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Multi-Level Leadership Development Using Co-Constructed Spaces with Schools: A Ten-Year Journey

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Abstract: Leadership in both theory and practice usually emphasizes a person and a position. There has been a shift from emphasizing the senior level of organizational roles, to include the middle level and other sources of leadership. Nomenclature has emerged over time to reflect this, for example, collective, distributed, shared, and collaborative leadership. Another understanding of leadership needs to be added, one that does not first emphasize a person or position, instead incorporating process and practices, weaving through all levels and sources of leadership. This additional understanding has implications for how leadership development is constructed and facilitated. Over the last ten years, the authors have journeyed with groups of schools, using an emerging co-constructed approach to leadership development. The journey is relayed across three seasons. The first is the grounding of collaborative practices through inquiry, informed by a two-phase research project. The second focuses on adaptation and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, whereas the third delves deeper into what sits behind prevalent practices that may enable and hinder student achievement. Our narrative over time shows that leadership development can be shaped through a continual cycle of review, reflection, and co-construction, leading to conditions for transformation across multiple levels and sources of leadership.

Keywords: leadership development; professional development; school leadership; collaboration; inquiry; co-construction; emergence; practices; dialogue; organizational learning

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1. Introduction

Leadership and its related development have become an assumed sine qua non of and for organizational development and improvement. This is in part due to the popularization of leadership and growth of the leadership development industry over the last few decades. A desire to make a difference and hope this may come through reified individuals contributes to this popularization [1,2], as does the construction of leaders as reform change agents [3]. Despite the broadening of leadership beyond individuals in senior organizational roles to include those in positions in other levels of an organization, the focus of leadership and the leadership development industry has maintained an emphasis on the individual person as a leader. This has led to a possible over-emphasis on leadership in education being positional and individually personified while overlooking more process- and practice-based understandings of leadership theory and practice [4–6]. This suggests that leadership development may not, in some cases, be as holistic as it could be.

The aim of this article is to provide a narrative showing how a holistic multi-level leadership development program was co-constructed with schools over ten years. Four sections shape the structure of this article. The remainder of this introduction focuses on leadership theory and how it may be expressed through leadership development. Particular attention is given to what is meant by leadership, as its meaning is often not given much scrutiny in other leadership articles [7] due to its unquestioned association with

improvement and development. The following section explains the sources of evidence that inform how the research methods and professional development evaluation sources have emerged over the ten years and inform our narrative. This is followed by our findings section, where three seasons of the ten-year journey illustrate how multi-level leadership development using co-constructed spaces and materials with schools has contributed to conditions conducive to transformation of practice. The fourth and final discussion section, informed by relevant literature, informs how our learnings from this ten-year journey can be relevant for improving multi-level leadership development in other settings. There are two critical components of this improvement. The first is including and moving beyond individualized understandings of leadership and the second is loosening the rigidity that may exist in current professional development programs, so co-construction with schools can emerge over time.

1.1. Leadership: Individualized, Multi-Level, and Collective

Leader, leaders, and leadership are common nomenclature of education research, practice, policy, and reform. A feature of what is written has tended to associate this nomenclature with principalship or headship often aligned to transformational leadership [8,9], although there has been an increased focus on middle leaders [10] since the turn of the millennium [11]. Parallel to this has been a focus on teachers as leaders [9] and first-level leaders, who are neither senior or middle leaders [12]. Combining all of these together can conveniently be classified as multi-level leadership; multi due to the numerous roles and sources, and level, due to the layering of such roles in hierarchical school structures. Multi-level leadership, though, is usually equated to each person as a leader, an aggregated individualized categorization that has its roots in leader–follower constructions of leadership. Leadership development based on this understanding may tend to focus on individual leader development for each person.

The broadening of leadership sources beyond the principal is also a key aspect of collective forms of leadership, which incorporates distributed, shared, relational, and collaborative expressions [13]. There is general acceptance in educational leadership research that collective forms of leadership co-exist with more individual expressions, as discussed above [9,14–17]. Distributed leadership is usually the most common form of collective leadership expressed across education [18]. However there is no one form of distributed leadership, due to differing ontologies [19] and its multiple forms in practice (for example, see [20]). In most cases, distributed leadership is a derivative of the leader–follower construction of leadership where there is interchangeability between the two, as well as broadening the sources of leadership beyond those in organizational leadership roles. Leadership development may subsequently become more inclusive of staff across a school. However, there is still a critical component missing; the integration of practices and process.

1.2. Leadership as Process and Practice

Leadership is often described as an influence process, particularly in terms of a leader influencing a follower or leader(s) influencing staff to be part of a change initiative. We acknowledge influence from leaders does take place in schools; however, this perspective of process is not the focus of what follows. Crevani [21] makes a distinction between this process perspective and process ontology. It is the latter we focus on here. What has been discussed so far in Section 1.1. is premised on an entitative ontology that underpins most leadership theory, research, and development. An entitative ontology of leadership locates leadership in an entity, that is, in a person, usually appointed to a role associated with the term leader [19], who may be seen as being stable within a period of change [22]. Change is then reduced to a phenomenon, where entities, in this case a leader or leaders, either create or act on change. Process ontology, on the other hand, assumes "change is of the very essence of reality" [23] (p. 25), and change is no longer viewed as "an occasional episode in organizational life" [24] (p. 568) that leaders act on. This repositions leaders away from being stable entities acting on change, as they themselves are also changing

moment-by-moment, as is the situation in which a change initiative is taking place. It also brings into question some change management literature and leadership development programs that position and simplify leaders as agents being able to successfully lead change if certain steps are followed (for a more in-depth critique of this, see [25,26]). One way of addressing this issue is to bring some greater focus to practices by drawing on practice theory and practice architectures.

