

**Investigating culturally responsive practices:  
Perceptions and experiences of  
secondary school middle leaders**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this research was to critically examine the perceptions and understandings of culturally responsive practices carried out by secondary school middle leaders in low decile, multi-ethnic school settings in New Zealand. A personal moral obligation to be a culturally responsive leader, as well as the professional requirements identified in government and educational publications influenced the rationale for this investigation. Furthermore, although there is adequate research on culturally responsive leadership for principals, there is a dearth of literature on culturally responsive middle leadership. A qualitative methodology was utilised for this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven middle leader's from six different secondary schools in the Auckland region, who work in a school context similar to my own. Findings were analysed using inductive analysis through manual open coding, and are presented by theme in relation to research questions.

Middle leaders' understandings, experiences and challenges that they encountered in their schools were diverse and multi-faceted. The data revealed that culturally responsive leadership is influenced by personal, interpersonal and school factors. Possessing personal traits that allowed middle leaders to be innately culturally responsive, and which allowed them to effectively communicate and form learning and working relationships, were considered to be the most influential factors in effective culturally responsive middle leadership. The redesigned socio-ecological model presented in this thesis acknowledges the importance of both culturally responsive practices and culturally responsive leadership by middle leaders.

A number of recommendations arose from this research. Culturally responsive leadership and practices involve a committed approach from principals, senior management, middle leaders and teachers to engage students and families in the community. Individual teachers need to critically reflect on their personal values and beliefs and how these might influence their teaching practices. The research also highlighted the importance of emphasising both bi-culturalism and multi-culturalism if schools are to meet their obligations to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

## **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 or a university or other institution of higher learning.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This thesis reports on research that focussed on a critical examination of the perceptions and understandings of culturally responsive practices carried out by a sample of secondary school middle leaders in low decile, multi-ethnic settings in New Zealand. Chapter One establishes the research area by defining the problem of growing educational disparities and reviewing the context of culturally responsive practices. Personal and professional perspectives, including evidence from Government and educational publications, are provided to indicate the reasons that culturally responsive practices are important. After identifying a gap in the literature and establishing a niche, the aim of the research is outlined and research questions are presented. A brief description of the paradigm framework, methodology and data collection techniques are also discussed. To conclude, the chapter organisation for this thesis is outlined.

### **The research context**

In the context of New Zealand schools one of the more important challenges facing teachers is the ability to concurrently manage the complex learning needs of diverse learners, where diversity is typified by differences in gender, disability, socio-economic background, special needs, ethnicity and home language (Alton-Lee, 2003). New Zealand student outcomes in international assessments indicate relatively high disparities in achievement by comparison with most countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Ferguson, Gorinski, Samu & Mara, 2008). According to Alton-Lee (2003), Māori and Pasifika students featured prominently amongst the students that performed poorly on these assessments. Therefore, Samu (2006) proposes that our education system serves *many* students well; however, it does not serve *all* students well, particularly those of specific cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Similarly, Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh and Teddy (2009) believe the major challenge in New Zealand education is the continuing social, political and economic disparities between European and the Indigenous Māori people. More recently, New Zealand statistics highlight unsatisfactory educational outcomes still exist between Māori and New Zealand European secondary students because Māori students continue to leave school with fewer qualifications (Ministry of Education, 2013b).

Additionally, lifting Pasifika educational achievement is a priority and is crucial for the future of New Zealand's productivity and economy (Ministry of Education, 2009). However, the goal of raising educational achievement for Pasifika students in secondary school continues to be problematic for the New Zealand education system (Ministry of Education, 2015; Spiller, 2012). New Zealand research by Knight de-Blois and Poskitt (2016) suggested a significant gap remains between the performance of Pasifika students and their New Zealand European peers. The increasing diversity in our communities, growing educational disparities and the challenges and demands placed on teachers to improve student achievement, have all contributed to the current importance placed on culturally responsive practices for educators and the education system.

### **The research rationale**

The rationale for my research has stemmed from two factors. As a middle leader in my multi-ethnic school, I aspire to be culturally responsive, and my personal values have helped determine the importance of culturally responsive practices. Secondly, recent priorities and expectations, from the Ministry of Education in particular, have highlighted the importance of improving under-achievement and outcomes for both Māori and Pasifika students through culturally responsive practices (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2012b, 2012c, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). Further explanation about both the personal and professional influences on my research are outlined below.

### **A personal perspective**

Being a New Zealand European working in a predominantly Pasifika context, I realise there are different challenges for myself, as well as for the students, when working with people from cultures other than my own. My personal rationale is the driving force behind conducting my research because I believe it is an honour to be teaching at my multi-ethnic school but, more than that, I feel it is my moral obligation to ensure I am doing everything I can to help the students in front of me succeed. The tendency to place the blame for underachievement with students and their communities overlooks the role of schools as institutions, and principals and teacher as leaders, in processes that lead to poor student performance (Blair, 2002). The statement by Blair (2002) resonates with me because as a middle leader and a teacher in my school, it is my responsibility as well as that of the whole school community to ensure we are committed to meeting the

needs of our students and their families. Table 1.1 exhibits the multi-ethnic nature of my school (Education Review Office, 2016). This has influenced the nature and purpose of my study. Additionally, I wanted the secondary school middle leaders whom I interviewed to work in a similar social and cultural context. Table 1.1 also displays the ethnic compositions of the multi-ethnic schools the seven middle leaders work in who participated in this research school (Education Review Office, 2016). The table shows the diverse ethnic compositions of my participants' secondary schools.

