with all senior students and invited them myself to participate in the study, because of the very limited time available, I conceded to having to get the Deputy Principal organise my group of students. This meant that there were further limitations of student confidentiality than originally intended, which was clearly outlined to students before the interview, however this had to be measured against not gaining any student voice, while also

considering students education as a priority. By sharing their experiences with innovative curriculum design and delivery in this context, the senior students that participated provide my study with multiple perspectives, including those who it affects directly.

Data Collection - Semi Structured Interviews

As a case study focusses on illustrating a specified context, it frequently employs data collection techniques of interviews, observations, oral history and document analysis (Mutch, 2013). Briggs et al. (2012) states that research that works within an interpretative paradigm, where the main objective is to gain understanding of participants perceptions and thoughts, generally prefer to utilise interviews as the preferred data collection method. Furthermore, they state that interviews provide a sole researcher with a relatively quick insight into specific problems or issues which are suited for those working within the limitation of time and the scope of academic writing. These methodological and pragmatic considerations provided the rationale to collect my data through semi-structured interviews with the Principal, a Key Informant middle leader, group interview with two Deputy Principals and a group interview with senior students from year 12 and 13. As noted in the previous section, although I had initially intended to gain a wider range of teacher perspectives, due to limited uptake of teacher invitations to join this study, there was more of a leadership perspective collected.

My selection of semi-structured interviews over more formalised interviews, questioners or other controlled data collection approaches, meant that I was able to gather the individualised experiences of my participant's and utilise probing questions to deeper understand information they were providing. Hancock and Algozzine (2017) state that while semi-structured interviews ask predetermined questions, they have the flexibility to allow participants to openly and freely express themselves. My questions for all interviews consisted of similar content and structure, while being slightly adapted to appropriately communicate with the various participants. Although the semi-structured approach allowed the participants to provide answers in differing length and detail on my specific topic, it sometimes meant that participants shared more information than needed or slightly went off topic. This required a balance of allowing them to share their views as the information is clearly important to them and directing the next question specifically back to the focus of my study.

Cohen et al. (1993) explains the importance in recognising interviews as more than a data gathering process and that they are an interpersonal and social encounter. This signifies that although the practicalities and research aim of my interviews are a focus, the ethical and social courtesies within these encounters needed to be respected.

Data Analysis

Data analysis generally comprises of looking for patterns, regularities and significant information from the collected data. This entails the general process of data collection, reduction, organisation and interpretation (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Hancock and Algozzine (2017) further explain that this process in qualitative research generally consist of a cyclical method, where the data is analysed multiple times. This includes the researcher immediately reflecting and formulating ideas that are being provided their interviews. As my study only collects data through interviews, this constant informal analysis of data allowed me to ponder pertinent information as I collected it and assisted in the development of emerging themes during the research process. Briggs et al. (2012) defines this approach as formative analysis, while Morell and Carroll (2010) terms it as a constant comparative approach. David and Tolich (2003) suggest that employing this approach is a practical way to cope with the sheer volume of data that is generated through qualitative research approaches.

The process of transcribing the data myself provided an opportunity to deeply examine the information provided by my participants. Once all interviews had been transcribed and participants who are involved in individual interviews had reviewed and approved transcripts, a more systematic approach was applied to analysing my data. This initially entailed highlighting and summarise the meaning within a section of text from each interview and formulating themes. Then all interviews were printed onto their own colour of paper, where the text was cut up into sections and placed into these emerging themes on a pin board. This went through several cycles with themes and data becoming more refined (see appendix 12). During this process I employed Hancock and Algozzine's (2017) advice that suggests to avoid feeling overwhelmed throughout analysis the researcher must remind themselves of the fundamental question that is being explored in the study and avoiding being distracted by less relevant information. By going through this process multiple times allows for a more

in-depth understanding and supports the rigor of the study. Additionally, I believe that the outlined data analysis methods align with my interpretive paradigm in which my research is conducted. The limitation of coding qualitative data is that there is no agreed coding approach. Data analysis and coding in this research area requires a large amount of personal judgment and organisation. However, Hammond and Wellington (2012) warn that researchers who over-organise their collected data can miss the complexities of what is said in interviews. This is why when writing my research findings and discussion, I would quickly read participants coded references from the original transcript to ensure that contextually it was still relevant to the points I was attempting to illustrate.

Ethical Considerations

As qualitative educational research fundamentally involves gathering data from and about people, it naturally involves ethical concerns that require researchers to identify and consider how they will be addressed (Punch, 2009). Throughout the many stages of this research there have been numerous ethical matters that have required thoughtful consideration to ensure this investigation is a valid and authentic study. As a Master of Educational Leadership student at the Auckland University of Technology my initial consideration was ensuring my project was guided by the ethical principles outlined by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC). These include:

- Partnership, participation and protection
- Social and Cultural Sensitivity (including Treaty of Waitangi obligations)
- Respect for the vulnerability of some participants
- Informed and voluntary consent
- Respect for rights of privacy and confidentiality
- Minimising risk
- Truthfulness and limitation of deception
- Conflict of interest

These issues were individually addressed in my approved ethics application and although some areas have been touched on in other sections of this report, they will be further explained and justified throughout this ethical consideration section.

When initially planning my research, I began to critically examine my role as a researcher and realised that the role holds inherent power and must be taken into consideration when conducting research. O'Toole and Beckett (2013) consider that researchers hold status and influence because they have the ability to deeply examine the lived experiences of their participants. Adding that research intentions must be clarified to ensure that those participating are not left disempowered and emphasised the researcher's duty to care for those participating in their research. Additionally, this is particularly pertinent, in that my research findings and written report will significantly represent this specific case study school and careful ethical considerations needed to be made when writing this dissertation. The fact that my intended school was likely to belong to a community of social hardship being from a low decile context and the more personal nature of a single case study, informed my decision to employ an ethics of care approach to this research. Wiles (2012) explains that an ethics of care approach is where ethical decisions are made on grounds of care and compassion for the participants within a genuine desire to act in ways that is beneficial for those who are the focus of the study. This approach is much more fluid than a principlist or consequentialist ethical stance which typically apply universal principles or rules for making ethical choices (Wiles, 2012). As this investigation required gaining insight from participants through their told experiences, it felt more appropriate to apply this fluid ethical approach where issues can be differentiated and considered by prioritising the care of individual participants and the community in which I was examining.

As I was interviewing leaders, teachers and students from a single secondary school context my initial concern in gaining consent was to secure Board of Trustees and Principal's written approval to access their school community. This allowed for a greater transparency about the research I was conducting, because although I was only interviewing a small number of their community, these opinions may be viewed as representative of the wider school community by those reading my report. This led to the school's Board of Trustees requesting a presentation of my research design to them in a board meeting where I was able to clarify any questions they had and outline my approach. Once school access was granted, I briefly presented my research intentions to leaders and teachers at the end of a regular staff meeting. This way I was able to provide potential participants with the details of my research on a handout, providing them with a weeklong opportunity to contact me through email if

they were willing to participate. Through these actions, I believed that I have avoided deceiving or coercing participation while providing clarity and information that participants are able to provide informed consent. While the recruitment of students was a little more context involved than intended, there was more of an emphasis ensuring student understood informed consent and the limited confidentiality before the interview and ensuring they genuinely wanted to participate. The importance of informed and voluntary consent is not only clear from AUTECH, Lichtman (2013) explains that research participants “have a reasonable expectation that they will be informed of the nature of the study and may choose whether or not to participate” (p. 53). Once participants committed to being involved, I reiterated all aspects of the study including confidentiality and privacy immediately before the interview, while also getting them to sign consent forms. At this stage, participants were made aware that that they have the right to withdraw from the research at any point and those involved in individual interviews will be given an opportunity to review transcripts before formal data analysis is conducted. While those in group interviews are explicitly made aware that the information they give will not be able to individually be reviewed and that withdrawing from the study after the interview may mean that their data cannot be completely withdrawn. While all interviews focussed on collecting relevant data, consideration needed to be made to remove any irrelevant data, particularly information that could harm or effect those participating.

Lichtman (2013) and Mutch (2013) explain that any individual that participate in academic research has a reasonable expectation that information they provide will be treated in a confidential manner and that this data will be stored securely. During this study, participants were made aware that only limited confidentiality was able to be assumed as the school environment is a relatively small context, students are from limited range and interviews were held onsite. An additional factor I considered was that a very limited number of schools are taking innovative approaches to curriculum design and delivery. Indicating there is a small possibility that people who are familiar with this school’s context may be able identify the school from my research findings. Although only limited confidentiality could be provided, only name titles were applied to the school and participants when collecting data, in my journal entries and in my research findings to minimise further confidentiality risks. This also required me to not publicly disclose the research school or those participating. All data and correspondence

collected research was kept in a secure location throughout the conducted study, while at the end of the study all consent forms and data files are stored with AUT and correspondence disposed.

While my research question focussed on a low decile context, I was mindful that this type of context often has high representation of minority groups, particularly Māori and Pasifika students. These ethnicities are not a specific target characteristic of my research design, but I understood that it was an area that needed my ethical consideration. As an educator I am already largely guided by the partnership, participation and protection principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, which aims to ensure that Māori students enjoy and achieve educational success as Māori. This involves ensuring that Māori identity, language and culture is valued by including these elements in teaching and learning in ways that supports their engagement and success. My research context turned out to have a predominately Māori student population where the community was deeply grounded in tikanga Māori. With my 9 years' experience teaching in low decile high schools and being a former student of a low decile school myself, I felt that I have a good understanding of contextual concerns and fundamental protocols to conduct a culturally and contextually sensitive study. This included ensuring that a range of participants, particularly Māori, had a fair opportunity to participate in this study. In keeping with Tikanga once all interviews were complete participants received a small koha of a gift voucher as an appreciation for their time.

Limitations

With all qualitative research, particularly an instrumental case study bound by an interpretive paradigm, it is vital to identify the limitations and issues faced with the original research plan. Morrell and Carroll (2010) explain that by addressing these limitations, it shows the researcher has carefully considered the research design and that ignoring obvious limitations would place considerable doubt on the rigor of the study. Research limitations tend to present themselves at nearly all stages of the project including the planning, conduction and analysis phases. Like the ethical concerns section many research limitations have been outlined in other areas of the methodologies chapter, however this section will summarise and reiterate the key limitations this study encountered.

By embarking on instrumental case study of one selected context, means that wider generalisations of the broader innovative curriculum topic concerns would be limited. While aspects of the study could be useful to compare in other contexts, it is important to recognise that this particular study is bound, not only by its own unique contextual factors, it is also bound by time. These elements both evolve and change, suggesting that if the study was replicated in a different or even the same context, the findings could be different. I acknowledge that broad generalisations of innovative curriculum are not this study's intention. It is rather more focused on the value a small study can contribute to the field of educational research. Punch (2009) states that the strength of small-scale studies is they have a greater ability to finely examine the topic and open pathways to further projects. However, because there were limited participation opportunities within the study design insight into this context could still be considered relatively small. There could possibly be a wider view of the context that wasn't presented by those who volunteered to participate.