Practice theory, "with its focus on dynamics, relations, and enactment" is highly appropriate to understand "contemporary organizing [which] is increasingly understood to be complex, dynamic, distributed, mobile, transient, and unprecedented" [27] (p. 1240). Leadership work may then be re-understood as "the ongoing production of direction in organizing" [21] (p. 88) and "moments that re-orient the flow of practice" [28] (p. 170). This echoes the etymology of the word lead, which has an association with to travel [29]. This dynamic, rather than a fixed entity understanding of leadership, is also reflected in indigenous knowledge, where collectiveness and journeying are emphasized [30,31]. To understand this ongoing production or journeying, an emphasis on understanding practices in the moment-by-moment of their happening is needed. One practice framework that has emerged in education is practice architectures [32]. "Practice architectures is a theory of what practices are made of. They constitute the broader arrangements that enable or constrain and prefigure (but do not determine) a practice" [6] (p. 5 of 14). Practice architectures consist of cultural-discursive, economic, and socio-political arrangements that occur at a particular site [32]. The respective sayings, doings, and relatings people learn and re-learn are the interactional practices associated with practice architectures that enable and constrain the interactions. This brings attention to focusing on the present and how practices that get labeled as leadership unfold and are experienced. The implication for leadership development is a shift from focusing first on a leader's development to that of practices and flows of direction. This has implications for facilitators of leadership development programs and pre-packaged professional development programs of education reforms. Facilitators and trainers cannot position themselves as ones who act on participants, as if the participants are passive entities who will take new knowledge with them and apply this to practice. Instead, participants are central to the ongoing process of learning and the co-construction of leadership development program direction, as the direction is forming and reforming as the leadership development session is taking place. The following section outlines the evidence we draw on in our narrative to support how our journey of co-construction and leadership development has unfolded.

2. Emergent Design and Methods

The data, findings, and learnings informing this article are situated in two groups of schools located in Auckland, New Zealand. One group, the Eastern Learning Network (ELN) consists of schools from east and south-east Auckland, whereas the other group, the Northern Learning Network (NLN), consists of schools from the North Shore area of Auckland. The ELN and NLN are part of paid professional services offered by Osprey Consulting [www.ospreyconsulting.co.nz (accessed on 1 February 2024)] that the schools choose to pay for. The number of schools involved has fluctuated between eight and seventeen in the ELN, and five to eight in the NLN. At the time of writing, both the ELN and NLN continue to operate, having started in 2013 (ELN) and 2021 (NLN).

The specific focus on leadership development did not start until 2015. Our narrative covers the leadership development period of 2015–2024 for the ELN and 2021–2024 for the NLN, and is informed through a range of sources and methods (see Table 1). These periods cover the three seasons reported in our findings section that follows. Please note there is no one research aim or question that was established at the start of this ten-year period. This is because we are looking back retrospectively so we capture how our current co-constructed approach to leadership development emerged. This means that it is not possible to fully replicate these findings because as they emerged over time, they also shaped what would happen next. This is the essence of co-construction where we cannot

determine what happens next. We use the term "fully" because we do hope that other leadership development providers and schools may be able to replicate the model and components that now inform our practices. The justification and details pertaining to these are evident in our narrative. The three seasons are:

- Season one: Collaborative practices and inquiry (ELN, 2015–19);
- Season two: Adaptation and wayfinding (ELN, 2020–22; NLN, 2021, 22);
- Season three: Shifting patterns of practice (ELN, 2023, 24; NLN, 2023, 24).

Table 1. Data sources and methods from the ELN and NLN (2015–24).

Source	Season One	Season Two	Season Three
Pre-prepared workshop material	Workshop outlines Workshop slides	Workshop outlines Workshop slides	Workshop outlines Workshop slides
Emergent material generated by participants	Materials and syntheses	Materials and syntheses	Materials and syntheses
Advisory Panel notes	Meeting notes with school leaders	Meeting notes with school leaders	Meeting notes with school leaders
Research project—part one (2015, 2016)	Focus groups and survey to staff from participating schools	-	-
Research project—part two (2018, 2019)	Focus groups and survey to staff from participating schools	-	-

The Sources

Due to the co-constructed method that is a key feature of our narrative, attention is given to the materials created for and generated in leadership development workshops. The pre-prepared workshop material is inseparable from the emergent materials created in prior workshops by schools. This reflects how materiality is seen as a core component of practice [32,33], where a socio-material perspective can illustrate how social interaction and materials can both shape each other. In our case, it reflects our commitment to the co-constructed direction forming of leadership development. In addition, direction is also shaped by the ELN and NLN Advisory Panels. Each panel consists of school leaders from ELN and NLN schools, who provide guidance and feedback during each year. Access to these materials is restricted to the authors, Osprey Consulting, and the schools who belong to the ELN and NLN. The authors can take enquiries regarding further information on request.

During season one, contestable research funding was received via a Faculty of Culture and Society research grant (AX15/10) at Auckland University of Technology. The subsequent research project gained ethics approval from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC), number 15/295 on 25 August 2015 for three years. For part two, ethics approval was extended for an additional year on 22 May 2018 by AUTEC. The overall research question guiding both parts of the project was: what role is played by professional learning in supporting schools to sustain change-focused collaborative inquiry? The research project consisted of two methods, a survey and a focus group, although only a small portion of the results were used to inform our narrative in this article. The survey used in part two was adapted slightly from the original one in part one, so that schools would benefit more from their individual private reports based on data only associated with their staff as part of our ongoing co-constructed process. Each survey consisted of Likert-scale statements and open-ended questions. The 6-point scale (0 = disagree, 5 = agree) had good internal reliability, with a Cronbach Alpha score of 0.886 for the 2015 survey and 0.872 for the 2018 survey. A total of 155 participants from across ten schools completed the survey in 2015 and 250 participants from across eleven schools completed the 2018 survey. Focus groups with senior and middle leaders took place, with three volunteering schools in 2016 and four volunteering schools in 2019. Due to ethics

restrictions, data cannot be shared with any third party, so we are unable to share data sets. However, upon request we can share copies of the survey and focus group questions.

3. Findings: Three Seasons over Ten Years

Leadership development, initially with ELN schools, was carried out in parallel to teacher professional development from 2015 to 2018. The ELN started in 2013 in response to informal conversations with principals whose schools were looking for assistance with introducing "Bring Your Own Devices" (BYOD) programs to support student learning and collaboration between teachers. This was initially offered 11 times a year during afternoon sessions after each school had finished their classes for the day. Teachers and leaders would travel to a neighboring school. In addition, coaching-based conversations were offered to each school leadership team to support their reflection and to consider the next steps to BYOD implementation. Other foci, chosen by each school, have since replaced BYOD.

The large afternoon sessions finished in 2015, and from 2016 to 2018 transitioned to afternoon sessions tailored specifically for senior, middle, and other level leaders who engaged in teacher coaching due to growing requests from member schools to grow their own capacity for teacher-coaches to support other teachers. In addition, at the end of 2014, participating schools requested separate and additional leadership development sessions because principals were looking for professional development particularly focused on the role of the principal, given the demands, expectations, and breadth of their role. The school leaders suggested that a time before school would be most beneficial. The resultant 7:00 am start with breakfast, followed by a one-hour session, has been used ever since for both the ELN and NLN schools. The afternoon sessions finished in 2018 due to the increased voluntary attendance of middle leaders in the leadership breakfast workshops. At the time of writing, the following flow diagram (see Figure 1) illustrates the flows of co-construction that shape leadership development direction forming (WS = workshop). The theory and practices underpinning Figure 1 are discussed in Discussion, Section 4.