*Table 1.1* Ethnic composition of researcher's school compared with participants' schools

<b>Ethnic composition (%)</b>	<b>School of researcher</b>	<b>School A</b>	<b>School B</b>	<b>School C</b>	<b>School D</b>	<b>School E</b>	<b>School F</b>
Māori	11-15	6-10	16-20	16-20	16-20	16-20	6-10
Samoaan	31-35	51-55	36-40	26-30	26-30	26-30	66-70
Tongan	26-30	21-25	21-25	31-35	11-15	6-10	16-20
Cook Island Māori	6-10		11-15	11-15	1-5	1-5	1-5
Niuean	1-5		1-5	1-5	1-5	1-5	
Fijian	1-5			1-5	6-10	6-10	
Tokelauan	1-5			1-5			
Cook Island		1-5					
Other Pacific		1-5			6-10	1-5	
Indian	6-10	1-5			6-10	6-10	
Asian		6-10				1-5	
South East Asian				1-5	1-5		
Middle Eastern					6-10		
African					1-5		
European	1-5				1-5	11-15	
Other	1-5	1-5	1-5	1-5	1-5	6-10	6-10

### **A professional perspective**

Although my personal rationale is the most influential factor for undertaking the research, it is important to acknowledge other influencing factors that support the topic choice. There is sufficient evidence in New Zealand government and other educational publications to validate how cultural responsiveness can be used to address the current achievement disparities in New Zealand secondary schools. There are also clear

expectations for leaders and teachers to respond to the challenge of raising achievement of Māori and Pasifika students in particular.

For example, Criteria Nine in the current *Practising Teaching Criteria* (Education Council New Zealand, 2015) relates to a teacher's professional knowledge in relation to their ability to effectively respond to the diverse language and cultural experiences of individuals and groups of ākonga. A key indicator for this criteria is demonstrating knowledge of social and cultural influences of working effectively in bi-cultural and multi-cultural contexts in Aotearoa (Education Council New Zealand, 2015). Furthermore, Priority One in the *Statement of Intent* (Ministry of Education, 2012b) is focused on improving educational outcomes for Māori and Pasifika learners. One way the Ministry of Education proposes to do this is through supporting improvement in teaching practice by strengthening teacher training to ensure it is producing culturally intelligent teachers. Although it does not specify what culturally intelligent teachers are, the publication indicates the need for high quality and flexible teachers who can work effectively, not only with Māori and Pasifika learners, but special education learners and those from low socio-economic backgrounds (Ministry of Education, 2012b).

The New Zealand Government has also partnered with Auckland University to create *The Starpath Project* (University of Auckland, 2016), targeted at improving educational outcomes for students who are currently not meeting the criteria required to progress into degree-level study and, as a result, are under-represented in tertiary education. In particular, the project has worked in partnership with a selection of secondary schools in Auckland and Northland to identify and address the barriers that prevent participation and success in degree-level education especially for Māori, Pacific, and other students from low socio-economic communities. *The Starpath Project* (University of Auckland, 2016) also aims to increase achievement at National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) levels 1-3 and University Entrance (UE) attainment for Māori and Pacific students, and for other students from low socio-economic communities (University of Auckland, 2016).

The importance of achievement is also emphasised in the *Pasifika Education Plan* (Ministry of Education, 2013a), as there are clear targets in regards to increasing literacy and numeracy expectations, reducing Pasifika 'suspensions' from school and increasing

numbers of school leavers who have gained UE. The Ministry of Education intends to action this goal by strengthening accountability processes such as including targets for Pasifika learners in school charters, and the Education Review Office (ERO) reviewing schools' performance on programmes targeting Pasifika learners (Ministry of Education, 2013a). Government priorities for raising Māori student achievement are also reflected in *Ka Hikitia* (Ministry of Education, 2013b). This Māori Education Strategy suggests critical factors must exist for Māori students to excel and reach their full potential: quality provision, leadership and teaching and learning, supported by effective governance. The document maintains that quality teaching is the most important influence that schools exert on student achievement (Ministry of Education, 2013b).

Further examples in educational research that acknowledge the link between school leadership and student achievement exist. For example, school leadership is a fundamental component to any improvement of education, second only to teaching (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). Research by Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2004) suggests that there is a relationship between leadership and student achievement, and as leadership improves, so does student achievement. Additionally, pedagogically focused leadership has a substantial impact on student outcomes. The more leaders focus their influence, learning and relationships with teachers on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009).