Collecting data through interviews poses a limitation in that interviews are bounded by the recollection and perceptions of those being interviewed. By conducting multiple interviews with various members of the context, the rationale is that this approach will draw elements from those insights to formulate key themes and validate the perceptions as a collective. Although the constraints of limiting participants or with only some people volunteering to participate in my study could mean that only a limited perspective has been collected. Attempts to minimise this concern have been applied by interviewing various levels of participant, targeting the principal, senior leaders, teachers and students. However, as noted in the Recruitment of Schools and Participants Section above, I was unable to recruit teachers without formal leadership roles for my study. While participant's perceptions play a role in the limitations of a qualitative study, the collection and analysis of this data is bound by the interpretations of the sole researcher. This required constantly reflecting critically on any bias or preconceived theories to enable findings to reliably represent the presented case study.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the methodology and research design decisions that support my research emphasis on gaining insight into innovative curriculum design and delivery in a low decile context. It

has outlined my ontological and epistemological considerations that inform this qualitative and interpretive case study where there is justification for the use of semi-structure interviews and acknowledging the unique views and experiences of individual participants. The data-analysis methods allowed for the exploration of school processes and curriculum approaches through the told experiences and interpretations of my participants by categorising into common themes and significant statements. While conducting any qualitative research there is always many ethical considerations that need to be made to ensure participants and the researcher are protected. My study significantly had to take in to account research schools' low socio-economic community, strong Māori population and the transition the school was making after hardships they had faced within the last ten years. This led to applying an ethics of care approach to minimise my effect of conducting and presenting my research. The interpretive paradigm in which my study is grounded presents some limitations to this research and it is particularly important to acknowledge that the study has a leadership weighted perspective than anticipated. However, by outlining my ethical considerations and limitations my research aims to present a clear and valid body of research that contributes to the educational topic of senior high school curriculum.

Chapter Four – Perceptions and Experiences

Introduction

This Perceptions and Experiences chapter aims to illustrate the school's approaches to senior curriculum, the perceived benefits and barriers, and the leadership philosophies and methodologies that underpin their approaches. As this study emphasises innovative secondary senior curriculum practices in one low decile context, I decided to utilise what is traditionally set as the findings chapter to instead describe the context and curriculum approaches, solely using the collected data and my descriptions. This approach aims to provide a clear picture of what is happening in this specific secondary school, and provides an opportunity for the participant's views, experiences and perceptions to be expressed without the lens of critical analysis or academic referral.

The chapter will begin with a brief introduction of the context and the participants, followed by the presentation of data that has been analysed into key themes. These include:

- Descriptions of the curriculum approaches
- Creating positive environments and culture
- School size
- Innovative mindset
- Leadership approaches

While this section will focus on presenting the participant's perceptions and experiences in innovative approaches within this context, it will also illustrate the links and differences between these perceptions. Although this chapter focusses on giving a relatively descriptive representation of the school's innovative curriculum approaches, the level of detail provided is limited to a certain extent in order to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the school and participants.

Describing the Context and Interview Participants

The research context is a low decile co-educational state secondary school. The Key Informant describes the school as a semi-rural small high school within a small community just outside a large city. All interviewed staff acknowledged that there is a considerable amount of socio-economic and

social difficulty within the wider community and this often means the school is seeking ways to minimise the effect of these issues for their students. The Principal specifically discussed the responsibility that the school had around the socialisation of their students and exposing students to opportunities, particularly when a number of students come from families with generational unemployment. All participants discussed the “whānau feel” that they believed the school has, which appears to be created by grounding a lot of the practices and protocols around Tikanga Māori. The Principal discussed the importance of a number of Māori focused approaches they are taking in the school, such as the Tuakana-teina model (a peer-mentoring programme) and whole school Tikanga activities on Tuesday afternoons, stating “that’s a way of saying to our kids, because 85 percent are Māori, that their backgrounds and their Tikanga is important.”

The Principal is a long serving staff member of this context with nearly 40 years in this school and began his teaching career here. He has held the Principal Position for over five years. He left high school himself at a young age, partly through what he describes as academic disengagement and wanting to pursue a building and construction career, which he did successfully for several years before studying to be a teacher. I got a sense that this experience shapes his pedagogical approach and allows for a relatively empathetic understanding of students who appear educationally disengaged, particularly when he discussed letting students leave when they are ready and not holding them back for year 13 just to keep the numbers and funding in the school.

Deputy Principal A is an experienced teacher who has been in this school for nearly 2 years. Prior to this job she has had various teaching experiences and most recently had been teaching in a similar school for 10 years, where she had been doing multiple leadership roles both pastorally and within her subject area of English and History. She came to this school for a head of department role, but quickly moved into the acting Deputy Principal role that she shares with Deputy Principal B.

Deputy Principal B began her teaching career in this school nearly eleven years ago. She comes from a primary teacher trained background but took a role in this high school to help a friend going on leave. She moved into pastoral leadership roles early in her career and feels a very strong connection to the school. She said that although she grew up in the nearby city, she felt that she has stayed working at this school because her mother is from the area and she has been building a stronger

connection with her mother's whānau. Both Deputy Principal A and Deputy Principal B share the deputy principal role and responsibilities and have only been in the role for one term.

The Key Informant is described as the Head of Pedagogy. Her role appears to be the driver of curriculum thinking, where design and delivery approaches are thought-out, and structures are implemented to take these approaches. A lot of her role appears to be about understanding and presenting different pedagogical approaches to staff, while managing the school's timetable to support implementation of these approaches. She describes the role as somewhere between middle-management and senior-management, with a full load of teaching time. She states that the large amount of teaching time, although tough in combination with the pedagogy role has become very useful in order to directly understand the needs of the students individually and as cohorts, and this provides the grounding of much of the curriculum approaches and timetabling decisions. She has been in this context for over 14 years with a background in physical education and health.

Students were a mix of year 12 and 13 students who were all aiming to gain University entrance qualifications. A few students stated that they were not sure if they would continue onto university but emphasised that gaining the qualification provided them with more options at the end of high school. There were five female students, who had been attending this school since year 9 and one male student who came from a private school in the city in year 11. The students appeared comfortable openly discussing their thoughts and when asked about this they believed that the school culture had made them feel like could share their ideas openly and freely.

Describing the School's Approach to Curriculum Design and Delivery

Throughout the interviews the participants described the senior programmes in their school as flexible with a great amount of individualisation. This year the school trialled what the Key Informant describes as "two senior timetables within one" and drew a picture to illustrate (see figure 2).

Figure 2

UE Pathway					Industry Pathway				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
English	Science	Maths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology Design • Outdoor Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts – Visual, Drama or Music • Outdoor Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction • Hospitality • Engineering • Life Skills 			2hours	
	Maths	Science			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PE • Internal Science • Internal English 			2hours	
					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maori Performing Arts • Art • Music • Tourism 			1hour	

She explains that those students who are on the University Entrance (UE) pathway timetable are attending one subject a day for the full day except for Maths and Science, which are split over two days after students expressed the difficulty to maintain focus in those subjects for an entire day. Students can bounce between the two timetables and there is a fair amount of flexibility for students to take courses between both schedules. Students 1, 4 and 6 along with Deputy Principal A expressed how difficult it was to maintain focus on one subject for the entire day, especially for subjects like Maths, English and Science. Student 4 however, explained that he felt that the whole day concept appeared to be more effective for the more practical subjects. Both the Key Informant and the Deputy Principals expressed that these issues, like all trialled approaches, will be reviewed at the end of the year and are likely to be adapted for the following year. The Key Informant explained that reflection and adaption was an integral part of their innovative approaches and explains “our timetable has been different for the last five years.” Although the timetable is split into distinct, somewhat traditional subjects on specific days, the individuality comes from within these subjects, where somewhat differentiated programmes appear to be available to students. Student 1 explained that,

“At the beginning of the year when we started English and I think Science as well, they laid out all the internals that we were going to do that year and they let us choose individually which ones we wanted to choose, but they made it clear that we had to reach a certain mark and credits.... they let us choose what we wanted to do.” (Student 1)

Students also explained that when learners really wanted to enrol in a subject that wasn’t offered by the school, the school would make allowance for students to work on these in a more self-directed manner and went out of their way to provide students with the course that they needed. The interviewed staff discussed the tactic to start year 10 students doing Level 1 assessments where

appropriate, especially targeting the literacy and numeracy standards and aimed to have Level 1 numeracy and completed before year 11. They believe that completing literacy and numeracy standards earlier allows students to focus on subjects they find more engaging when they reach senior level. The Key Informant explained that the school was essentially taking the approach where Level 1 was taught over two years in year 10 and 11. At year 12 those students who are aiming to attend University begin working on Level 3 achievement standards and will work on gaining their Level 3 qualification over two years. Year 12 students on the Industry Pathway will be working on a range of Level 2 and 3 credits usually targeted towards their vocational goals and generally targeting a Level 2 qualification by the end of year 12. Both the Principal and Key Informant discussed the notion of “void qualifications”, questioning why students should spend time on a Level 2 qualification if they are aiming to gain a Level 3 qualification. Their philosophy is that it is preferable to allow students more time to complete Level 3 standards over two years, where appropriate based on the student’s preferences and ability. They hope that this approach will provide more opportunity for students to attempt NCEA scholarship level assessments. The Key Informant acknowledged that many other secondary schools had implemented a similar concept, but they generally focussed on moving students straight into Level 2, bypassing Level 1, and are generally undertaking Level 2 for two years. She felt that moving from Level 1 and then straight into Level 3 was a more sensible approach in her school’s context because Level 1 is more accessible and achievable for a range of students and provides more success momentum. She states,

“Our thinking is that we get a lot of transient kids, in and out of care [with] a lot going on. For them to not achieve anything until the end of year 12 just seems too far for a lot of those kids.”

(Key Informant)

She also explained that she felt the step from Level 2 to 3 was not as hard as the step from Level 1 to 2, so it made more sense to provide students more time for their Level 3 qualification.

The other key feature of the senior curriculum approach was what the school has termed “Vocational Pathways”. This is a three-week block where the regular timetable is collapsed so that students can complete block courses that are organised by the school, attend outdoor education camps, work on inquiry projects or work on self-directed learning, where students can spend time finishing

achievement standard assignments. Vocational Pathways occurred at the end of term three, which was a deliberate choice to alleviate the stress for staff and students at the end of the term and to encourage students to complete all internal achievement standards by the end of the term. The Key Informant explains that both students and teachers now enjoy this time of the year, which is particularly important for the decile one school given the winter period is generally a period of high stress for low decile communities. She claims,

“...this has kind of flipped it. We look forward to the end of term three.... most [students] will be finished at the end of the term and then all of next term becomes focussed on external [assessments] and we change the timetable to accommodate that.” (Key Informant)

Deputy Principal A explained that freeing up term four by focussing on completing internal assessments by the end of term three, elevated the value and priority of external achievement standards. She believes this provides students the head space to concentrate on preparing for exams, whereas traditionally many students would still be attempting to finish multiple internal achievement standards during term four. She anticipated that this approach will help improve not only external achievement but overall achievement.

From the staff interviewed it is apparent that there is a significant pedagogical focus on using a holistic approach. This includes a strong focus on contextualised learning, exposing students to industry and further educational opportunities, developing key competencies and transferrable skills, and using differentiated learning approaches to assist students in developing skills and knowledge that will support them beyond high school. In particular the school has a strong emphasis on identifying potential pathways, working closely with students and their whānau to understand the students' goals and interests, and the pathways the student could take beyond high school. Deputy Principal A believes that by having student driven programmes that are adapting and changing, rather than strict structured lessons and schedules, is more effective in developing key competencies and life skills. She goes on to explain that “real world” jobs today are not as strictly structured as they may have been in the past, and a less structured teaching practice prepares students to better cope with real world working environments. The Principal specified that he believes that the school has a

mission to develop the more holistic characteristic and abilities of their students. When discussing the role of education for students he stated,

“I see our role as exposing [students], giving them opportunities to grow... [and] to work with people in the community and polytech.... but also, we've got a fairly big responsibility around socialisation.” (Principal)

He believes that exposing students to various industries, a multitude of job roles and higher education institutes is particularly important in a low decile context as the students are even less likely to be exposed or have access to such role models. There appears to be a strong attempt to ensure that the school is not insular, and the Principal defines this when he explains that educators must realise that secondary school “is only a stepping stone.” This notion is apparent throughout the school when many of the participants discussed building skills for beyond school and guiding students into sustainable pathways. The Principal and the Key Informant believe that this often requires staff to be aware of the passions and talents of their students and offer advice that supports this beyond school thinking. Student 3 described a time when her English teacher asked if she wanted to enter a speech competition, which she felt was a pivotal point in her seeking a career pathway in acting and entertainment. She felt the teacher gave her the opportunity because there had been various conversations around what she might like to do when she left school and the teacher recognised her talents and her skill set. Often these transitional or future thinking conversations, that the students identified as happening often throughout their time at the school, meant that what students were studying or what achievement standards they were selecting had purpose for their own pathway. This often-provided teachers with opportunities to provide contextualised examples or experiences for the students to engage with.