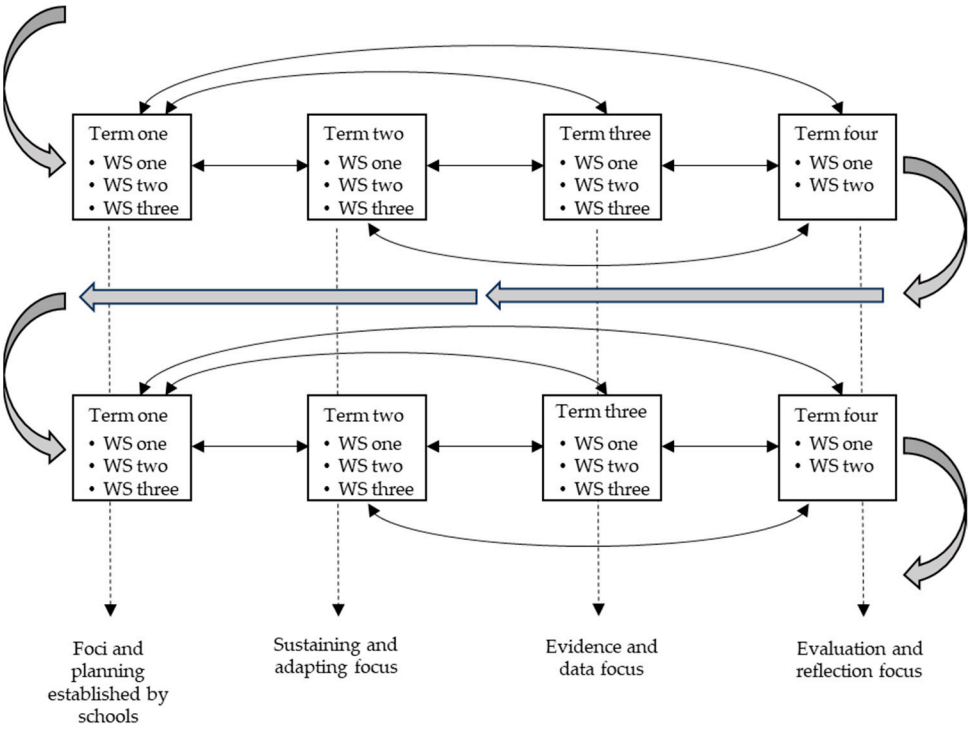

Figure 1. Flows of co-construction for multi-level leadership development.

3.1. Season One: Collaborative Practices and Inquiry

3.1.1. A "Line in the Sand"

During 2015, a major focus on collaboration reflected the emerging national initiative of school-to-school collaboration, Kāhui Ako (for more details, see [34]), and the promotion of teaching as inquiry in the New Zealand Curriculum [35]. Eight afternoon sessions spread throughout the year focused on teachers and their collaborative inquiries into their practice and student learning. In addition to this, eight breakfast sessions were provided for senior leaders with a focus on enhancing the conditions for teacher collaborative inquiry. A commitment was made in the first leadership workshop to not solely rely on research and associated literature that schools were already receiving in line with Ministry of Education (MoE) reforms. When this was declared in the first session, there was a collective sigh of relief from most of the participants. This first "line in the sand" meant we were committed to providing experiences for learning and development that complemented, and at times critiqued, what schools were receiving in line with MoE reforms and MoE-sponsored research. Consequently, and with support from the schools, we had no preset leadership development package to rely on. From this "line in the sand" moment, we realized we had committed ourselves to creating spaces within workshops for co-constructed leadership development, where the direction we were to head would be shaped with workshop participants. This would be not just via workshop feedback, but also and primarily through the materials that participating schools produced in their school-based group. For example, during the leadership breakfast on 27 May 2015, participants identified the practices that were assisting teachers to establish and maintain collaborative teacher inquiries. These were completed in their groups on sticky-notes and attached to a whiteboard. As they were attached, participants collectively grouped the responses where there were connections. Later, these connections were then rewritten in the form illustrated in Figure 2, capturing the sticky-note responses from the practitioners. Here, participants provided the data as well as undertook the synthesis of data clusters that emerged from the workshop activity. When we undertook this activity, we did not know what was going to emerge. This illustrates our letting go of providing content to allow for co-construction.

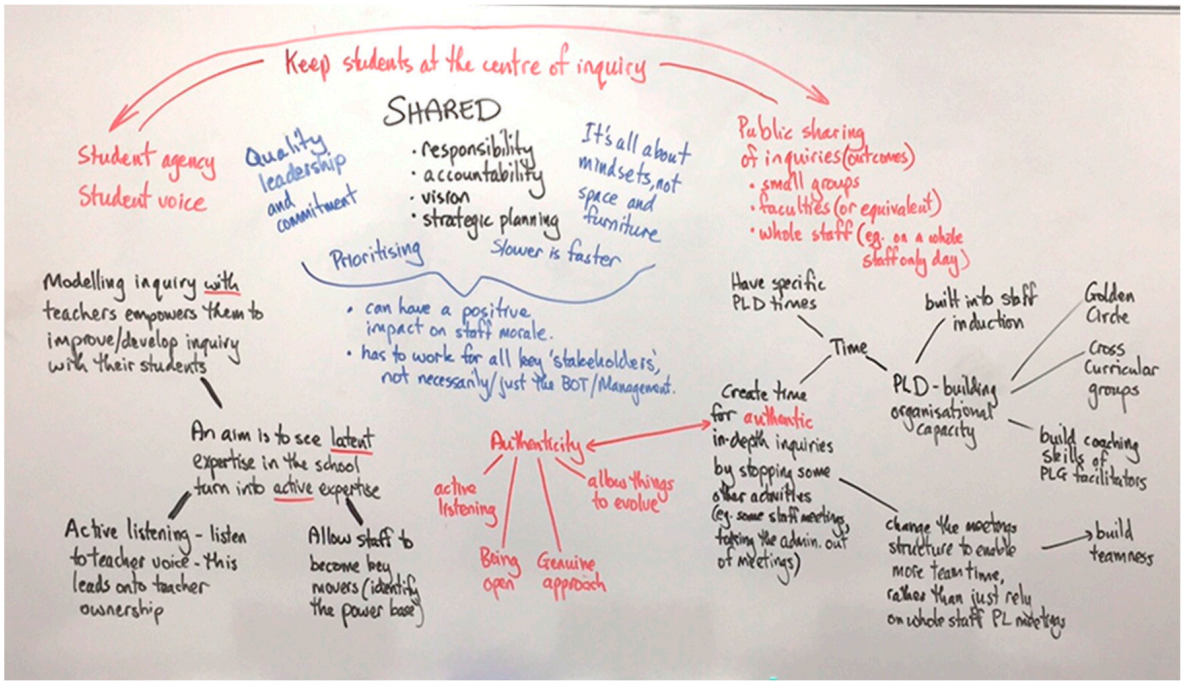

Figure 2. Practices and challenges with supporting collaborative teacher inquiry (photo: H.Y.).