In the first instance, these examples help justify the important expectations and roles that leaders and teachers have in improving student achievement. Secondly, they acknowledge the wider social and political importance of being culturally responsive in an educational context, and indicate that schools have a responsibility in reducing educational disparities. Considering the aforementioned publications has raised three salient ideas. Firstly, although there are numerous national guiding documents and resources provided by the Ministry of Education, they are often very broad and do not always offer advice on how relevant strategies can be implemented in the classroom. For example, the *Pacific Education Plan 2013-2017* (Ministry of Education, 2013a) highlights goals and strategies for stakeholders, but gives very little guidance for teachers at the classroom level (Knight de-Blois & Poskitt, 2016). Secondly, even though both the personal and professional rationales acknowledge the significance of being

culturally responsive, the difference is that the Government documents imply we should be, or that we have to be, culturally responsive if we want to be registered teachers. Conversely, a culturally responsive leader is something I am striving to be. Moreover, it should be a moral imperative for all teachers, leaders and schools. Thirdly is the issue of homogeneity which will be discussed further in Chapter Two. However, it is important to acknowledge individual ethnic groups, rather than standardising students with terms such as Pasifika and MELAA (Middle Eastern, Latin American, African). For example Table 1.1 recognises Samoan, Tongan, Cook Island Māori, Niuean, Fijian, Tokelauan and Cook Island ethnicities of students, rather than labelling them Pasifika. These ideas have helped formulate the research aim and questions, alongside the obligations of being a middle leader.

Because they are in positions of responsibility, one significant role of middle leaders is to influence others. Furthermore, most middle leaders also have teaching responsibilities within their organisation. There are clear priorities and expectations that substantiate the importance of cultural responsiveness for middle leaders and teachers in New Zealand government publications. However, there is limited research and literature that focuses on culturally responsive middle leadership. Therefore, this study set out to investigate culturally responsive middle leadership practices in multi-ethnic secondary schools in New Zealand.

## **Research aim and questions**

Consideration of the research context, along with the personal and professional perspectives informed the development of the research aim and questions for the investigation. The aim of this study was:

- To critically examine the perceptions and understandings of culturally responsive practices carried out by secondary school middle leaders in low decile, multi-ethnic settings in New Zealand. I will achieve this by engaging in discussions through the use of semi-structured interviews with secondary school middle leaders around their understandings and experiences of culturally responsive practices.

My principal research question was:

- “What are the perceptions and understandings of ‘culturally responsive’ practices carried out by secondary school middle leaders in low decile, multi-ethnic settings in New Zealand?”

The subsidiary research questions were:

1. What are secondary school middle leaders’ understandings and experiences of the practices of ‘culturally responsive practice’?
2. What are secondary school middle leaders’ perceptions of the challenges encountered in regards to ‘culturally responsive’ practice in their school?

The research was positioned within an interpretative paradigm and employed a qualitative approach to address the two research questions. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with seven middle leaders from six different multi-ethnic secondary schools in Auckland. To ensure the research contexts were similar to my own, only middle leaders that worked at schools of Deciles 1, 2 and 3 were invited to participate in the study. A decile is a measure of the socio-economic position of a school’s student community relative to other schools throughout the country. For example, decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities. Deciles are used to target funding for state and state-integrated schools to help them overcome any barriers to learning that students from lower socio-economic communities might face. The lower the school’s decile, the more funding it receives (Ministry of Education, 2016a). A limitation of the investigation is that it is only a small-scale qualitative study. Nevertheless, the findings could be transferable to the practices and contexts of the readers of my research.

This thesis is set out in six chapters that document each step of the investigation. A brief outline of each chapter that follows this introductory one, is provided below.

## Chapter Two

The literature review chapter presents a critical evaluation of both New Zealand and International literature concerned with educational leadership and middle leadership. Culturally responsive practice and culturally responsive leadership are also examined along with their challenges for implementation.

### Chapter Three

Chapter Three provides an overview of the methodological approach that I selected as best suited to my research questions. Additionally, it justifies and critiques the positioning of my research within an interpretive paradigm, and the use of a qualitative research design. Data collection, data analysis techniques, validity and reliability factors are also explained. The chapter concludes with an examination of ethical and cultural considerations.

### Chapter Four

This section introduces the common themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews which are presented in table format. Commentary and participant quotes are used as evidence to support the findings.

### Chapter Five

Chapter Five critically analyses and interprets the significant findings centred around the three emergent themes, and links these findings to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

### Chapter Six

To conclude, chapter Six summarises the overall findings of the investigation and reviews the strengths and limitations of the study. Suggestions on how the findings can be applied to practice are provided, and recommendations for further research regarding culturally responsive leadership carried out by secondary school middle leaders in low decile, multi-ethnic schools is examined.



## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

The purpose of the literature review chapter is to present a critical evaluation of the available research literature. This is presented under the following four themes relevant to the aim of the investigation: (1) educational leadership; (2) middle leadership; (3) culturally responsive practice and challenges for implementation; and (4) culturally responsive leadership and challenges for implementation. Each theme is defined, examined and the implications established. To conclude, the connections between the four key themes are discussed with respect to the formation of the final research questions.

### **Educational leadership**

This section reviews the literature that I have read in relation to the purpose and focus of educational leaders, the skills and knowledge they require and the link to middle leadership. I have positioned research about educational leadership at the outset of the literature review to provide a broad overview of the wider context within which my topic of culturally responsive practice is situated. Educational leadership is a broad term used to describe the field of study concerned with leaders in educational institutions and is a concept associated with both leadership and management (Cardno, 2012). After a comprehensive examination of the literature, Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom and Anderson (2010) proposed that leadership is about direction and influence, and it involves leaders and followers (Bush, 2011; Yukl, 2010). Dimmock and Walker (2005) propose that effective school leadership is seen in terms of school improvement. Educational leaders need to influence the quality of learning and teaching in ways that positively affect the educational achievement of students (Cardno, 2012) and promote quality learning for all children (Starratt, 2003). Clearly, the core work of educational leaders is to facilitate school development and influence quality teaching that focuses on improving learning and achievement for all students.