Deputy Principal A felt that the school wasn't doing enough cross-curricular teaching and learning in the senior school, although there was a decent amount in the junior programmes. She considered that her experience this year working with the Biology teacher to combine English was really successful, and that more opportunities should be developed to offer that kind of cross-curricular approach. However, the Key Informant provided a different view when asked about the approaches they are taking, indicating that a cross-curricular approach isn't always appropriate by stating,

“Do you need to join art with maths to enjoy art, or [to discover] that they love maths?” (Key Informant)

She indicated that it was better to ensure that students “are getting the real-world knowledge of how that subject applies.” She highlighted that she believed that often when a cross-curricular approach is formalised, the tactics can often become really contrived. She believed that although teachers would attempt to work collaboratively, they would inevitably focus on their areas of subject expertise, resulting in a less integrated programme than originally intended.

The school is now moving towards a more collaborative approach for planning the curriculum delivery structure, which is outlined in the leadership section below, however prior to this year it appears to have been the responsibility of the Key Informant. The Key Informant explains that planning for implementation of innovative curriculum approaches is about unpacking the thousands of pedagogies and researched approaches and deciphering what elements are going to work in your own particular context and for that year’s cohort of students. She explains that it is also about considering the other variables such as student’s needs, staffing hours/availability, staffing expertise, teacher/student personality factors, and room availability. She states,

“We design based on all those needs put together...what would make the teacher operate at their very best and how does that look for the students.” (Key Informant)

Although her full teaching load was rather demanding alongside holding her leadership position, the Key Informant saw it as a benefit to the role stating,

“[It] just gave me a sense of what was happening on the ground, the agitations. A lot of the times I think that designing the curriculum and timetable happens at the top table [senior leadership in other schools] and they are not the ones responsible. So, they don’t know the dynamic that sits in front, and in a small school the dynamic can change quite radically.” (Key Informant)

This highlights where a collaborative approach to decision making could be beneficial in truly understanding the student needs, especially when this school believes an individualised approach is what characterises the innovative curriculum approaches in this context.

Although a lot of the regular curriculum planning at this school is grounded in already researched approaches that have been trialled in other schools and other parts of the world, the Key Informant explains that the three-week vocational pathway programme developed specifically by the school itself to better meet the needs of their community. The Deputy Principals explain the planning approach to the vocational pathways this year was completed at the beginning of the year when the previous Deputy Principal sent out a Google document asking staff to share ideas for what staff could offer based on their expertise and what would ensure the best achievement outcomes for their senior students. Students then identify what activities or areas they want to be involved in and then negotiate with staff to identify options that best meet their academic needs. For Student 4, this involved using the entire three weeks for “self-directed learning”, giving him time to complete assessments. However, through the student interviews, some senior students indicated that they felt conflicted about the time spent in the vocational pathway programme, as although they enjoyed the freedom it provided, some students struggled to effectively utilise the allocated time, which could have been better managed by staff.

School Culture and Creating a Positive Environment

Throughout the interviews it became clear that creating positive environments and school culture was a priority and staff believed that this made working with innovative, individualised and flexible curriculum approaches more manageable. It appears the school’s starting point in developing this environment is connecting both staff and students to the school’s specific cultural context. Staff start the year offsite at different local marae in order to develop the staff’s understanding of the community and its history. Students also begin the year with a whole school camp, which the school has facilitated on the school grounds for the last two years. At this camp students’ complete activities such as climbing the significant local maunga (mountains), bush walks and learning about the local environment. The Principal explains the importance of the camp in creating a greater sense of belonging and connection to the community and its environment,

“We’re trying to say to our kids, you’ve got a wonderful asset here, you need to be aware of your own assets.” (Principal)

There is also a clear sense that the school's processes and values are grounded in Tikanga Māori, with the whole school, staff and students undertaking Tikanga activities on Tuesday afternoons including kapa haka, waiata, Māori medicine studies, and Māori games. This allows the school to directly address and value the culture of their context, with the Principal explaining that the school needs to reflect the culture of its students if they want to engage and support student development. Students felt that staff were very connected and particularly felt that teachers were strongly committed to the school because many were past students and had contextual knowledge. Additionally, the school prioritised rebuilding local trust and confidence in the school, by encouraging whānau to visit the school to observe the new practices being used at the school. The Principal also provides local community groups access to school facilities to host events and encourages all students to assist the local iwi with hosting events at the local Marae.

The Principal emphasises the importance of having clear behaviour expectations and developing relational trust. He explained that he has “zero tolerance to any sort of violence, bullying, drugs, alcohol, vandalism.” Any issues of that nature are directed to him, where a meeting is held with whānau and strict decisions are made about whether a student will be excluded or the conditions under which the student will be allowed to remain in the school. This strict approach to discipline appears to have helped build local trust in the school, which has been lost during the school's “difficult times” when the school was nearly shut down. The perception at the time was that the school was unsafe and local families were sending their students to other high schools in the city. However, now that the school has established clear expectations and issues are dealt with proactively, a more positive culture has been created where both students and staff feel safe and can focus on teaching and learning. Creating this safe environment is seen by the Principal as a foundation to being able to build mutual respect between students and teachers, which is a key element in working with innovative curriculum approaches. Students felt that teachers had a really good sense of who their students are and what pathways they want to take, and that teachers genuinely care about their students. Student 1 explains that she felt the teachers truly understood them individually and there was a clear understanding “that not every student is built for the same thing” and they were not just another number. The focus on relationship building appears to be well established in the school and the mutual respect and expectation is exemplified when student 3 states,

“I think one of the main things is, they will give you as much as they can as long as you give back, if you want them to show you effort you have to show effort back.” (Student 3)

Additionally, the Principal stated that positive relationships with students are vital in helping students learn and that celebrating their success, whether that be formally in a prizegiving or informally in a conversation, helps develop teacher/student relationships.

Having individualised programmes, positive relationships and clear behaviour guidelines contributes to a what the Principal and Student 4 describe as a “relaxed environment” that is seemingly more conducive to student engagement and achievement. Student 1 explains that students feel comfortable expressing their points of view to staff and believes that the flexible curriculum approach really benefits the development of her independence and preparing her for life beyond high school. Student 4 shares a similar sentiment and believes that the combination of the culture of the school, the teacher’s approaches, and the flexibility of the schedule creates a good environment to meet students’ individual academic assessment needs. The Principal additionally explains that the curriculum flexibility allows the staff and students to take advantage of and integrate extra-curricular activities and competitions into their academic year. He believes that these opportunities provide students with rich and authentic experiences that contribute to students experiencing success and developing key competencies. However, the Principal also acknowledged that the school must balance the desire for students to be comfortable and enjoy what they do while also providing opportunities for students to be pushed past their comfort zones to build resilience. All the interviewed staff suggested that with students having more individualised programmes they believed that behaviour and attendance issues had been minimised. However, both the Deputy Principals and the Key Informant acknowledged that attendance was still somewhat of an issue but felt that these were often much wider social issues that are ingrained into the wider community. The Deputy Principals discussed that they are starting to conceptualise ways to address these wider issues and intend to offer the community assistance such as parenting guidance evenings or workshops.

The Principal also discussed the school’s plans to rebuild key infrastructure, utilising the Ministry of Education’s Innovative Learning Environment build directive. The school aims to create a mixture of

open plan spaces, silo spaces, and specialist areas such as workshops for engineering and technology. In designing this new build, the school is trying to cater to the needs of their context and the variety of learners needs. The Principal believes that the rebuild will enhance and add to the relaxed and welcoming environment that they have already established.

School Size

All participants discussed the perceived benefits and barriers that the small size of the school had on their innovative curriculum approaches. Most of the interviewed participants expressed that the small roll size contributed to the more personalised approach with Student 3 stating,

“because it’s a very small school, they are able to take their time and work with us one on one and get to know us more.” (Student 3)

The Principal reiterates this when he explained that he didn’t want the roll to exceed 500 students, saying that with any expansion “we’re going to lose that individual dynamic that we’ve got with our kids.” He explains that because they are a small school they can have smaller classes sizes which he believes allows teachers to build those relationships more effectively.

An identified limitation of the school size, however, was the limited subject selection available to students. Students felt that they were offered limited subject choice because there were so few students and not enough staff to provide a variety of subjects. Deputy Principal A also believed that the small size limited innovative curriculum opportunities stating that they haven’t been able to explore opportunities as widely as they would like because they didn’t have the staffing to offer more variety. Although students felt like they were missing some opportunities because of the school’s size, students also realised the resourcing constraints and that having one teacher to provide an entire course for one student wouldn’t be feasible. Student 1 explains that the school is nonetheless willing to work with students to support their subject choice where possible,

“If you really want to study something and you show that you’re passionate about it, they will try and find a way to get you into something like that”. (Student 1)

Student 4 explains that the school took this approach for him and he is the only student studying Level 3 Physics. The school worked out a way that the math teacher could teach Student 4 during one of the teacher's other classes and Student 4 mostly works independently in the maths resource room while the math teacher provides guidance when necessary. This demonstrates that a flexible and differentiated approach is beneficial in minimise the limitations of school size. The Key Informant stated that a lot of people would claim that such a flexible and individualised approach is only possible because the school is small, but she believes larger schools haven't considered a mindset shift and that there would also be different benefits and barriers to innovative practices in a larger context. However, she acknowledges that moving to an innovative curriculum in a larger school could be more challenging due to the volume of stakeholders that would need to support the change.

Innovative Mindset

Within all the interviews participants expressed that in order to implement innovative senior curriculum approaches there needed to be a shift in pedagogical thinking. The Key Informant believed that shifting everybody's thinking is the hardest part. Students also recognised this as a difficult component for both staff and students with Student 4 stating that,

“It all has to come together with the staff and the students, they have to be willing to put in the work or, I think it's a different attitude that people have to have.” (Student 4)

Student 4 further explained that for students it required a more self-motivated way of working and that some teachers were still “getting their head around” the more organic approaches. The Principal acknowledged that the biggest thinking shift was allowing for greater student input and that,

“It's no longer the days where the teacher was the only person with the knowledge, because students can Google now.” (Principal)

He explained that technology has impacted teaching pedagogy and that there is now a greater emphasis on teachers as continual learners and allowing students to contribute with their own prior knowledge. Both the Principal and the Deputy Principals expressed that their staff are on a “continuum” with some staff fully onboard with trialling new things all the time and some who are just starting to experiment. The Key Informant explained that she believed that around 2013 there was a

global paradigm shift in education, which coincided with the school desperately needing to make some changes after nearly being shut down. With the school starting to implement these new approaches this meant that it challenged a lot of their traditional teachers, resulting in a large turn over in staffing. The Key Informant said,

“We saw a lot of teachers that sort of conceded that this is not my fight anymore and they could have done it, but it took a lot of energy.” (Key Informant)

This high level of staff turnover appears to have been a benefit in some ways as the Principal and Deputy Principal A expressed that having a large proportion of new pre-registered teachers has helped develop a more innovative and collaborative culture as new teachers tend to be more open to giving everything a go, as they don't have deeply entrenched educational ideas or teaching practice.