On the left-hand side, the responses tended to emphasize a socio-cultural aspect of practice, whereas the right-hand side emphasized more of the socio-material aspect of practice. Both started to bring into view, for all schools, the leadership practices that may be necessary to develop and sustain conditions for collaborative teacher inquiry. Further evidence and understanding were sought through the survey given to teachers and leaders from the ELN schools. The survey focused on teacher inquiry, and although not the focus of this article, readers can obtain an open-access conference paper that reports and discusses the survey's main findings (see [36]).

During 2015 and 2016, schools were increasingly becoming engaged with the national initiative of school-to-school collaboration, Kāhui Ako. Leadership practices that supported collaboration between schools and between teachers in each school became a prominent focus for development. Principles of a learning organization [37], collaboration and collaborative decision-making [38], and identifying and supporting boundary spanning staff across communities of practice [39] were threaded together around leading change and supporting teachers for the workshops. The ELN Advisory Panel (16 June 2016) reported the leadership breakfast sessions were "energizing" and going "very well", with "input from research". Participants from the research study focus groups reported how, in the leadership workshops, the cross-school group activities helped them understand how "different schools have taken different perspectives of" collaboration (FG, school A, 2016). The line in the sand was deepening with the importance of providing space for each school in a workshop to tailor their own understandings and responses, rather than have facilitators tell them what they should do and know. The journey towards co-construction was being validated, as leaders in one school also reported how "we've tried to use it [the ELN workshops] to allow us leaders to think more carefully about what specific skills we're trying to develop in teachers" (FG, school C, 2016). "Thinking more carefully" was a reminder about how inquiry could be established as a leadership practice to complement the coaching teachers' workshops that started in 2016 and ran in parallel to the leadership workshops up until the end of 2018.

3.1.2. The Emergence of Leadership Inquiry and Workload Challenges

The focus in the New Zealand Curriculum on teaching as inquiry [35] brought further attention to the teacher–student space and the teacher–teacher space. Most schools in the ELN reported using the Spiral of Inquiry model [40,41]. Those in positions associated with senior or middle leadership had their gaze towards these two spaces. There was, however, a gap when we considered schools having a sub-culture of inquiry inclusive of all staff. Without those in leadership roles engaging in their own inquiry related to their own leadership practices, it left open the opportunity for leaders to be possibly and unintentionally positioned as outside school inquiry practices. This is somewhat reflective of leaders being stable entities acting on conditions that may support teachers, which aligns with the entitative view of leadership we discussed earlier. The moment that triggered the emergence of leadership inquiry came during a leadership workshop, where participants were asked if they had a leadership inquiry probing "what is going on for teachers and how do you know?". There was a moment's silence, broken by one participant exclaiming, "why haven't I seen that before? That is so obvious". The realization quickly came across the participants that, with so much focus on teachers carrying out inquiries into supporting students, few appeared to have stopped to consider using a similar process for a leadership team inquiring into how they could support teachers and their learning. Unless there is leadership inquiry into leadership practices that support and/or hinder teacher inquiry and associated student inquiry into their own learning, a school cannot fully claim to be moving towards a culture of inquiry. Leadership practices, too, need to be brought into view and review. The participant's response in the workshop reflects how obvious this should be in a school that promotes learning for all, yet, ironically, all the focus on teacher and student inquiry had perhaps led to an assumption that if leaders talk about teacher

inquiry, that perhaps is sufficient to suggest they too are doing it as well, albeit without inquiring into their leadership practices.

Leadership inquiry has continued to be a core thread in the leadership workshops to this day, even though we never set out to include it from the start, mainly because it is not a component of teacher and student inquiry research. The attention to the leadership–teacher space brought focus to the barriers teachers were experiencing regarding critical reflection and inquiries into their own practices with students and collaborative practices with colleagues. In the second survey, one of the lowest Likert-scale means (0 = disagree, 5 = agree) was "my workload is sustainable", with a mean of 1.89. Ratings tended to be lower if a participant taught most of the week (small effect size = 0.020, $\alpha = 0.05$) and lower if they were a team leader (small effect size = 0.023, $\alpha = 0.05$). This was validated later during the leadership workshop on 29 August 2018, where the following main barriers were identified, with workload, exhaustion, and lack of time being common alongside other psychological barriers. There were 86 responses in total and these are summarized as:

- Lack of time, workload, exhaustion;
- Assumptions, blinkered mindset;
- Fear of failure, fear of being aware, not ready for learning, self-doubt;
- Pride, arrogance, entitlement, stubbornness.

These barriers co-existed with transformation. Participants in the second survey reported transformation in their practice, such as the application of (new) knowledge and insight (58 responses), a change for the good in teacher–student engagement (48), improvement in teacher–teacher collaboration (21), and evidence of improved student achievement data (21). The highest factors in the second survey contributing towards this transformation appeared to be spontaneous conversations with colleagues (mean = 4.09), having an inquiry aligned to their school's goals (4.01), and experiencing their school's culture as one that encourages responsible risk-taking (3.78). Further validation of the well-being issues raised in the August 29 workshop was evident in a low Likert-scale rating for my inquiry process is enhancing my well-being (mean = 2.34) and was lower if the participant was also a team leader (small effect size = 0.023, $\alpha = 0.05$). Two drivers for leadership inquiries emerged during this time, one of addressing factors contributing against teacher well-being while engaged in teacher inquiry, and the other with a particular focus on staff who were in the middle leadership space, usually with some team leadership responsibility. These foci continue to inform current workshops and leadership inquiries, where collaboration and inquiry are a process "for learning to permeate the whole organization" [42] (p. 616).