Educational leadership research by Waters et al. (2004) suggests that there is a relationship between leadership and student achievement and, as leadership improves, so does student achievement. Although this is an important finding, it is equally significant to note that just as leaders can have a positive impact on achievement, they also can have a marginal or, worse, negative impact on achievement (Waters, Marzano,

& McNulty, 2003). However, Cardno (2012) notes that in previous research, the link between leadership and learning outcomes for students has not been empirically established to a substantial degree. More recently, publications such as *School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works best and why* (Robinson et al., 2009), and *Learning from leadership: Investigating the links to improved students learning* (Louis et al., 2010), have indicated dimensions of leadership that might indirectly influence student outcomes more effectively (Cardno, 2012). For example, the primary conclusion by Robinson et al. (2009) is that pedagogically focused leadership has a substantial impact on student outcomes. The more leaders focus their influence, learning and relationships with teachers on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence as leaders on student outcomes.

Effective educational leaders know what to focus on in order to influence the quality of learning and teaching (Cardno, 2012). The focus of their leadership activity can be enacted directly or indirectly. Examples of direct instructional leadership include leading professional development for staff, visiting classrooms, and engaging with teachers on a regular basis (Cardno, 2012; Robinson et al., 2009; Waters et al., 2004). Moreover, educational leadership is concerned with professional dialogue, professional learning, and the enhancement of teaching within classrooms (Southworth, 2004; Waters et al. 2004). Similarly, effective educational leaders should engage in constructive problem talk and dialogue that is associated with learning and openness (Hayes, Christie, Mills, & Lingard, 2004; Robinson et al., 2009).

Indirect leadership could take the form of establishing direction and goals for the school, providing resources and leading activity that relates to learning climate and a supportive environment (Cardno, 2012; Robinson et al., 2009). Alternatively, Ogram and Youngs (2014) believe effective collective educational leadership should focus on the leadership input both a principal and staff make to improve learning and teaching. As Bush (2011) argues, teachers are more likely to be enthusiastic about change when they own it instead of having it forced on them. In summary, the literature suggests that the focus on classrooms as well as the organisational climate to support teaching and learning are both important dimensions for educational leaders (Cardno, 2102).

If educational leaders are required to exercise influence in their organisation, it is also important to consider another aspect of their role; relationships with others. Tamati (2011) believes that leaders should ensure leadership is about people and relationships. Cardno (2012) argues that leadership involves a trusting relationship between leaders and followers. Effective leaders build teachers' capacity to work in teams (Dufour & Marzano, 2009). Other factors that ensure effective relationships include a supportive and respectful environment (Waters et al. 2004). Another important behaviour that an educational leader must demonstrate is awareness of individual and collective students' learning needs. Waniganayake, Cheeseman, Fenech, Hadley and Shepherd (2012) assert that having awareness of the local community and the needs and interests of children and families can enhance the way leaders work within their organisation.

The principal has traditionally been at the centre of most research concerned with school leadership, although recent studies have emphasised the need for educational leadership to be distributed to a greater extent (Cardno, 2012). For instance, Timperley (2005) recognises problems in relying on one leader to improve student outcomes and suggests leadership should be distributed across multiple people and situations. Likewise, Louis et al. (2010) recommend the use of middle leaders as valuable in improving instruction and developing teaching and learning. The following section reviews the literature focused on middle leadership which includes a description of their role and purpose, responsibilities and requirements of middle leaders, and challenges and tensions they face.

### **Middle leadership**

It is important to situate and examine middle leadership here as it is a role that contributes to educational leadership and it was the focus area of my interviews of seven middle leaders about their perceptions and experiences of culturally responsive leadership. In a New Zealand context, the main role of middle leaders is to improve outcomes for all students that embraces their education, welfare and development (Ministry of Education, 2012a). Middle leaders include: pedagogical leaders at the subject, curriculum and faculty level; pastoral leaders involved in student services, careers, guidance and counselling staff; teachers with specific whole-school responsibilities like information and communications technology (ICT) and literacy; team and syndicate leaders; and coaches and mentors who help lead professional

learning (Ministry of Education, 2012a). Middle leaders are seen to have both administrative functions as well as teaching responsibilities because they are accountable for the work of teams of teachers to ensure curricula are developed, delivered and assessed, programmes are evaluated, and teachers are appraised (Fitzgerald, 2000).

Middle leaders, in particular, should have direct involvement with the curriculum and assessment (Bennett, Woods, Wise & Newton, 2007). Furthermore, Gurr and Drysdale's model (2013) for successful school leadership proposes that more middle leaders need to be involved in pedagogy, curriculum and assessment because this has the most influence on student outcomes. Aside from the roles and tasks listed above, middle leaders are responsible for providing leadership that is culturally responsive to student identity, language and culture, and which also helps to establish reciprocal relationships implicit in Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) (Ministry of Education, 2012a). To help give middle educational leaders some direction, *The educational leadership model* (Ministry of Education, 2012a) identifies four areas of practice that have the same goal to support the learning of all students: culture, pedagogy, systems, and networks. One major issue highlighted by the aforementioned research on the purpose and responsibilities of middle leaders, relates to their expanding workload that is reflected in the increase in variety and diversity of responsibilities in the role (Cranston, 2007).