The Principal believes that the pedagogical change required a focus on staff being flexible, not being afraid to experiment and constructively reflecting on what is being trialled to continually evolve curriculum design and delivery. In reference to this, the Principal states,

“There is no way we are sitting on the fence and saying we've got there, because you will never get there, there is no end point, because there is no end point to learning.” (Principal)

All interviewed staff discussed how all current timetable structures and programmes will be collectively reviewed by staff with the help of student surveys at the end of the year. These discussions will help formulate the adaptations and changes for the following year. Although this allows the school to better meet the needs of the students, students explained that this adaption process happened this year during their academic term time. They explained that they understood why the changes were made but felt the change during their year was “annoying” (Student 1). Suggesting that although flexibility is a key element to innovative curriculum, students in this school still value a relative amount of stability and structure. However, this could perhaps be understood as a way for students to experience change and build resilience and adaptability skills. This notion of continual adaption and experimentation stems from staff participant's drive to design and deliver the curriculum in a way that effectively engages students to learn and achieve. The Key Informant explains curriculum design and

delivery decisions are all dependent on the school's current students, which means the needs change often and that adaptability needs to be evident in the decisions.

Staff development appears to be a key area that both the Principal and Deputy Principals believes is important in shifting to a more innovative mindset. The Principal explains that the innovative collaborative approach requires teachers to become learners themselves and not be the ones who hold all the knowledge, but rather facilitate and combine strategies to develop knowledge together with their students. He states,

"My style of leadership whether its right or wrong, is to give people time to grow, go on courses, go and have a look at what other teachers are doing. Because a lot of it's about confidence and a big part of it is sharing yourself with your kids and trusting your kids that they'll do the things you want them to do without you having the big stick saying you need to do this." (Principal)

While this professional learning development (PLD) is important in developing innovative curriculum approaches, Deputy Principal A expressed how school wide professional learning approaches, where all staff attended the same PLD every Wednesday, had not been particularly well received by staff and had been put on hold while they formulated a new plan. She explained that there needed to be a more strategic approach to developing their PLD programme and understood why staff felt disengaged from what they had been doing, stating,

"That's part of the reason they [teachers] have all gone "no" to the PD, is that they felt it had no relevance to what they were doing." (Deputy Principal A)

She explained that developing a new strategy and plan towards PLD was a priority of the Deputy Principal's role for term four. She believes that this plan should be formulated around what courses and programmes are being offered to students so that the training is more relevant and will benefit students. She also stated that because staff are at a variety of levels that there should be a fair amount of differentiation to ensure they too are engaged with their development.

Leadership Approaches

The school's leadership approach appears to be working towards what Key Informant identifies as a "linear leadership" which she describes as collaborative leadership underpinned by a design thinking framework. She illustrates design thinking as being a reflective cycle that continually adapts and refines new concepts. The school is working towards a flatter hierarchal leadership model, which is described by the participants as a better way to develop collaboration and build relational trust, since more people will be involved in decision making. The Key Informant believes that gaining collective input from varying perspectives means that any decisions or strategies that are implemented tend to be more successful as more facets are considered and addressed. The Key Informant expresses this when she states,

"I find it actually speeds up decision making processes because you don't need to go back so often and undo." (Key Informant)

A relatively flat leadership hierarchy appears to be in place throughout the school, with Student 4 explaining,

"I think the whole system is like there is no big leader...everyone has their little jigsaw puzzle piece and everyone kind of fits [but] some of the pieces don't fit very well, but you just jam it in." (Student 4)

This suggests that while the school is attempting to move to this leadership model there are some limitations. The Key Informant noted that it was particularly difficult to move to such a model when the Ministry of Education requires schools to have defined hierarchical leadership roles, such as principal, deputy principal, assistant principal etc, and that having to advertise jobs in this manner means that it may be more difficult to attract candidates who place a lower value on titles and traditional leadership hierarchies. The Principal explained that his leadership approach and this move towards a flatter model required him to trust staff with decisions and support the decisions that they make. He said that showing staff trust, especially when they are wanting to trial new things, is particularly important for developing an innovative environment. He also explained that because he understands what his own leadership strengths and limitations are, he believes that other staff are able to more effectively contribute. For example, when asked if he personally had much input into curriculum design, he replied,

“I don't have a lot [of input] because I trust my staff to do that. And I've got experts here that are doing that and I'm a great believer in surrounding yourself with people who've got capabilities. And again, I'm trying to flatten that hierarchical model because ten people can come up with a hell of a lot more ideas than one person. I do need to be kept in the loop because it can affect resourcing, or other things that staff aren't aware about. But I don't make all the decisions, I'm part of the curriculum timetable committee that comes up with a lot of these innovations or they bring a lot of their innovations to that committee. I'm part of those discussions...and I'll say if I need to go away and do a bit of research or whatever. But that's the forum and that is open to everybody.” (Principal)

Throughout all four interviews there was an overwhelming sense that the leadership approach in this context was very student centred and aspired to genuinely meet the unique needs of individual students. Deputy Principal A states “It's all about the kids, everything is about the kids.” The students felt that teachers had a good grasp of individual student's goals and aspirations as they would often have meaningful learning conversations with students. In particular, Student 1 felt that their hub teacher provided good academic guidance and assistance to ensure that curriculum choices aligned with their goals and facilitated the adaption of programmes to meet these needs as they developed. This student-centred approach appears to stem from the senior leadership team where the Principal expressed “I'm really passionate about not writing kids off, right from the start.” He believes that students who are not engaging with education just need more opportunities to find “what makes them tick.” This includes willingly transitioning year 12 students out of school if they have found meaningful employment or higher education opportunities. The Principal explains that this has financial implications for the school, as they would lose funding for students who leave, but he believes that those decisions are made because it's what's best for that individual student. There was a genuine desire to ensure that students were leaving for specific pathways with the Principal stating,

“Nobody leaves unless they've got somewhere to go, and we make sure there is a pathway for them.” (Principal)

Conclusion

The research school is described as a small, low decile, semi-rural high school just outside of a large city with the majority of its students identifying as Māori. The wider socio-economic and social hardship felt by the local community was acknowledged by staff in this study and they believed the school often sought ways to minimise the effects of this, particularly by grounding their core practices in Tikanga Māori. The school places a large emphasis on individual students learning and development of sustainable pathways for all learners. In the attempt to address these individual learners needs the school had developed a two-pathway timetable where students could select a University Entrance (UE) or an Industry Pathway where there is flexibility for students to move between the two when appropriate. While the senior programmes in the UE Pathways timetable are relatively structured into traditional subjects, students and teachers explained that within these courses there is a significant amount of differentiation and individualising the programmes. The school had also developed a Vocational Pathways programme, where the regular timetable is disestablished for three weeks at end of term three. During this time senior students can join a variety of activities, camps or use the time for self-directed learning to complete assessments.

Creating a positive, culturally aware, whānau friendly and community connected environment was a strong focus of the school, which many participants felt created the right atmosphere to explore different curriculum and teaching practices. The small school size was often emphasised as assisting the creation of the more personal and approachable relationships between students and teachers, however the school size also presented limitations, particularly when providing diverse subject options. All participants of the research highlighted that a shift in mindset was required to implement innovative senior curriculum approaches, where teachers and students need to be confident exploring new ideas and critically reflecting on these practices for the school programmes to evolve. When the research school first started to implement new approaches to the curriculum, which included teachers developing into more of a facilitator role and teachers themselves being open to learning, saw many staff resign as they felt this new approach did not align with their teaching pedagogy. This saw a number of new staff, particularly pre-registered teachers join the school, which the leadership believes

made it easier to sustain the development of their innovative curriculum approaches as they did not have deeply engrained teaching practices and were more willing try new things.

Although there is still distinct leadership titles and roles within my research school, they are working towards a flatter leadership model. Participants felt that a more collaborative approach to decision making and planning had the benefit of foreseeing potential issues as multiple perspective are considered and planned strategies were more effectively implemented as there is a collective understanding of how and why they have been developed. The Principal believed that building relational trust was a key element of his leadership approach, as it was essential in ensuring that staff felt confident in trialling new things and that they would be supported to reflect and adapt when trialled approaches failed.

In my literature review, there was an emphasis that innovative senior curriculum design and delivery needs to be context specific and that innovative practices needed to reflect the needs and interest of a school's specific learners. The data that has been presented in this perceptions and experiences section reflects elements that are important to innovative curriculum in my research school's context.

Chapter Five – Discussion

While the previous chapter aimed to illustrate the research context through the experiences and perceptions of the research participants, this chapter will correlate those findings with the literature research and will make an interpretive and deeper analysis into the focus of the study. This section will return to the literature review structure where discussion will be formulated around the key areas of defining innovative curriculum, benefits, barriers and leading curriculum innovation. While a case study cannot make broad generalised claims, this section will pose several further questions to the wider topic of senior curriculum and suggest further areas of research.

Defining Innovative Curriculum Discussion

The section illustrates the school's definitions and ideas relating to innovative curriculum relative to my reviewed literature. While my reviewed literature strongly emphasised defining innovative senior curriculum as approaches such as cross-curricular, project based or enquiry learning (Larmer et al., 2015; Snyder & Cooper, 2015; Wagner & Compton, 2012), there were varying views on how to define innovative senior curriculum within the research school. Deputy Principal A felt that some innovative practices had occurred organically, such as teachers having conversations in the staffroom and then discovering curriculum links leading to collaborative teaching and learning. However, she also felt there needed to more of an emphasis on explicitly developing opportunities for cross-curricular teaching and learning to occur more frequently. Alternatively, the Key Informant suggested that she believed if cross-curricular approaches were implemented in a more structured way, they may not be as successful as it would become more contrived. She explained that in her experience, because secondary staff feel more comfortable in their own specialist subject area, collaborative projects would often be divided into fragmented areas anyway. This notion was emphasised by reviewed literature where the deep-seated identities of subject areas is noted as a limiting factor to innovative approaches (Morrison & Cooper, 2008; Thomson et al., 2013). The Key Informant felt for such approaches to be successful it relied on staff members working well together and suggested perhaps collaborative teaching approaches are more successful when organised organically. In considering this, perhaps there are some indications that school-wide thematic approaches to the senior school curriculum could be a way to work around these perceived constraints. A theme-based approach to

curriculum design could deliver the contextual and collective model that the literature and research school emphasised as being important, while also working within a traditional single subject framework, which was still evident within the research school for certain subjects. However, a theme-based approach could also present limitations if the selected themes are too narrow, students feel that they cannot engage with the topic, or subject teachers feel they cannot align their subject with the theme. Although Stoll and Temperley (2009) suggest that if a school has developed and encouraged the development of creative and innovative staff, these concerns would likely be minimised as staff would be more willing to take risks and develop solutions. The Principal gave an example of this when he explained that teachers in his school were able to link a boy's interest and passions for trucking to a social inquiry which posed the question 'is the treaty of Waitangi viable in the twenty-first century?' Initially the student proclaimed as having no interest in doing any research on the Treaty of Waitangi, however the Principal explained that teachers were able to initiate his inquiry by encouraging him to research the transportation investments that an Iwi had made and from this starting point he was able to successfully inquire into the broader topic question.