3.1.3. Supporting the Middle Space and Well-Being

Attention to the middle space across ELN schools was also informed by national research published around the same time [43]. The lead researcher of this national research into teaching practices, school practices, and principal leadership, Cathy Wylie from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER), facilitated one or two ELN leadership workshops a year from 2019 through to 2021. This meant that workshop participants were receiving first-hand the latest national findings pertaining to practices across schools. At the core of this research [43] were the findings that there was a stronger association between principal leadership and school (-wide) practices than between principal leadership and teacher practices. School practices had a stronger association with teacher practices [43]. This brought attention in a timely way to our own situation with the ELN schools in two ways: firstly, our increasing gaze towards practices, and secondly to those contributing to school practices, namely those in the middle leadership space. At the end of 2018, the ELN Advisory Group advocated for increased focus on middle leadership development in the 2019 leadership workshops.

For 2019, the ELN schools developed a leadership inquiry question, related in some way to supporting the middle leadership space in their school. At the end of 2018, we introduced to the workshop participants Coghlan's and Brannick's [44] Spiral of Action Research Cycles model, where each cycle consists of constructing, planning action, taking

action, and evaluating action. The last term of 2018 focused on evaluating and constructing a leadership inquiry question and focus for 2019. The first half of 2019 centered around planning and taking action. We did not know at the time how this action research cycle thinking would come to shape the flows of co-construction that currently shape our workshops across each year and into the next (see Figure 1):

- Term one—foci and planning established;
- Term two—sustaining and adapting;
- Term three—evidence and data;
- Term four—evaluation and reflection.

In relation to the issues of workload impacting well-being, "slower is faster" and "less is more" emerged in the workshops from the participants, and to this day continue to be touchstones throughout the workshops from the schools and the facilitators. The second survey in 2018 and follow-up focus groups in 2019 provided examples of how schools were trying to create intentional space for reflective practice and inquiry. Time for inquiry was structured into a school week, not on top of existing structures but as a replacement for. These included (as reported in the second survey), replacing staff meetings with small professional learning group meeting times, scheduling coaching sessions, providing time for teacher–teacher observation, and staff meeting agendas that attended to a greater focus on inquiry. School D (FG, 2019) reported "a lot more ownership" regarding collaborative inquiry; "I think it's because it's been scheduled in" and this is one way "it's been shown to be valued". Creating time for teachers "to grow their own understanding of the purpose and nature of inquiry" contributed to "deeper ownership" in School E (FG, 2019). In School F (FG, 2019), they reported a shift towards greater collaboration coupled with the intention to bring focus to teacher inquiry and how students learn without mandating a one-size-fits-all approach. The outcome was increased openness in teachers to learn from each other and from students. These positive indicators may have also created another challenge, a desire for "more time to go deeper" (Survey, 2018). The changes occurring across 2018–2019 can in part be attributed to shifts in leadership practices and may, in some cases, be associated with leadership inquiry, where a number of schools focused on clarifying middle leadership role and expectations, as well as providing intentional space where senior and middle leaders could "get on the same page" (Workshop, 26 June 2019). Links were made by focus group schools back to the leadership workshops, such as:

- "ELN has helped us with the idea that we could have our own model of inquiry" (School E, FG, 2019);
- "when you first started going to the ELN and having PD, it was originally first just sort of leadership team [sic], but then we brought in our middle leaders too and because they're in the classroom and they can see the practice, then they will spread that to their teachers too" (School F, FG, 2019);
- "I think that the breakfast ELN meetings have provided us with time and discussion stimulus to have different kind of conversations than we would have in our normal meetings" (School F, FG, 2019);
- "And then ELN, it's been really good for us to come back and discuss aspects from it that have made us think differently about what our teachers bring to our school and what they bring to groups" (School G, FG, 2019).

At the end of 2019, through the workshops, schools continued to identify the interface of middle-senior leadership spaces, as well as middle-teacher spaces for priority areas of developing practices in 2020. Practices were associated by the schools with collaboration, connectiveness, sharing and shared understanding, transparency of practice, and consistency in language. One school's inquiry question for 2020 captured the tenor of the ELN at the time, "how can we [at the senior-middle leadership interface] support each other to be more effective leaders?". During this 2018–2019 period, we kept hearing how schools valued workshop time being made for them to work and dialogue, usually in their school-based groups, consisting of senior and middle leaders. This has shaped how we

currently structure the one-hour workshops, where up to 40 to 45 min are dedicated to schools working in their groups. 2019 was also the first year we shifted to three workshops for each of the first three school terms, followed by two in the end-of-year term. This structure, too, has remained in place because there have been no requests from schools to change. However, little did we know at the time, planning for 2020 was soon to be "turned on its head" and well-being would become an even greater focus.

3.2. Season Two: Adaptation and Wayfinding

3.2.1. Adapting in Disruption

After completing the first two of three term one workshops in 2020, New Zealand went into lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. By the end of 2021, all New Zealand schools had been closed for a total of three months and those in Auckland for an additional 16 weeks [45]. Student attendance at school sites continued to be an issue well into 2022, with schools reporting 60% attendance in term two of 2021 and a drop to 40% in term two of 2022 [45]. Just over six months later, in January 2023, two extreme weather events impacted parts of New Zealand, and Auckland schools had to postpone the start of their school year by a week for the first event, and during the second event (Cyclone Gabriel), Aucklanders were told to work from home. This meant that schools in Auckland had four years in a row of disruptions, especially at the start of their school year. Unplanned disruption became the norm, and in 2020 ELN workshops for a while switched to online mode. Three key factors contributed to their continuation: the schools' commitment to ongoing leadership development, the smooth transition to online delivery, and changing the focus so it matched the current environment. All three continue to be principles that inform the co-construction of current workshops.

Since its inception, ELN schools, and then from 2021, NLN schools, have access to their own network website that is not publicly available. Each workshop is videoed, edited, and stored on this website. Switching to online mode was not a significant transition for the facilitators to make, with use made of pre- and post-workshop videos and slides for asynchronous engagement, and online meetings and breakout rooms for synchronous engagement. Later in 2020, the ELN Advisory Panel (22 September) expressed how the synchronous online sessions "kept momentum" and it was "helpful to have workshop videos and slides provided on the website to work in teams at schools" in their own time. This is a practice continued today, even though all workshops are face-to-face. The panel also welcomed how responsive the facilitators were "to need [and] enabled a leadership team to go through crisis leadership". From our facilitator's perspective, we knew we too had to respond to the emerging crisis, and so adjusted the content accordingly, drawing on crisis management research [46–48] and pandemic-informed articles related to educational leadership [49–51]. In a similar way, we also realized a way of understanding leadership that emphasized community, fluidity, and adjusting to conditions daily was needed to inform schools' journeys through disruption. This came in the form of wayfinding leadership [30].