Because middle leaders are the link between learners and learning, they occupy a complex territory (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2006). Fitzgerald's and Gunter's (2006) research indicated that leadership is the act of influencing and working with others in a highly collaborative, supportive environment that encourages risk and innovation, and places learning at the centre of all activities rather than leadership responsibilities and tasks defined in job descriptions, performance agreements and professional standards. Corresponding research suggests middle leaders can experience tension because their role has a whole school focus, while at the same time, they are trying to maintain loyalty to their department, so monitoring becomes a challenge to collegiality as it is seen as a check on their colleagues' quality of teaching and their competence (Bennett et al., 2007). By working with and through other colleagues, leaders achieve goals and, in these work-related interpersonal relationships, trust-building is crucial to the effective enactment on educational leadership tasks (Cardno, 2012). In his study in New Zealand

secondary schools, Cranston (2007) found that interpersonal skills are critical to carrying out the role of a middle-level school leader. Communicating effectively reflects the essential people skills of both the leadership and management aspects of the roles of middle-level school leaders (Cranston, 2007).

The first two sections of the literature review have synthesised and critiqued the theoretical perspectives that underpin the leadership aspects of my research. Both forms of leadership have an emphasis on school improvement and increasing educational outcomes for students. Middle leaders are required to lead learning in their organisation, but increased external accountability from government agencies and workload demands are challenges to maintaining collegiality in this environment. Furthermore, the importance of middle leaders working collaboratively and forming trusting interpersonal relationships was highlighted as critical to carrying out their role. The following section will focus on aspects of culturally responsive practice as well as challenges for its implementation. Because middle leaders also have teaching commitments, it is important for them to consider what culturally responsive practices are and how they relate to both of their roles as leaders and teachers. Additionally, middle leaders are frequently involved in work-related interpersonal relationships where they are responsible for ensuring culturally responsive practices are being implemented by their colleagues.

### **Culturally responsive practice and challenges for implementation**

The following two sections focus on culturally responsive teaching and culturally responsive leadership. They align with the previous sections because the practice of culturally responsive leadership is a requirement for middle leaders and, apart from utilising culturally responsive practices, they are also required to oversee their colleagues' practices. Culturally responsive teaching is espoused as one way to improve school success of ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2002). Teachers must learn to teach students from an expansive range of backgrounds, including those that may differ from the teachers' own racial, ethnic linguistic, class, sexual or religious identities (Ullman & Hecsh, 2011). Culturally responsive teaching uses the cultural experiences, perspectives and characteristics of ethnically diverse students as mediums for teaching them more effectively (Gay, 2002).

To begin this chapter, a synthesis of the key themes is presented, each of which will be discussed throughout this section. Table 2.1 displays twelve aspects of culturally responsive practice that are evident in the literature. The majority of authors share the view that having a knowledge of and utilising students' cultural and ethnic diversity was an important aspect of culturally responsive practice, followed by forming respectful learning relationships with students.

*Table 2.1 A summary of the literature; commonalities of culturally responsive practice*

<b>Culturally responsive practices include:</b>	<b>Authors:</b>
Caring for students and creating a caring environment	Bishop & Berryman (2010); Gay (2002); Ford (2013); Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran (2004).
Demonstrating quality teaching and the ability to manage classrooms	Alton-Lee (2003); Bishop & Berryman (2010); Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran (2004).
Forming respectful learning relationships with students	Alton-Lee (2003); Bishop & Berryman (2010); Ford (2013); Ladson-Billings (1995); Siope (2013); Wlodkowski & Ginsberg (1995).
Having high expectations for student learning and eliminating deficit theorising	Bishop & Berryman (2010); Gay (2002); Ladson-Billings (1995); Nakhid (2003).
Having a culturally responsive curriculum and instructional strategies	Gay (2002); Glynn (2013); Samu (2006); Wlodkowski & Ginsberg (1995).
Having a knowledge of and utilising students cultural and ethnic diversity	Alton-Lee (2003); Bishop & Berryman (2010); Blair (2002); Bourdieu (1986); Delpit (1995); Gay (2002); Ford (2013); Samu (2006); Weinstein Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran (2004); Wlodkowski & Ginsberg (1995).
Improving student achievement and outcomes	Alton-Lee (2003); Bishop & Berryman (2010); Samu (2006).
Facilitating collaborative learning	Ford (2013); Ladson-Billings (1995).
Sharing power with and incorporating student voice	Bishop & Berryman (2010); Ford (2013); Larrivee (2000).
Having self-awareness, self-reflecting, and a knowledge of personal biases and stereotypes	Blair (2002); Henderson (2013); Larrivee (2000); Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran (2004).
Having an empathetic temperament	McAllister & Irvine (2002).
Having a knowledge of the broader political, social and economic contexts and inequalities	Lourie (2016); Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran (2004).

Early research on culturally responsive teaching showed that no single teaching strategy consistently engaged all learners, and it was therefore thought to be important to help

students relate lesson content to their own cultural backgrounds (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). These authors proposed a model of culturally responsive teaching where teachers establish inclusion by creating a learning atmosphere where teachers and students feel respected and connected, and teachers develop positive attitudes by relating teaching and learning activities to students' previous experience. Additionally, teachers create challenging learning experiences that include student perspectives and values, and they engender confidence through creating an understanding that students are effective in learning something they value (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995).