With many of the reviewed literature authors suggesting that innovative curriculum approaches rely on schools meeting the needs of their specific contexts and learners (Austin & Starkey, 2016; Larmer et al., 2015; K. Robinson & Aronica, 2015; Wagner, 2015), perhaps the issue with defining innovative curriculum approaches is that these definitions will vary across schools and even within schools, as evident in the research context. Defining students' needs can be particularly problematic as these are largely bound by teachers, parents, the Ministry of Education or societal perceptions of what learners require. For wider implementation of innovative approaches, perhaps each school should collectively define and develop their own understanding of student-centred innovative curriculum and develop methods around a shared understanding. Morrison and Cooper (2018) explain that this notion of building a collective capacity is a key component of effectively implementing innovative curriculum approaches and maintaining those changes.

Although the research school did not demonstrate widespread use of approaches suggested by the reviewed literature as defining innovative curriculum (such as cross-curriculum teaching and learning,

project-based, or inquiry senior curriculum design approaches), the school nonetheless presented strong links to the pedagogical shifts that many authors expressed as important in moving towards innovative approaches (Bolstad & Gilbert, 2008; Education Review Office, 2018; Hipkins & Spiller, 2012). The school's emphasis on developing programmes to cater for each student's goals and needs, aligned well with what these authors conveyed. Additionally, the school is constantly analysing and adjusting the traditional constraints, such as timetabling and subject delivery to also cater for the individual needs of their learners. There still appears to be an underpinning focus within the school on gaining achievement standards, with all participants emphasising the need for students to gain credits and evidenced by the use of vocational pathways by many senior students to catch up with assessments. Ings (2017) explains that a heavy focus on gaining achievement can be detrimental to learning and explains "that the measure of performance is *not* the measure of learning" (p. 188). However, it appears that this will be the hardest ideology to shift, as throughout this research project there is an overwhelming sense that assessment is the very essence of senior curriculum and continues to be the societal measure of student and school success. Although NCEA was seemingly introduced in New Zealand to encourage more innovative approaches to the curriculum, simultaneously it has placed more emphasis on assessment and achievement, which could be contributing to the lack of innovation in senior curriculum. Although the research school emphasised developing students' social and soft skills to ensure they were able to cope with life beyond school, the deeply ingrained assessment and results focus is often seen as critical for students to be able to access options beyond school, such as tertiary education or the workforce. This notion was exemplified when Student 5 explained she was not planning to attend University but wanted the UE qualification so that she had future options. This provides an indication that unless broader societal and structural changes reduce the emphasis on traditional measures of achievement, this will continue to hinder New Zealand wide senior curriculum innovation. For example, the pressure schools face from the Ministry of Education to meet achievement targets could be an important barrier to schools adopting more innovative practices.

Benefits of Innovative Curriculum Discussion

During my interviews the research participants outlined their belief that their innovative curriculum approaches, that focused on individualised and flexible student programmes, has improved student engagement in their school. Participants believe that the improved student attendance and school roll growth supported their claims, along with anecdotal evidence they have had through conversations with their students, families and community. During my interviews with the students, they explained that because their school was focused on helping them achieve their individual targets and goals, attending school was more enjoyable because it had purpose. They also suggested that because their teachers were not so fixated on the whole class completing a set programme, the teachers were more “relaxed” and believe this also contributed to a more enjoyable environment. Taylor (2012) explains that students who have regular school attendance are those who feel valued and included and states that these students are more likely to gain academic and social success. This could suggest that the research school’s emphasis on valuing the cultures and identities of its community may be having a larger impact on engagement than their innovative curriculum approaches. However, it does appear that the individualised curriculum approaches that the research school has developed have been in direct response to understanding and valuing the cultures and needs of its community. Several of the researched literature authors expressed that individualised and flexible senior curriculum, like what was illustrated by the research school, provides more equitable educational opportunities as the learning is more accessible, more engaging, and values their cultural knowledge (Berryman & Eley, 2017; V. Robinson, 2011). However, those opposed to these approaches believe that many of the twenty-first century learning approaches are not equitable as they believe students are missing opportunities to gain valid objective knowledge that is foundational to their learning and their ability to make connections across subject areas (McPhail & Rata, 2016). They make a valid point as most of reviewed literature indicated that society still currently values the traditional hierarchy of academic subjects and therefore in this climate a non-traditional approach could make gaining opportunities harder if students do not have explicit success in these learning areas. There is the added risk that, because innovative curriculum approaches rely heavily on interpretive understanding of student’s needs, deficit thinking could impact equitable opportunities for students, particularly for minority groups where societal expectations may be lower. Austin and Starkey (2016) along with Bolstad and Gilbert (2012) allude to this when they illustrated that often innovative learning

approaches are implemented to target specific students particularly those who are not engaged with education. While these approaches are adapting to the needs of students, Hipkins and Spiller (2012) warn that schools designing innovative programmes around these needs can fall into developing dead-end courses and can often be branded as less valuable contributing to a two-tiered hierarchical system. When the research school explained they had two senior timetables developed around either a University Pathway or Industry Pathway, I was initially concerned that this could fall into this deficit two-tiered thinking. However, the Key Informant explained that there was plenty of opportunity for students to move between the two programmes and that the Vocational Pathways timetable still provided a solid academic qualification. She explained that there were instances when students were not ready to undertake a University pathway course at the beginning of year 12 they would complete the year in the Vocational Pathways structure and then were still able to successfully complete a University Pathways programme the following year. This highlighted how the flexibility in their senior curriculum design was vital in providing students multiple opportunities to engage in the curriculum without limiting further developmental opportunities.

The debate around educational curriculum approaches has been around for a long time but appears particularly relevant in New Zealand because of the introduction of schools specifically developed for twenty-first century learning, Innovative Learning Environments (ILE) and more recent discussions of the suggested change towards project-based learning for all NCEA Level 1 learners (Ministry of Education, n.d-a). When discussions are developed in both the literature and publicly about a move towards innovative curriculum approaches, the core debate appears to be around whether the curriculum should place emphasis on building skills or developing knowledge (McPhail & Rata, 2016). The importance of developing learner's soft skills along with social and personal growth was highlighted as a key focus of innovative curriculum approaches in both my researched literature and the research school. Benade et al. (2014) explains that twenty-first century learning approaches are increasingly seen as a way to meet the demand for developing student's skills and competencies. The Principal of the research school believed that because of the curriculum approaches and various experiences they are providing for their students, the school is in his opinion "creating more rounded students" and that these skills will be valuable beyond their time at school. The Principal also discussed the role the school had in building confidence of their students, because he believed it was

often a lack of confidence that stops their learners from pursuing opportunities. This is where the research school believes innovative curriculum approaches have been beneficial because there is an emphasis on what students can do rather than what they can't do (Berryman & Eley, 2017; Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2009; Wagner, 2015). However, there is a need to consider whether by doing this, educators are limiting student's growth and opportunities. The Principal and Key Informant touch on this when they discussed that students still needed to be challenged. This appears to also contribute to the research school's emphasis on providing students with opportunities to try new things and expose them to as many industry and academic prospects as possible. The research school felt that by contextualising the learning, especially in the Industry Pathway timetable and the Vocational Pathway programme, it gave students opportunities to understand the application of the knowledge and skills they are learning.

Morrison and Cooper (2008) highlight the importance of building community trust through ensuring wider stakeholders have valid input in the school's vision and provides platforms for connections to be made between the school and its community. The research school felt that their innovative learning approach was building community trust and building wider relationships with the community. Deputy Principal A believes that positive in school experiences alongside positive student experiences in the community, such as working at the local Marae and with local businesses, has contributed to a more positive community perception of the research school. The Principal explains that allowing local community groups to utilise the school's facilities and establishing ways to incorporate curriculum with local businesses has contributed stronger community networks. The Principal believes that this provides a significant benefit for low decile students as such opportunities were not as readily available or exposed to his students.

Barriers and Limitation Discussion

The literature draws attention to the conflicting directives from the government with an emphasis on building innovative senior curriculum while at the same time pushing achievement targets which is highlighted as detrimental to innovative approaches (Chemi et al., 2017; Cullen, 2014; Ings, 2017).

The staff at the research school also indicated that there was sometimes a lack of support at a Ministry level and felt that in particular the Education Review process, which they believed was too focussed purely on making judgements, was not particularly conducive to supporting their innovative approaches. These concerns have also been highlighted in the Tomorrow Schools Report (Ministry of Education, 2018) where there are recommendations for the Educational Review Office to take a more collaborative and ongoing approach. The report states this would build a more “trusting relationship where progress and lack of progress can be both discussed openly, and without fear” (p. 123). This notion aligns better with the foundational principles of innovative curriculum by applying reflective and adaptable methods. This also supports Morrison and Cooper’s (2008) concept that establishing innovations throughout systematic processes and procedures supports sustained curriculum change. Interestingly this same report recommends that year 11-13 Senior secondary schooling should be separated from year 9 and 10 so that there could be a focus on gaining formal qualification at a senior level. Having an emphasis on achievement has already been identified as not being particularly conducive to innovative approaches.

My reviewed literature revealed that the continual training of secondary teachers in specific subject areas could be a contributing constraint to the implementation of innovative senior curriculum as teachers form strong subject specific identities that are often territorial (Thompson, Hall & Jones, 2013; Morrison & Cooper, 2008). The research school explained that this was particularly evident when they started to implement innovative approaches in the school, where many staff felt the school direction did not align with their traditional teaching philosophies, which saw a large number of teachers leave the school. However, the Principal and Deputy Principal A believed that this also created the opportunity to employ new staff that would more effectively align with those innovative principles. Additionally, alongside the national teachers shortage, the research school explained that the travel to a semi-rural location presented an additional constraint to recruiting staff. The school attempts to mitigate these limitations by providing more flexible timetable options for staff and creating part-time options for teachers to ensure they are still providing quality teachers for their community. The Key Informant expressed the teachers shortage pressure had been felt in their school and explained that there was only one Māori maths teacher in the area and similar schools were all competing to recruit this highly suitable candidate. She then went on to make a poignant point that

regardless of where that candidate is employed, it will mean that a whole group of other learners have missed out on that valuable teaching resource. She adds that it would be beneficial if schools could think more creatively about how they could collaborate and share resources, such as teachers, across schools to ensure that learning disparities are minimised. The Tomorrow Schools Report (Ministry of Education, 2018) draws on a similar concept, when they recommend that teachers have the option for secondment between schools to address teacher development concerns.

Throughout the interviews I developed a sense that the research school may need to develop a clearer and explicit school-wide vision that overtly outlines the innovative intentions of their curriculum. The Principal and the Key Informant both stated that there was a school vision, however they also stated it was not widely or explicitly referred to. Regardless, they both felt that the core values of the school are exhibited inherently through practice and behaviours of both staff and student. Deputy Principal A and B both felt that school-wide policies and procedures needed addressing as they felt they were not entirely clear to all staff. Perhaps in order to address these concerns, there is a need to revisit and formalise the school vision, in conjunction with the collective stakeholders, so that the formulation of school-wide process, procedures and policies can be aligned and clarified. Deputy Principal A and B felt that if these were clarified and provided structure, it would provide teachers with better opportunities to focus on learning and experiment with their teaching practice. Although Morrison and Cooper (2008) endorse the disruption of traditional processes and structure throughout an organisation to encourage innovation, they still imply that these should be replaced by a new innovative and reflective structure. This suggests that a certain amount of structure to administration elements and behaviour processes of a school could provide staff with more freedom to experiment with learning approaches.