3.2.2. The Emergence of Wayfinding Leadership and Capacity Decrease

Wayfinding leadership is based in indigenous Māori and Pacific knowledges of wayfinding across the Pacific Ocean in waka (sea-going craft). These knowledges based on traditional navigation skills are centuries old and can provide valuable lessons for leadership practice in complex times [30]. It is a privilege to draw on such indigenous knowledge for the greater good of others in challenging times. Wayfinding leadership has connections "with fluidity, emergence, adaptive leadership, adaptive expertise, relational connectedness, and a process ontology of leadership" [52] (p. 529). Even though the destination in wayfinding is important, emphasis is placed on sailing to the conditions, rather than following a fixed path or plan. No single person can see, understand, and then steer an organization through times where conditions change daily, as during the pandemic. A collective approach is required, one that is established on mana–mana (mutual respect)

and collective will, two of a number of practices evident in wayfinding [30]. At the end of 2020, 2021, and 2022, participating schools were asked whether we should continue with wayfinding leadership informing the workshops. Affirmation was provided each time because participants valued a process and relational understanding of leadership that could be applied across all levels of leadership in a school and between schools. The emphasis on collectiveness in wayfinding also reflected schools' reviews of their practices during the end-of-year workshops in 2020 with intentions to develop further collaboration with other schools across their own Kāhui Ako cluster of schools (distinct from the ELN and NLN). Subsequently, Across School Leaders and Within School Leaders whose roles are part of the MoE Kāhui Ako initiative, and in addition to existing senior and middle leader school roles, joined their colleagues in ELN and NLN workshops from 2021. This reflected our non-boundary approach to leadership, where schools dictate who comes to the workshops to best fit their leadership development needs. It means some schools may have two or three staff in a workshop, whereas another may have ten or sometimes more. Another dimension of multi-level leadership development was now in play, although the impact of multiple unplanned disruptions on schools was impacting their capacity to engage with any new initiatives and in-reserve capacity for unknown major events.

During the end of 2021 and the start of 2022, the facilitators noticed an increased emphasis on staff capacity issues evident in the materials schools created and conversations during workshops. In response to this, workshops reflected an increased emphasis on what to do less of, with links to adaptive challenges [53], creating and sustaining coherence [54], reflective practice [55], growing resilience [48], and addressing potential broadening equity gaps because of the pandemic [56]. These were against the backdrop of wayfinding leadership throughout the workshops of 2022 and into 2023.

3.3. Season Three: Shifting Patterns of Practice

3.3.1. Refining the Focus: A Shift for the Facilitators

During 2021 and 2022, a core group of four facilitators emerged: the two authors (who have been conjointly involved since the start of the leadership workshops), another from the University of Auckland, and another from NZCER. One or two of the facilitators supported the main facilitator of a workshop. Having two or three of us attend reflected the need to sit with school groups while they worked together during a workshop. Up to the end of 2022, even though there was flow from one workshop to the next, the main facilitator was usually facilitating across two or more school terms, so each subsequent workshop usually had a different main facilitator. At the end of 2022, both the ELN and NLN Advisory Panels requested a shift from a different focus in each workshop to a single focus for each term, so back-to-back workshops with the same focus could go deeper and provide greater continuity for schools. This led to the final shift to what is displayed in Figure 1, where a lead facilitator now oversees the development of a single focus across the three workshops in the first three school terms and the final two workshops of term four. The same lead facilitator oversees the term one and four workshops so that there is flow from one year to the next. These two terms reflect the evaluation and planning aspects of an action research cycle we discuss later. The material produced by school groups in the term four workshop is informed by the material and foci of the previous workshops that year. The change in facilitator during terms two and three is not an issue due to their focus being informed by the materials developed by schools in term one. An example of how this occurred in the transition from 2023 to 2024 follows in the next section.

3.3.2. Going Deeper: A Shift for the Schools

The start of 2024 was the first year for four years where schools encountered no external sources of major disruption. It meant schools had an opportunity to shift from the usual reactionary start of the year to a more reflective one. Leading into this were the foci from the previous year. The first term of 2023 focused on shifting between the "dance floor" and the "balcony" [53,57], with the latter emphasizing repositioning oneself from

the minutiae of day-to-day practice to an organizational perspective, akin to stepping out of one's silo, where multiple levels of leadership merge. The second term focused on being agentic and how that could be developed individually and collectively. As school groups shifted to a "balcony" view, then agency to act across multiple levels of leadership becomes important. Agency to act, however, requires a response to why schools are doing what they do and what they plan to do. Therefore, the term three workshops focused on making the most from sources of student-related data, teacher-related data, and parent-related data, where data are seen as a potential trigger to change practitioner assumptions and practices [58]. Data can be numerical or qualitative, with the latter valuing feedback and other forms of verbal or written communication. By the end of term three, schools across the ELN and NLN were able to identify areas for improvement based on multiple sources of evidence, while also testing their assumptions of what they thought needed improving. Threaded through the year were leadership inquiries distinct to each school.

The reflective start to the 2024 workshops was intentionally established from the foci of the last two workshops of 2023. Schools were encouraged to review change initiatives from the last three to four years and identify possible implementation gaps and repeated barriers to implementation. A common message from schools is that there are too many change initiatives (often externally driven), so they do not evaluate whether the last initiative resulted in the intended change. This focus on evaluating not just one initiative, but several, reflects the last stage of an action research cycle that informs the next cycle, which would start during term one in the following year. The focus on repeating patterns associated with barriers to implementation meant that school groups saw beyond the details of one change initiative and started to identify patterns associated with the following:

- Trying to maintain too many change initiatives;
- Siloes;
- Problem framing;
- Hesitation related to engaging in challenging to have conversations;
- Staff capacity for engagement;
- Staff well-being;
- Relying on untested assumptions;
- Insufficient data and/or analysis such as student voice and student achievement data.

At the end of the 2023 NLN workshop, principals requested more time discussing these patterns in 2024, particularly in relation to the complexities of challenging conversations. This was also corroborated by leaders in the ELN.