*Te Kotahitanga* (Bishop et al., 2009), a teacher-focussed project to improve the educational achievement of Māori students in mainstream New Zealand schools began in 2001. One aspect involved teachers implementing an *Effective teaching profile* (ETP). The ETP identifies six ways effective teachers can relate to and interact with Māori students on a daily basis. This includes a number of teacher actions such as caring for students, having high expectations for students learning, managing classrooms and curriculum to promote learning, facilitating learning interactions, and collaboratively promoting, monitoring and reflecting upon students' learning outcomes that lead to improvements in Māori student achievement (Bishop & Berryman, 2010). Although there are similarities in what each of the two frameworks propose for teachers, such as promoting learning and having high expectations, there are two main differences. Firstly, *Te Kotahitanga* uses student voice in the form of narratives to inform the framework and the ETP and, secondly, it is an approach that rests upon a commitment of teachers to build caring learning relationships which are key to effective teaching of Māori students (Bishop & Berryman, 2010). The importance of relationships as part of culturally responsive practice is further highlighted in additional research.

Alton-Lee (2003) advocated the relationship between the teacher and student, and the teacher's ability to motivate the students, as factors that influence effective teaching and learning. Equally, Siope (2013) advocated for a definition of culturally responsive pedagogy of relations, which emerges from *Te Kotahitanga*. She argues that, ultimately being culturally responsive is in the intent of the implementation, or in terms of the relations, and for teachers this begins between themselves and their learners (Siope, 2013). Ford (2013) went even further to suggest that a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations is characterised by an environment where relationships of care and respect

are essential. Within these relationships Māori cultural identity is relevant to learning, and teachers share power in the classroom so that Māori students co-construct their learning pathways with their teacher and their peers (Ford, 2013). Furthermore, seminal research by Ladson-Billings (1995) proposed that culturally responsive teachers maintain fluid student-teacher relationships, demonstrate a connectedness with all students, develop a community of learners, and encourage students to learn collaboratively. More recently, Ladson-Billings (2014) has reflected on how her original theory of culturally relevant pedagogy as previously mentioned, has been used and misused, and suggests a revision to culturally sustaining pedagogy. She proposes that culturally sustaining pedagogy allows for a fluid understanding of culture, and teaching that overtly engages questions of equity and justice (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Another of Ladson-Billings' (1995) influential theories was concerned with the conceptions of self and others held by culturally relevant teachers. A key indicator for this theory is that culturally relevant teachers believe that all students are capable of academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995). It is essential that teachers hold high expectations for students of all ethnic groups and view their students as capable of academic achievement. A common thread throughout the literature was the negative impact that stereotyping could have on student learning and achievement. Deficit theorising is not a culturally responsive approach to teaching and learning (Bishop & Berryman, 2010; Gay, 2002; Nakhid, 2003). Having high expectations and eliminating teachers' deficit theorising is important for improved student academic achievement; however, Alton-Lee (2003) recommends that this needs to be integrated into quality teaching practices that establish links between pedagogical practices and student achievement outcomes. The use of data and assessment tools can help achieve this by enabling teachers to avoid making assumptions about student ability (Alton-Lee, 2003). The importance of pedagogical practice leads into the next significant finding around the need for a culturally responsive curriculum - an obligation that middle leaders may be required to implement. Gay (2002) proposes that ethnically diverse students have the right to tackle learning challenges from the points of strength and relevance found in their own cultural frames of reference. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) called this cultural capital. Consequently, another significant idea to consider in relation to culturally responsive practice is associated with different forms of capital.



Capital can be described as the resources that are acquired and accumulated, and are of value in certain situations (Spillane, Hallett & Diamond, 2003). Bourdieu (1986) posited that the distribution of academic achievement matched the distribution of cultural capital between social classes. The closer the match between the culture of the home and the culture of the school, the more likely it is that students from that social class would experience academic success. However, Gorinsky and Fraser (2006) indicate that the dominant culture will possess and benefit from the cultural capital in schools because the curriculum and teaching approaches are both derived from the dominant culture. Consequently, matching school and home cultural capital would require teachers to understand the different forms of capital students bring with them to school. Delpit (1995) believes that knowing about students' culture is one tool teachers can utilise to help find solutions for learning difficulties.

Apart from acquiring a knowledge base about cultural and ethnic diversity, teachers need to learn how to adapt it into culturally responsive curriculum designs and instructional strategies (Gay, 2002). Samu (2006) postulates that responsiveness to diversity is about tailoring teaching to learner diversities in order to raise academic achievement. This could be a challenge for teachers, especially when their language and culture varies from that of their students. Glynn's (2013) investigation examined *Te Kotahitanga* (Bishop et al., 2009), and noted that the essential difference lies with the central positioning of culture within the culturally responsive and relationship-based learning contexts, which contributes to strengthening pedagogical power for Māori students.

Conversely, what works for Māori students may not be relevant or apply to Pasifika students in New Zealand. In contrast, quality teaching for Pasifika learners cannot be based on the assumption that there exists a specific pedagogical approach that best suits them. However, Samu (2006) believes a framework of principles can be developed to guide teachers of Pacific students' efforts to expand specific and relevant teaching and learning environments for their students. Another major concern is that even though a large amount of literature has explored the issues of ethnicity in the success and failure of students, there has been a tendency to regard different ethnic groups as homogenous on the basis of their perceived racial identity (Blair, 2002). Samu (2006) also cautions against standardising, because the use of the term Pasifika amalgamates into one

category more than six ethnic and linguistic groups who each have their own unique social structure, histories, attitudes, values and perspectives. Alternatively, Pasifika could be viewed as a collectivising term that recognises and respects the various groups and draws them together (Samu, 2006).