Leading Senior Innovation Discussion

The research school participants largely discussed the flatter leadership approaches the school is attempting to implement and believed that it would better support their innovative curriculum design and delivery approaches. However, the participants also discussed the constraints that made moving towards this flatter model more difficult, such as traditional philosophies of leadership, the MOEs

focus on having to specifically define school leadership roles and personality traits of those who are appointed into such roles. Ings (2017) highlights that traditional hierarchy is deep-seated in the New Zealand education model and is likely a remnant of typical industrial revolution structures. He goes on to state that these hierarchies are often illustrated in the physical design of the school, with the principal's office almost always being located right near the main entrance of the school and the remaining tiers of leadership and influence positioned in descending order as you move through the school. The Key Informant also explained that funding and the constrained way schools had to advertise leadership positions in such distinct definitions also did not assist in disestablishing such constructs. The Tomorrow Schools Review Report (Ministry of Education, 2018) additionally highlighted the ongoing issues that small, rural and low decile schools had in appointing and maintaining good quality leadership. Unfortunately for my research school they are all three of these descriptors. The report explains that these contexts are often viewed as "stepping stones" to larger schools where there are increases in salary for leading a larger school. This highlights that low decile students could often be disadvantaged by frequent leadership movement in these types of context. This could have been a contributing factor in the research schools' Board of Trustees choosing to appoint a long serving staff member as their principal when re-establishing the school after nearly being shut down. The report (Ministry of Education, 2018) also suggest that principals in these hard to staff contexts require more support and incentives to maintain quality leadership in these schools.

The reviewed literature explained that innovative leadership displayed characteristics of risk taking, collaboration, creativity, has a reflective practice, values and listens to stakeholders (Brundrett & Duncan, 2011; Jarvis, Bell & Sharp, 2016; Orr & Cleveland-Innes, 2015). The research school's Principal felt that his experience in the construction industry and his own less engaged experience of high school contributed significantly to his willingness to experiment with the curriculum and take risks as a leader. In considering the Principal's experience and the various leadership characteristics outlined by the reviewed literature, I am curious to understand more about the experiences and subject areas that leaders of New Zealand secondary schools come from. It could provide further insight into dispositions that contribute to the development of these innovative leadership characteristics and could also provide good foundational knowledge in establishing future leadership professional development targeted at innovative learning approaches. An additional key leadership

characteristic that was emphasised during the research interviews was the concept of relational trust and building effective professional relationships. Many participants believed these caring and trusting qualities are vital in leading innovative curriculum design and delivery approaches. Authors such as Bishop (2011) and Robinson (2011) also highlight that relational trust is vital for effective educational leadership and underpins an effective school culture. However, Le Fevre (2014) warns that it is important to differentiate between friendship and relational trust. She believes that workplace friendships can limit teachers taking risks during times of change or when trialling new teaching approaches because teachers are more self-conscious of failure or being unsuccessful in front of friends. This could be a difficult concept for leaders to manage as much of the literature advocates for building strong collaborative relationships and could be even more difficult to manage in a small context like my research school.

Conclusion

As my literature review had defined innovative senior curriculum as project-based, cross-curricular or enquiry methods, there are varying thoughts in my research school about these approaches. This included whether a more organic or organised approach to planning the programmes was more effective in developing innovative curriculum practices. There was however, a collective consensus on developing long-term sustained pathways that cater for individual learners needs and goals through differentiated teaching. The school illustrates that there is still an assessment focus at a senior high level, which is essentially unavoidable in the current climate as formal high school qualifications are still perceived as the key to the most future pathways. In the wider context it appears that an over emphasis on assessment has seemingly hindered New Zealand wide senior curriculum innovation.

The research school felt that the benefit of individualised and innovative approaches to the senior curriculum had improved student engagement and achievement. My research participants believe that innovative senior curriculum design and delivery is valuing students' culture, individuality, talents and goals, while building positive relationships. This has contributed to added benefit regaining community trust and support, while establishing stronger networks. However, the research school felt that the Education Review process was not conducive to innovative approaches and did not provide a

supportive structure to assist moving towards these styles of teaching and learning. The research participants explained that another barrier to implementing innovative practices is the national teacher shortage, which was particularly challenging as they are considered a hard to staff school. This also influences leadership consistency as these types of school often have high leadership turnover as such contexts are often seen as stepping stones to other leadership positions.

The collaborative leadership approaches in my research school appears to be developing school-wide. The senior leadership team has strong emphasis on building encouraging and trusting relationships that value the strengths of both its students and staff. This focus has contributed to what research participants described as a relaxed environment. Although building positive relationship is seen as a core component of innovative leadership, it is also necessary to differentiate between friendship and relational trust as teachers could be more self-conscious of failure and more risk-adverse around friends. This could be particularly difficult to manage in a small community like my research school.

Chapter Six – Research Conclusions

This chapter will present my research conclusions, reflecting my original research questions:

1. What approach is this school taking regarding innovative senior curriculum design and delivery, who is involved and what roles do they play?
2. What leadership approach is being conducted within this context to support the delivery of their curriculum?
3. What barriers do they face and what does success look like in being innovative?

These will be followed by brief recommendations, further research recommendations, and overview of the study limitations and reflections on the effect this study has had on my teaching pedagogy.

What Approach is the School Taking in Regarding Senior Curriculum Design and Delivery, Who is Involved, and What Roles do they Play?

The research school focussed on developing and offering a very individual and flexible senior curriculum which focussed on providing both a vocational or academic pathway for their students. While students had a large amount of influence on which pathway they took, guided by their goals, strengths and aspirations, there was flexibility for students to move between the pathways as they and their aspiration evolved. While some areas of the pathways are still categorised by traditional subject domains, differentiated approaches are applied within these subjects, where students appear to have a fair amount of input. Although this school is not widely using methods that my literature review commonly defined as innovative curriculum such as project-based learning, cross-curricular or inquiry teaching approaches, the school demonstrated evidence of student-centred methodologies that my reviewed literature highlights as essential to the design and delivery of innovative senior curriculum. The research school's emphasis on developing long term outcomes for their students contributes to this student-centred ethos, despite this having potentially negative effect on the wider school context, such as the loss of funding for students who leave to pursue vocational or employment endeavours before completing year 13.

The school's Head of Pedagogy has previously been the significant driver for school curriculum design and delivery approaches, however the school is making a significant shift towards more collaborative leadership by forming a curriculum group that is open to everyone, to drive curriculum design and delivery moving forward. The Principal explained that although he is "kept in the loop" through attending curriculum group meetings, he does not have a direct role in the development of the school's curriculum. The Principal believes that by entrusting this role to staff with more expertise in curriculum, particularly those who are teaching in the classroom, was a more effective strategy to encourage innovative teaching and learning. This aligns with Brundrett and Duncan's (2011) notion that effective innovative leadership accounts for the strengths and talents of staff to be the driver of transformational educational practices. Students also played a role in the development in various elements of the curriculum. This includes students making choices about school learning options through a UE pathway, Industry pathway or with a combination of the two, alongside many mentoring opportunities where they could voice their needs and aspirations, which were then considered during curriculum planning. The students also believed that there is a lot of student input into specific course design and teachers made the effort to individualise their subjects to meet student's needs, particularly by offering differentiated achievement standard options.

What Leadership Approach is Being Conducted Within this Context to Support the Delivery of their Curriculum?

The research school's collaborative leadership appears to be evolving across the school, with a strong emphasis on building positive and trusting relationships that values the strengths of both students and staff. By focussing on these elements, it is contributing to what research participants describe as a "relaxed environment". The interviewed staff also believe that this atmosphere can better support innovative curriculum approaches as it values and allows stakeholders to take risk and be reflective. A number of authors in my literature review agrees with building effective relationships and relaxed model for people to take risks (Bishop 2011, Jarvis, Bell & Sharp, 2016; Morrison & Copper 2008; Robinson, 2011; Stoll & Temperley, 2009). However, Le Fevre (2014) emphasises the need to different between friendships and relational trust as she believes that friendships can limit risk

taking, as teachers can become more self-conscious of being unsuccessful in front of friends. This concept is particularly challenging in my research school given its small community.

Orr and Cleveland (2015) suggest that teachers are more likely to trial innovative teaching approaches and contribute to organisational transformation when there is a flatter hierarchical leadership model. This model often has an emphasis on collaboration and co-construction. The research participants expressed that the school was working on ways to implement this flatter hierarchy and were developing more explicit ways to work collaboratively. For example, the school had recently created a curriculum planning group that was open to all staff, whereas in the past most curriculum design decisions were made by the Key Informant or a select leadership group.

Senior leaders in my study recognise and are taking proactive action to build community relationships to support their innovative curriculum approaches. This includes allowing local community groups to use school facilities and having stronger whanau connections and accessibility. These relationships have contributed to the research school building stronger networks, which provides students with work experience, community activities and industry exposure.

What Barriers do they Face and What Does Success Look Like in this Context?

With the school located in a low decile community there are a number of social and economic issues that affect student's engagement and achievement at a secondary school level. The school continues to mitigate these effects through building better community engagement and connections, while implementing innovative curriculum approaches. Leaders in the research school explained that staffing the school was often a difficult process and that sometimes flexible or part-time options are negotiated to attract the right staff. The Ministry of Education (2018) also highlights that it is not only difficult to staff schools of a low decile, small or rural context, they often have the added barrier of inconsistent leadership. In the research school there had been several changes in the deputy principal role, but had more of consistency in the principalship, with the current role being held for over five years with the Principal also being a long serving staff member. Students additionally

perceived the small size of the school with its staffing limitations as a barrier to having multiple subject options, which they felt could be limiting some of their opportunities.

Success in the research school is largely defined and discussed as being differentiated between individual students, depending on their personal aspirations and academic targets. There is a large focus on ensuring that their learners are leaving secondary school for sustainable vocational or educational pathways and that the school have a responsibility to prepared students to cope with life beyond secondary education. Robinson (2010) emphasises a similar sentiment, when he points out that today education needs to prepare students to cope with change for a future that will see rapid changes to both the work and global environments. He believes with the current common focus on elite traditional academic subjects, such as Math, English, Science etc, and the assessment focus on these compartmentalised subjects is hindering the development of skills required for this evolving future.

Recommendations

Innovative senior curriculum approaches appear to be very context and learner specific, and schools intending to implement such approaches need to consider the inclusion of various stakeholders through planning and implementation strategies. This includes possibly revisiting the school vision, policies and procedures to ensure that they align with the intended innovative approach, as it is believed that this provides better grounds for the approaches to be more effective and sustainable. The innovative curriculum design and delivery approach, like all approaches, will present numerous compromises and limitations, which will differ depending on the specific context. For example, the Key Informant, highlighted that working in an inquiry approach that focus on students' passions, could create further disparities for students in low decile schools as they are less likely to have been exposed to opportunities that explore passions such as music lessons, travel, afterschool activities etc. This makes it important for schools to recognise and critically analyse the barriers that exist in their context when thinking about how to implement more innovative practices alongside the broader challenges of societal and structural values of traditional academic achievement. Innovative

curriculum appears to rely on the concept that there is no single approach or model that will work for everyone.

Senior leaders need to critically analyse the goals of their school and how they are conducive to meeting the needs of the students individually as opposed to benefiting the school as a whole. Common processes of retaining students for funding or excluding students from assessments to optimise school rankings or raising the school's community profile all need to be critically considered when setting school-wide goals. For example, setting a school wide goal of meeting xx% for all level two students does not particularly prioritise individual students learning needs. Although it is worth noting that such target driven goals are likely to have been directives of the Ministry of Education and that perhaps there needs to be more consideration at this top level considering they are simultaneously seeking innovative approaches to the senior curriculum.

Further Research Recommendations

While conducting this research there were limited examples of New Zealand schools implementing school-wide innovative approaches to the senior curriculum. There was a lack of research on schools that had transitioned from traditional approaches and schools from low decile areas. Additional and more diverse research examples could better support wider implementation of these approaches in New Zealand.