The shift in external conditions away from crises created an opportunity for schools and ourselves to probe what contributes to patterns of practice that hinder implementation. In other words, we, together with the schools, were going to a deeper level where untested assumptions and unspeakable concerns may exist in a latent form. We also recognized another shift, that is, the number of staff attending from multiple levels of leadership increased for some schools. The school groups identified uninterrupted time for them to work in their groups as a major factor of transformation. One principal shared how during the week of the workshop they stopped having their weekly leadership team meeting because they were achieving so much in the workshops. A principal whose staff had been coming for a number of years mentioned how the early morning timing meant they could fully focus on the deeper and more reflective aspects of planning, review, and practice, before they filled their days responding to the needs around them. The schools have prioritized the 40–45-min school group time in the early morning workshops as a key space for deeper reflective discussion and planning. It is as though this space is now integrated into their regular practice, even for schools who have recently joined the ELN or NLN. The leadership development workshops are no longer an add-on to their day. It is as if co-constructed leadership spaces have moved beyond a professional development event to a space they voluntarily choose to own and use for the betterment of their staff and students.

4. Discussion: Our Learnings over Ten Years

Our learnings over the last ten years are rooted in emergent practices rather than a prescriptive syllabus for multi-level leadership development. The main points we are arguing for in this article are the importance of prioritizing the "co-" with workshop foci direction over a year and intentionally allowing the content developed in school groups to co-construct future workshops across a term. There are several areas, looking back, we now see we have revisited several times over the last ten years, albeit in different contexts and times with slightly different school groups. These are connecting in situ workshop practices with school on-site practices; associating leadership with role and people, as well as associating leadership with ongoing direction forming; and underpinning leadership inquiries with principles of action research and organizational learning so knowledge is co-constructed from year-to-year (see Figure 3).

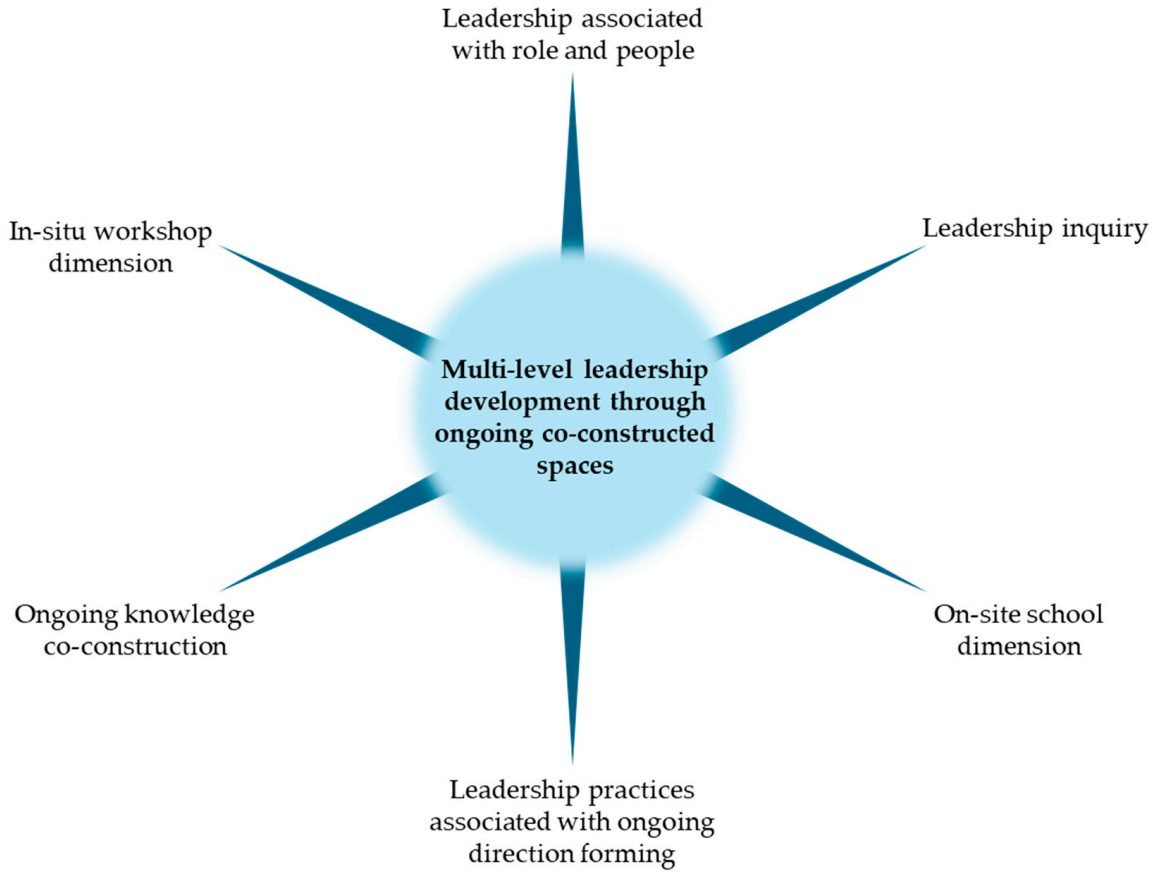

Figure 3. Components of ongoing multi-level leadership development.

4.1. Connecting Workshop Practices with School-Site Practices

The flows of co-construction between workshops and from year-to-year, as illustrated with the multi-directional arrows in Figure 1, are dependent on connections between the practices of participants in the workshops and the practices evident in their school. Two factors emerged over the last ten years that contribute to this. The first is the numerical growth and increased diversity of leadership roles in the group that represents each school. In 2014, the first workshops were a response to principals requesting leadership development and networking for themselves. This soon spread to include assistant and deputy principals, who were then joined by an increasing number of middle leaders who mainly had coaching roles with teachers as well as team leadership roles. The onset of school-to-school collaboration resulted in additional across-school leaders and within-school middle leaders joining. Since the end of the pandemic, teachers who are contributing to leading the implementation of new initiatives have also joined. Participant groups are now a reflection

of multi-level leadership, including those De Nobile [12] identifies as first-level leaders, those who are in neither senior or middle leadership roles. The key is not limiting leadership development to a predefined group of those in formal leadership roles. Rather, the agency of who attends is totally with each school. Secondly, this in turn creates conditions more conducive to connecting school participant group practices in a workshop to those the participants experience in their schools. In our case, we hear school leaders reporting the time on activities in a workshop is akin to doing the same work in their schools, but within an environment where day-to-day events do not disrupt their time together. Given that, in general, appropriate middle "leadership development opportunities are limited" [11] (p. 280) and that policy "translation time is an issue in schools as translators are often overloaded" [59] (p. 14), it is crucial the collective on-site dimension of schools shapes and reshapes direction and focus of the workshops (as illustrated in Figure 2). We have learnt that this can only be achieved if most of the time in a workshop is kept for school-based dialogue so direction forming at a school level can be co-constructed. This places the on-site dimension at the center of the workshop dimension, so the workshop is experienced as in situ activity by the participants.