As discussed in the previous section on middle leadership, education reforms and the increased pressure to improve student achievement has created issues for teachers, which include challenges around implementing culturally responsive practices. In New Zealand, the emergence of bicultural education policy in the 1980s, underpinned by Te Tiriti o Waitangi, was in part a response to the inequality reflected in lower school achievement rates of Māori students (Lourie, 2016). Lourie argues that auditing systems, such as teacher appraisal, registration and external reviews by the Education Review Office that require schools and teachers to provide evidence of bi-cultural practices, can result in tokenism. Although Lourie (2016) agrees biculturalism is imperative, she argues the current auditing system keeps the focus on teaching and learning relationships, pedagogy and curriculum. Whilst still important, this current focus ignores wider contemporary social and political inequalities that need to be addressed (Lourie, 2016).

Further challenges that educational professionals might confront in regard to implementing culturally responsive practices are also revealed in the literature. The first of these concerns the personal traits of a teacher. Blair (2002) proposes many teachers have little or no knowledge or understanding of the different cultural backgrounds of the students in their classrooms, and are not prepared to deal with racism from other students, let alone critically reflect on their own stereotypes and assumptions. Those unmotivated to participate in cross-cultural experiences often remain unaware of how their own cultural lens affects the way they live, their professional practices and their relationships (Henderson, 2013).

Other researchers also hold the view that culturally responsive teaching is not effectively addressed in teacher education (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). For example, a problem highlighted in preservice teacher education in the United States, concerns how students of colour tend to bring richer experiences and perspectives to multi-cultural teaching than most white students who represent the majority numerically (Sleeter, 2001). Further challenges were also raised in a study on

addressing the achievement gap and disproportionate representation of racially, culturally, ethically and linguistically diverse students in special education programmes in the United States (Griner & Stewart, 2012). The authors propose that the lack of student-teacher connections, led by the cultural divide between elementary and secondary schools and communities, continues to overwhelm the educational community. Griner and Stewart (2012) believe the issue lies in the gaps between policy, theory and practice.

Of interest are the different recommendations that are suggested to address these challenges. Sleeter (2001) posits that, although examining recruitment processes is essential, working with prospective teachers who are white is also essential. She suggests that extensive community based immersion experiences, coupled with course work, could be a promising strategy to effectively provide culturally responsive teaching in teacher education (Sleeter, 2001). Larrivee (2000) argues that in order to transform teaching practice, teachers need to engage in critical reflection in order to examine their personal and professional belief systems and consider the ethical implications and impact of particular practices. Having power with, rather than over, learners begins with teacher self-awareness, self-inquiry and self-reflection, not with the students (Larrivee, 2000). In a similar vein, an empathetic temperament has also been identified as a desirable but not a sufficient trait for teachers in diverse settings (McAllister & Irvine, 2002). In McAllister and Irvine's (2002) qualitative study of practicing teachers in the United States, teachers noted empathy with their students was important to help them become more effective teachers of culturally diverse students which led to more positive interactions, supportive classroom climates and student centred pedagogy (McAllister & Irvine, 2002). How this is enacted remains a challenge. However, research in the United States on the role of empathy in preparing culturally responsive teachers, discovered that to help candidates become agents of change, it was essential teacher educators also knew about the beliefs teacher candidates brought to the classroom and how they think (Ullman & Hecsh, 2011).

Jester and Fickel (2013) propose it is urgent to prepare teachers by having an explicit focus on culturally responsive teaching in teacher education. Discussions around how to introduce culturally responsive pedagogy into teacher education programmes, and the relationship between culturally responsive pedagogy and classroom management led to

the concept of culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004). CRCM includes five components for teachers: recognising biases; having a knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds; understanding the broader political, social and economic context; having the ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate management strategies; and demonstrating a commitment to building caring classrooms. The authors propose CRCM as a frame of mind that can guide the management decisions teachers make (Weinstein et.al, 2004).

Conversely, Griner and Stewart (2012) believe teachers and staff in schools' lack clear examples and tools related to best practice for culturally responsive teaching. Therefore, their research provides a practical tool to encourage teachers and staff to engage in reflective, culturally responsive practice, as well as emphasising the need to include a range of stakeholders in the process of developing, implementing and appraising tools for educational purposes (Griner & Stewart, 2012). Contrary to both preceding recommendations, Blair (2002) states that it is leadership that is most likely to influence the creation of an inclusive and antiracist environment, and suggests it is the most crucial element in making a school more effective in a multi-cultural context (Blair, 2002). The following section will synthesise the research on culturally responsive leadership.

### **Culturally responsive leadership**

The final part of the literature review is a culmination of the previous inter-related fields of research, and it also examines the intricacies of culturally responsive leadership. A large number of approaches to multi-cultural education have focussed on classroom teaching, as discussed in the previous section, but some researchers have used a culturally responsive framework in relation to school leadership (Johnson, 2014). Culturally responsive leadership, derived from the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy (Johnson, 2014), includes practices that help to empower diverse groups and make the school curriculum more culturally responsive (Johnson, 2007). In a current synthesis of the literature (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis, 2016), four major strands emerged which are fundamental for culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL).