While conducting this research I identified the importance of the principal in driving innovative curriculum practices within a school. A larger research project that focusses on leaders within innovative and traditional secondary schools could provide some more specific understanding to the leadership required to implement innovative senior curriculum.

For this specific school context, there may be value in further research that explores the experiences of students that have completed the pathways offered by the research school. This research could explore the ongoing impact of the pathway programme for students beyond high school to assess its long-term impact.

Limitations

This study was conducted through a single context case study with four sets of participants. As it has a small context specific and limited perspective it is impossible to make broad generalisations to the wider topic. As this study worked within an interpretive paradigm, it must acknowledge that the data collected is formed by participants' perceptions and the data is analysed by the sole researcher. This research was also limited by the need for me to be able to access a school within reasonable distance to my location and is also restricted by the academic requirements of a dissertation paper a. While the initial research design aimed to get perspectives across various levels of the school, teachers without leadership roles did not volunteer to participate in my study, which means those staff who did share their perspective are more likely to have a positive disposition on the school's practices.

Effect this Study Has Had on my Teaching Pedagogy

I entered this research project with an optimism that innovative senior curriculum design and delivery could be the solution to assisting low decile students gaining better rates of achievements and engagement at a senior high school level. I have however, discovered that implementing such approaches is subject to a number of limitations and barriers, particularly as traditional academic values are still the societal measure of education and success.

The leadership components of my research emphasised my own educational values in focussing on strength of both staff and students, while building effective professional relationships through listening and collaborating with various stakeholders. I have established that there is huge value in strengthening wider community relationships, through shared resources and partnerships. This is particularly important if I was to implement innovative senior curriculum approaches as a senior

leader. I still feel that innovative curriculum approaches are beneficial for students, I am just more aware of the limitations and barriers that an effective implementation will pose.

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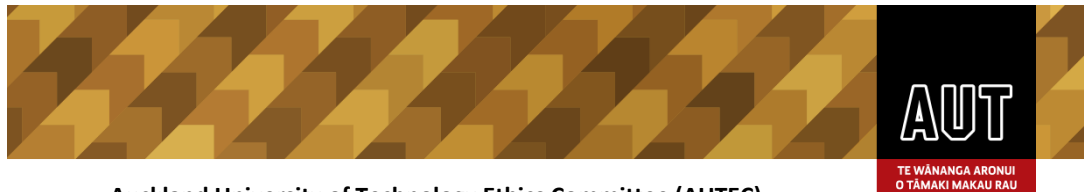
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Appendices

Appendix One – Ethics Approval



Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

24 July 2018

Ruth Boyask
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Ruth

Re Ethics Application: **18/260 Innovative senior curriculum within a New Zealand low decile secondary school: A case study**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 24 July 2021.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
2. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form: <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval for access for your research from another institution or organisation then you are responsible for obtaining it. You are reminded that it is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

For any enquiries, please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K O'Connor'.

Kate O'Connor
Executive Manager
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: tara-lee Hansen@hotmail.com

Appendix Two – Invitation Letter to Research School Board of Trustees

Letter to the board of trustees of case study school to be accompanied by information sheet (appendix 3)

[Date]

[Name of School]

[Address]

[Town, 0000]

Attention: Board of Trustees.

Request for approval to conduct research at [Name of School].

Dear Board of Trustees,

My name is Tara-Lee Soysa and I am a Master of Educational Leadership student at the Auckland University of Technology and currently in my final semester. In order to complete my qualification, I am required to conduct an educational research project for my 60-point dissertation. My research aims to develop insight on innovation in senior curriculum by examining a low decile New Zealand secondary school.

I am seeking permission to conduct my case study research in your schools as I am aware that innovative approaches to senior curriculum delivery and design are being taken in your school and [principal name] has expressed interest in participating in this study. As this study seeks to gain understanding of practices and leadership of [High School Name], Board of Trustee approval is required to gain access to the school's potential participants. I am aware that leadership, teachers and students are faced with many pressures and time constraints during the academic year. If access is granted, I will aim for minimal disruption of the regular activities of the school and participants.

As a current HOD of Art at Aorere College and nine years teaching experience, I can assure you I have suitable credentials and integrity to conduct effective research in a secondary school context. I have attached my study information sheet that provides further research details, outlines the study intentions, design plan and timeline.

I look forward to your response and the possibility working with members of you school community.

Kind regards

Tara-Lee Soysa

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 24th July 2018, AUTEK Reference number 18/260 Innovative senior curriculum within a New Zealand low decile secondary school: A case study.

Appendix Three – Board of Trustees and Principal Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet – School and Principal

Date Information Sheet Produced: 25 June 2018

Project Title: Innovative senior curriculum within a New Zealand low decile secondary school: A case study.

Invitation: My name is Tara-Lee Soysa and I am a Master of Educational Leadership student at the Auckland University of Technology. As a component of my qualification I am working on a research project that seeks insight into innovations in senior curriculum design and delivery by conducting a single case study. I have identified your school as an institute that fits within my research parameters and I am inviting you and your school to participate in my research.

What is the purpose of this research and what is it about? The focus of the study is around innovative curriculum design and delivery approaches such as project based, inquiry and cross-curricular learning. This interest stems from my nine years' experience as a visual arts teacher and from my literature research which suggest very few school in New Zealand are taking such approaches with the senior curriculum. This study aims to provide insight on what approaches your school is taking towards innovation in senior curriculum design and delivery. This study will also be conducted to fulfil the requirements of my 60-point dissertation to gain my Masters of Educational Leadership qualification at AUT.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research? Your school was identified through research on school websites and through professional conversations about schools that are taking these approaches.

How do I agree to participate in this research? If you and your school are willing to participate, email me at tara-lee@hansen@hotmail.com with an attached letter from your Board of Trustees which grants me permission to conduct my research in your school. As the principal you are also agreeing that you will participate in an individual interview to discuss the types of approaches your school takes to senior curriculum design and delivery. Your participation in this research is voluntary and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. If you choose to withdraw from the study, no further research will be conducted in your school.

What will happen in this research? This study will be conducted through three separate sets of interviews which include;

- an interview with the principal,
- two individual interviews with teachers involved in senior innovative curriculum (*NB: if there are more than 2 teachers wanting to participate there will 1 individual interview with a key teacher and a separate teacher group interview*).
- a group interview of six senior students from innovative classes.

All interviews will be conducted in a private location in your school and will not take longer than 1 hour. I will aim to conduct all interviews during normal school hours, however participants involved in individual interviews (principal/teacher) will be able to directly negotiate suitable times with me to minimise disruption to their day. The student group interview will be conducted during a one-hour period before interval or lunch to minimise disruption to their learning and I will endeavour to scheduled time does not conflict with student assessment. All data collected in these interviews will be used to produce my dissertation for my qualification, conduct professional learning conversations and possible conference presentations and journal articles.



What are the discomforts and risks? As this research aims to gain insight into curriculum your schools senior curriculum design and delivery practice there are minimal risks in this research. However, because this is a single case study and the research will be conducted within your school context, there is only a limited amount of confidentiality that I can give to those who participate. Participants may also feel that the information they share may reflect badly on themselves or the school, however these concerns aim to be minimised as described below.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated? All participants will need to be aware of this limitation of confidentiality of when agreeing to participate. I will use pseudonyms for all participants and the school in my data collection and reporting documents to minimise confidentiality risk. All interviews will be conducted in a relatively private room that the participants agree to. The type of questions that will be used in the interviews should not cause discomfort, in that they are not dissimilar to feedback questions that students, teachers and schools often partake in for teacher inquiries. If a participant feels uncomfortable answering a question they have the right to skip questions. Those involved in individual interviews will also have an opportunity to read their own transcripts and remove information they feel can harm them.

What are the benefits? This research could contribute to further discussion around curriculum innovation in New Zealand. You may also find the summary of my research findings useful in reflecting and refining your school's teaching and learning practice. This will also assist in me gaining my qualification.

What are the costs of participating in this research? There is no monetary cost for you to participate however, all interviews will be up to a maximum of 60 minutes and there will need to allow some time for reviewing the transcript if you wish to do so.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation? You have two weeks to contact me via email if you would like to partake in this study by MONDAY 30th July 2018

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research? All participants will receive a two-page summary of my research findings.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research? Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *Dr Ruth Boyask*, ruth.boyask@aut.ac.nz, (09) 921 9999 ext 7569

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the researcher as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Tara-Lee Soysa, tara-lee@aut.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Ruth Boyask, ruth.boyask@aut.ac.nz, (09) 921 9999 ext 7569

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 24th July 2018, AUTEK Reference number 18/260 Innovative senior curriculum within a New Zealand low decile secondary school: A case study.

Appendix Four –Teachers Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet – Teachers

Date Information Sheet Produced: 25 June 2018

Project Title: Innovative senior curriculum within a New Zealand low decile secondary school: A case study.

Invitation: My name is Tara-Lee Soysa and I am a Master of Educational Leadership student at the Auckland University of Technology. As a component of my qualification I am working on a research project that seeks insight into innovations in senior curriculum design and delivery by conducting a single case study. I have identified your school as an institute that fits within my research and I am inviting you as a teacher of seniors to participate in my research.

What is the purpose of this research and what is it about? The focus of the study is around innovative curriculum design and delivery approaches such as project based, inquiry and cross-curricular learning. This interest stems from my nine years' experience as a visual arts teacher and from my literature research which suggest very few school in New Zealand are taking such approaches with the senior curriculum. This study aims to provide insight on what approaches your school is taking towards innovation in senior curriculum design and delivery. This study will also be conducted to fulfil the requirements of my 60-point dissertation to gain my Masters of Educational Leadership qualification at AUT.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research? The school was identified as working with innovative senior curriculum approaches and your principal has agreed to participate. As you are a teacher of senior classes in this school you are being invited to participate in my research.

How do I agree to participate in this research? If you are involved with innovative senior classes in this school and would like to share your ideas and experiences, email me at tara-leehansen@hotmail.com. Please attach a short message that states a brief description of your role and what involvement you have with innovative curriculum courses at this school. Please email expressions of interest by **Friday 28th September 2018**.

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

What will happen in this research? This study will be conducted through three separate sets of interviews which include;

- an interview with the principal/senior leaders,
- two individual interviews with teachers involved in senior innovative curriculum (*NB: if there are more than 2 teachers wanting to participate there will 1 individual interview with a key teacher and a separate teacher group interview*).
- a group interview of six senior students from innovative classes.

All interviews will be conducted in a private location in your school and will not take longer than 1hour. I will aim to conduct all interviews during normal school hours, however participants involved in individual interviews (principal/teacher) will be able to directly negotiate suitable times with me to minimise disruption to their day. All data collected in these interviews will be used to produce my dissertation for my qualification, conduct professional learning conversations and possible conference presentations and journal articles.

What are the discomforts and risks? As this research aims to gain insight into curriculum your schools senior curriculum design and delivery practice there are minimal risks in this research. However, because this is a single case study and the research will be conducted within your school context, there is only a limited amount of confidentiality that I can give to those who participate. Participants may also feel like the information they share may reflect badly on themselves or the school, however these concerns aim to be minimised as described below.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated? All participants will need to be aware of this limitation of confidentiality when agreeing to participate. I will use pseudonyms for all participants and the school in my data collection and reporting documents to minimise confidentiality risk. All interviews will be conducted in a relatively private room that the participants agree to. The type of questions that will be used in the interviews should not cause discomfort, in that they are not dissimilar to feedback questions that students, teachers and schools often partake in for teacher inquiries. If a participant feels uncomfortable answering a question they have the right to skip questions. Those involved in individual interviews will also have an opportunity to read their own transcripts and remove information they feel can harm them.