4.2. Embracing Leadership from Multiple Positions

Most expressions of collective leadership, as an alternative to leader-centric models that individuate a leader and classify others as followers, focus on the collection of roles and people. Leadership-as-role highlights the formal side of organizational leadership, such as senior leaders and middle leaders, whereas leadership-as-people adds others who may lead from time-to-time. Multi-level leadership can be construed this way, locating sources of leadership through multiple roles and people across the hierarchical levels of an organization. This generally positions leadership within an entitative ontology where leadership can be reduced to a collection of individuals, conveniently classified across levels of an organization. We say conveniently, because this potentially takes focus away from also understanding practices, labeled as leadership, that occur between people and how direction forms and is reformed. As the workshops morphed into providing prolonged spaces for school groups to work together, we became aware of two dynamics in the school groups. Often it is challenging to identify who is the principal in the group, let alone who is leading the group process. This is in part due to the establishment and prioritization of collaboration and dialogue as norms of practice in the workshop. We pick up on this further in Section 4.3. The second dynamic is the emergence of materials produced by each group in a workshop. Materials such as identifying and recording on a table or mind-map, ongoing barriers to initiative implementation, are direction formations that emerge in the aggregation of dialogical and reflective moments in the group. The coming together of dialogue and materials are integral to the co-constructed spaces that to us seem to emerge between the participants who make up each school group. This reflects Crevani's [21] association of leadership with the ongoing producing of direction aligned to the practice of organizing. Earlier we discussed how we applied principles of wayfinding leadership [30] and how it resonated with what schools were needing, especially in a time on unknowingness and fluidity. We attribute this resonance to our commitment to creating the conditions for socio-material spaces within each workshop, which in turn was confirmed through the Advisory Panels each year. Consequently, the emergence and, at times, confirmation of direction with emphasis on co-construction of direction, positions leadership with practices and a process ontology of leadership. We argue that process ontology coupled with the acknowledgement of leadership understood as a role and a collective of people is required for multi-level leadership development, so individuals, a group, and the spaces in between inform the ongoing co-construction of workshop foci and organization of workshop time so group activity is prioritized.

4.3. Leadership Inquiry and Ongoing Knowledge Co-Construction

In addition to the emphasis on emergence of direction in Section 4.2, there also needs to be intentionality, especially with collaborative practices [60]. Intentionality through ongoing co-construction and leadership inquiry are connected through the knowledge area of organizational learning and principles associated with the methodology of participative action research. Figure 1 illustrates the methodological framework we have come to now use for ongoing multi-level leadership development after ten years of adapting and tailoring to what schools say works well for them. The four school term strands repeated each year reflect Coghlan's and Brannick's [44] model of organizational action research (see Table 2).

Table 2. The strands of each term and principles of action research.

School Term	Term Strand (See Figure 1)	Action Research Component [44]
One	Foci and planning established by schools	Constructing and planning action
Two	Sustaining and adapting	Taking action
Three	Evidence and data	Taking action
Four	Evaluation and reflection	Evaluating action and constructing

The term strands require an intentional focus or foci that is threaded through the school year. Our learning, confirmed through the Advisory Panels, recognizes the importance of each school having a leadership inquiry. There is no requirement for a school to have a leadership inquiry that is the same as other schools. This is in part due to our leadership development programs not being tied to any single focus of education reform. Schools are free to determine their own inquiry foci. Sims and Fletcher-Wood [61], in their review of effective teacher professional development (PD), identify "that it may be repeated practice that matters, rather than PD being sustained" (p. 57). The implication here is that development foci need to be revisited if practice is going to change. Having a leadership inquiry enables schools to revisit the area of improvement they have chosen. The key is ensuring there is an intentional transition from the evaluation focus of term four to the constructing and planning action focus of term one the following year. The leadership development methodology then reflects the ongoing of action research cycles from year-to-year, with a leadership inquiry question or questions shaping each school's foci during the year.

Organizational learning is one knowledge area that has informed the content and how we have shaped questions for school group activities, over the last ten years. This broadly incorporates learning at an individual, group, and organizational level [62], as well as the spaces in between. Due to our view of leadership not being bound to an entitative ontology, it means the spaces in between are where the forming of direction occurs. Consequently, the aspects of organizational learning we focus on are in the dialogical space between two or more people. Here, we emphasize the surfacing and testing of assumptions through dialogue informed by evidence, as reflected in principles that inform Argyris' and Schön's [63] Model II theory-in-use, and can be applied as learning-oriented reasoning in leadership practices [38]. Complementing this is the space in which teams and groups learn. We view team learning as a process "illustrative of the internal processes teams engage in that build shared meaning from existing information, identify and fill in gaps in the team's collective knowledge, as well as challenge, test, and explore assumptions" [64] (p. 4 of 14). In addition, we recognize that triggers and enablers of the dialogical and team-learning spaces may be common across a school, which is akin to asking how a school learns to embed and sustain practices that contribute to changes in student learning and staff–staff collaboration. As facilitators we have to do the same, asking how our practices may or may not contribute to multi-level leadership development and, most importantly, how do we know?

5. Conclusions

We have been motivated to share the narrative of this ten-year journey because schools tend to choose to voluntarily come back for another year of leadership development, albeit when fiscal restraints tighten and there is an increase in the number of externally driven initiatives, with their attendant professional development. The feedback over the years, as well as the two-phase research project, have co-constructed this multi-level leadership development program over time. We present this as a complementary and perhaps, in some cases, an alternative, to packaged, short-term, and standardized leadership development programs. Robinson [65] argues for a shift in focus from change to improvement, as change may not lead to improvement. Improvement in student learning and staff practices may shift over years, not months, as long as a school is not inundated with change initiatives. Therefore, any form of leadership development associated with improvement requires a long-term approach through a developmental methodology of evaluation, implementation, and evidence that is repeated each year. The foci that each school brings may change over time, but this is the secondary focus, not the primary one. Our approach to multi-level leadership development focuses on what practices and assumptions need to shift, irrespective of any change initiative or school-chosen foci. It is here where we have seen and heard stories of deep transformation because of our commitment to how co-constructed spaces contribute to multi-level leadership development.

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