What are the benefits? This research could contribute to further discussion around curriculum innovation in New Zealand. You may also find the summary of my research findings useful in reflecting and refining your school's teaching and learning practice. This will also assist in me gaining my qualification.

What are the costs of participating in this research? There is no monetary cost for you to participate however, all interviews will be up to a maximum of 60 minutes and there will need to allow some time for reviewing the transcript if you wish to do so.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation? You have 10 days to contact me via email if you would like to partake in this study by Friday 28th September 2018

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research? All participants will receive a two-page summary of my research findings.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research? Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *Dr Ruth Boyask*, ruth.boyask@aut.ac.nz, (09) 921 9999 ext 7569

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the researcher as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Tara-Lee Soysa, tara-leehansen@hotmail.com,

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Ruth Boyask, ruth.boyask@aut.ac.nz, (09) 921 9999 ext 7569

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 24th July 2018, AUTEK Reference number 18/260 Innovative senior curriculum within a New Zealand low decile secondary school: A case study.

Appendix Five – Students Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet – Students

Date Information Sheet Produced: 25 June 2018

Project Title: Innovative senior curriculum within a New Zealand low decile secondary school: A case study.

Invitation: My name is Tara-Lee Soysa and I am a Master of Educational Leadership student at the Auckland University of Technology. As a part of my qualification, I am working on a research project that seeks insight into innovations in senior curriculum design and delivery by conducting a single case study. I have identified your school as an institute that fits within my research and as you are a senior student involved in these types of classes you are invited to participate in a group interview to share your experience.

What is the purpose of this research and what is it about? The focus of the study is around innovative curriculum design and delivery approaches such as project based, inquiry and cross-curricular learning. This interest stems from my nine years' experience as a visual arts teacher and from my literature research which suggest very few school in New Zealand are taking such approaches with the senior curriculum. This study aims to provide insight on what approaches your school is taking towards innovation in senior curriculum design and delivery. This study will also be conducted to fulfil the requirements of my 60-point dissertation to gain my Masters of Educational Leadership qualification at AUT.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research? The school was identified as working with innovative senior curriculum approaches and you are a senior student involved in these classes and I came to your class to talk about this project.

How do I agree to participate in this research? If you are over 16 (you must be over 16 to give consent to participate in this study) and would like to share your experiences in these classes at this school, you can either email me at tara-lee.hansen@hotmail.com by Tuesday 2nd OCTOBER 2018.

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data will not be possible.

What will happen in this research? This study will be conducted through three separate sets of interviews which include;

- an interview with the principal,
- two individual interviews with teachers involved in senior innovative curriculum (*NB: if there are more than 2 teachers wanting to participate there will 1 individual interview with a key teacher and a separate teacher group interview*).
- a group interview of six senior students from innovative classes.

If more than 6 students want to participate, your names will be randomly selected to determine the 6 participants. The student group interview will be conducted in a private location in the school during a one-hour period before interval or lunch to minimise disruption to your learning. I will endeavour to schedule a time does not conflict with any assessment or vital course work. You will need to be aware that you will need to catch up on classwork missed in your own time.

All data collected in these interviews will be used to produce my dissertation for my qualification, conduct professional learning conversations and possible conference presentations and journal articles.



What are the discomforts and risks? As this research aims to gain insight into curriculum your schools senior curriculum design and delivery practice there are minimal risks in this research. However, because this is a single case study and the research will be conducted within your school environment, there is only a limited amount of confidentiality that I can give to those who participate especially since all students will be in a group interview. Participants may also feel like the information they share may reflect badly on themselves or the school, however these concerns aim to be minimised as described below.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated? All participants will need to be aware of this limitation of confidentiality of when agreeing to participate. I will use pseudonyms (fake names) for all participants and the school in my data collection and reporting documents to minimise confidentiality risks. All interviews will be conducted in a relatively private room that the participants agree to. The type of questions that will be used in the interviews should not cause discomfort, in that they are much like student feedback questions, that often conducted in schools. If a participant feels uncomfortable answering a question they have the right to skip questions. As you will be participating in a group interview you must respect the privacy of other participants by not sharing the discussions with other people and not share information in the interview that will be harmful to others.

What are the benefits? This research could help further develop curriculum innovation in your school for future students or other New Zealand high schools. This research will also assist in me gaining my qualification.

What are the costs of participating in this research? There is no monetary cost for you to participate however, all interviews will be up to a maximum of 60 minutes.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation? You have one week to contact me via email if you would like to partake in this study by 2nd October 2018.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research? All participants will receive a two-page summary of my research findings.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research? Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *Dr Ruth Boyask*, ruth.boyask@aut.ac.nz, (09) 921 9999 ext 7569

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the researcher as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Tara-Lee Soysa, tara-leehansen@hotmail.com,

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Ruth Boyask, ruth.boyask@aut.ac.nz, (09) 921 9999 ext 7569

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 24th July 2018, AUTEK Reference number 18/260
Innovative senior curriculum within a New Zealand low decile secondary school: A case study.

Appendix Six – Consent Form – Individual Interview (Principal/Teacher)



Consent Form

Individual Interview Principal/Teacher

Project title:

Innovative senior curriculum within a New Zealand low decile secondary school: A case study.

Project Supervisor: **DR Ruth Boyask**

Researcher: **Tara-Lee Soysa**

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 25 June 2018.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once data transcripts have been approved by me, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participants signature:

Participants name:

Participants Contact Details (if appropriate):

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.....
.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 24th July 2018, AUTEC Reference number 18/260 Innovative senior curriculum within a New Zealand low decile secondary school: A case study.

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix Seven – Consent Form – Teacher Group Interview



Consent Form

Teacher group interview

Project title:

Innovative senior curriculum within a New Zealand low decile secondary school: A case study.

Project Supervisor: DR Ruth Boyask

Researcher: Tara-Lee Soysa

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 25 June 2018.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that identity of my fellow participants and our discussions in the focus group is confidential to the group and I agree to keep this information confidential.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then, while it may not be possible to destroy all records of the group discussion of which I was a part of, I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 24th July 2018, AUTEK Reference number 18/260 Innovative senior curriculum within a New Zealand low decile secondary school: A case study.

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix Eight – Consent Form – Student Group Interview



Consent Form

Student group interview

Project title:

Innovative senior curriculum within a New Zealand low decile secondary school: A case study.

Project Supervisor: **DR Ruth Boyask**

Researcher: **Tara-Lee Soysa**

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 25 June 2018.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that identity of my fellow participants and our discussions in the group interview is confidential to the group and I agree to keep this information confidential.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then, while it may not be possible to destroy all records of the group discussion of which I was a part of, I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 24th July 2018, AUTEK Reference number 18/260 Innovative senior curriculum within a New Zealand low decile secondary school: A case study.

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix Nine – Interview Guide – Principal Interview and Deputy Principals Interview

Semi-structured Interview Questions – Principal /DP

Before conducting the interview cover the following areas:

- *Thank them for participating introduce myself and make them feel welcome*
- *Purpose of the study*
- *Signed consent – Before signed go through confidentiality and explain they will have a chance to review interview transcriptions*
- *Briefly describe innovative curriculum design and delivery base on the research*

1. What do you personally see as the main purpose of senior (year 11-13) education. Or what role does the senior curriculum have for senior students? For example
 - a. Preparing students for the workforce or university
 - b. Developing student's social skills so they can contribute to society
 - c. Developing and mastering knowledge
2. Briefly describe your role and your experience in this school:
3. I have gone over some areas of what innovative curriculum means in my study (cross-curricular, project-based, inquiry). What is your understanding of innovative curriculum delivery and design and how does that relate to what is happening in this school?
4. What experience have you and the school had with innovative approaches to senior curriculum? (eg how long, in another context)
5. How has the school transitioned away traditional approaches?
6. In your role what sort of input do you have in curriculum design and delivery in this school and what are your thoughts on this (ie too much/too little please explain)? Who else does and what do they do?
7. What do you think the benefits and barriers have been in working with innovative curriculum? (staff, students, community)
 - a. What do you think are the benefits and barriers of innovative curriculum in a low decile context?
8. What effect has this approach had for senior students?
9. What leadership practice/approaches have been implemented to support the innovative senior curriculum approaches? (yourself/other staff)

Probing/clarifying questions:

- *Can you explain further?*
- *Would you mind expanding on that?*
- *Why do you feel/think this way?*
- *When you said...what do you mean?*
- *I'm not quite sure I understand what you are saying?*

Appendix Ten – Interview Guide – Key Informant Interview

Semi-structured Interview Questions – Key Informant

Before conducting the interview cover the following areas:

- *Thank them for participating introduce myself and make them feel welcome*
- *Purpose of the study*
- *Signed consent – Before signed go through confidentiality and explain they will have a chance to review interview transcriptions*
- *Briefly describe innovative curriculum design and delivery base on the research*

1. What do you personally see as the main purpose of senior (year 11-13) education. Or what role does the senior curriculum have for senior students? For example
 - a. Preparing students for the workforce or university
 - b. Developing student's social skills so they can contribute to society
 - c. Developing and mastering knowledge
2. Briefly describe your role and your experience in this school:
3. I have gone over some areas of what innovative curriculum means in my study (cross-curricular, project-based, inquiry). What is your understanding of innovative curriculum delivery and design and how does that relate to what is happening in this school?
4. What experience have you had with innovative approaches to senior curriculum? (eg how long, in another context/schools)
5. What innovative approaches are being taken in your classes?
 - a. If you been in this school for a long time. How has the school transitioned away traditional approaches?
6. In your role what sort of input do you have in curriculum design and delivery in this school and what are your thoughts on this (ie too much/too little please explain)? Who else does and what do they do?
7. What do you think the benefits and barriers have been in working with innovative curriculum? (staff, students, community)
 - a. What do you think are the benefits and barriers of innovative curriculum in a **low decile context**?
8. What effect has this approach had for senior students?
9. What leadership practice/approaches have been implemented to support the innovative senior curriculum approaches? (yourself/other staff)

Probing/clarifying questions:

- *Can you explain further?*
- *Would you mind expanding on that?*
- *Why do you feel/think this way?*
- *When you said...what do you mean?*
- *I'm not quite sure I understand what you are saying?*

Appendix Eleven – Interview Guide – Student Interview

Group Semi-structured Questions – 6 students

Before conducting the interview cover the following areas:

- *Thank them for participating introduce myself and make them feel welcome*
- *Purpose of the study*
- *Signed consent – Before signed go through confidentiality and explain they will have a chance to review interview transcriptions*
- *Briefly describe innovative curriculum design and delivery base on the research*

1. Why have/will you have stayed at high school through senior levels? What do you believe the purpose of senior level education is for?
 - a. Preparing you for the workforce or university
 - b. Developing your social skills so you can contribute to society
 - c. Developing and mastering knowledge (subjects)
2. How is the senior curriculum or programme in your school taught? (Are there separate subjects, do you have block courses, are the classes the same every week?)
3. Do you think your school's approaches to the senior curriculum are different from other high schools and if so how? What are your thoughts on this?
4. To what extent do students get input into curriculum design and delivery in this school and what are your thought on this (ie too much/too little please explain)?
5. What do you think the benefits and barriers are in your school approach to the curriculum design and delivery? (staff, students, community)
6. What effect do you think this approach has had on your learning?
7. What leadership practice/approaches are used by school leaders and teachers to support innovative curriculum design and delivery? (what are your principal and teachers doing to support this approach?)

Probing/clarifying questions:

- *Can you explain further?*
- *Would you mind expanding on that?*
- *Why do you feel/think this way?*
- *When you said...what do you mean?*
- *I'm not quite sure I understand what you are saying?*

Appendix Twelve – Interview Analysis and Coding Example