In the first instance a critical awareness of self, values, beliefs, and dispositions when it comes to serving poor children of colour and secondly, culturally responsive curricula

and teacher preparation are deemed as important - school leaders have a crucial role in ensuring that teachers are, and remain, culturally responsive. Thirdly, the presence of culturally responsive and inclusive school environments is noted - culturally responsive school leaders challenge the status quo by interrogating exclusionary and marginalising behaviours. Lastly, engaging students and parents in community contexts is also an important requirement. Supplementary research on culturally responsive leadership included in this section also incorporates characteristics of these four major components. Consequently, different aspects of each strand will be analysed in this section of the literature review. Table 2.2 overleaf summarises the common characteristics of a culturally responsive leader from the literature. Each of these attributes is discussed in more detail throughout the section.

The argument that context and culture influence the practice of culturally responsive leadership is evident in some literature (see for example: Billot, 2008; Blair 2002; Gurr 2014; Starratt 2003). A New Zealand study on the implications of increasing diversity in school leadership indicated that principals involved in the study shaped their leadership to enhance equity and inclusion for students of all backgrounds (Billot, 2008). The principals in this study were willing to adjust their leadership with the identity of the school community, and develop practices that were appropriate to their specific school that also fit with their own philosophies and values (Billot, 2008). If school leadership is to be effective in a multi-ethnic context the leader must have a vision for their organisation. A leader should place diversity at the centre of their school's vision, and take action to change the culture of the school to ensure policies and practices incorporate student diversity and consultation with the whole school community (Blair, 2002). Starratt (2003) concurs that in order to create a learning experience that meets the needs of diverse students, educational leaders must promote an understanding of diversity, meaning, community and responsibility through social justice. Conversely, Gurr's study (2014) of successful school leadership in Australia argues there is now a substantial body of research across diverse contexts and cultures that signify that the core characteristics of successful leadership surpass context and culture. Gurr (2014) claims that while successful school leaders are culturally sensitive, they are not constrained by context. Some commonalities that seem to transcend culture and context encompass: having high expectations for all; fostering collaboration; displaying

integrity, trust and transparency; being people centred; developing a range of appropriate personal qualities; and focusing leadership efforts on the development of others (Gurr, 2014).

*Table 2.2 A summary of the literature; the roles and tasks of a culturally responsive leader*

<b>A culturally responsive leader:</b>	<b>Authors:</b>
Has a critical awareness of self, their values, beliefs and dispositions	Branson (2007); Khalifa, Gooden & Davis (2016); Santamaria & Santamaria (2015).
Ensures teachers are and remain culturally responsive	Gurr (2014); Khalifa, Gooden & Davis (2016); Nelson (2007); Robinson & Timperley (2007).
Challenges and changes the status quo	Khalifa, Gooden & Davis (2016); Kia Eke Panuku (2016); Santamaria, Santamaria Webber & Pearson (2014).
Engages students, families and communities in culturally appropriate ways	Blair (2002); Ford (2012); Khalifa, Gooden & Davis (2016); Madhlangobe & Gordon (2012); Santamaria (2014); Santamaria & Santamaria (2015); Stevenson (2007); Quezada (2016).
Acknowledges culture and promotes diversity	Billot (2008); Blair (2002); Starratt (2003).
Utilises student voice	Hayes & Clode (2012); Knight de-Blois & Poskitt (2016).
Promotes, facilitates and engages in critical conversations	Cooper (2009); Madsen & Mabokela (2014); Santamaria (2014).
Leads by example	Santamaria (2014).
Creates and displays trust with others	Gurr (2014); Madsen & Mabokela (2014); Santamaria (2014).
Forms working relationships with staff, uses consensus building and collaboration	Cherkowski & Ragoonaden (2016); Gurr (2014); Santamaria (2014).
Has an awareness of stereotype threats	Madsen & Mabokela (2014); Santamaria & Santamaria (2015).

Leadership is identified as a lever for accelerated change for school reform in a recent New Zealand professional development initiative. Building on the *Ka Hikitia* (Ministry of Education, 2013b) document, *Kia Eke Panuku: Building on success* (Kia Eke Panuku, 2016) aims to address the aspirations of Māori communities by supporting Māori students to pursue their potential. The initiative considers both middle and senior school leaders as having a critical role in disrupting and changing the status quo of Māori underachievement. This occurs by understanding and analysing their schools' current position, aligning and focusing actions to disrupt the status quo, gathering data in an

iterative manner to monitor effectiveness of the reform, and re-imagining and embedding more equitable opportunities for Māori to excel (Kia Eke Panuku, 2016). In addition, while their study did not specifically allude to culturally responsive leadership, Robinson and Timperley (2007) also focused on how leaders foster school renewal by facilitating and participating in the types of teacher professional learning and development that improve student academic and non-academic outcomes.

When comparing Robinson and Timperley's (2007) synthesis of research and *Kia Eke Panuku* (2016), an area of similarity is that the leader is responsible for challenging and changing aspects of school and teacher culture. A corresponding example of this in Robinson and Timperley's (2007) research shows that leaders need to have the ability to respectfully involve teachers in an examination of how their actions contribute to problematic situations, and how an alternative action could contribute to a resolution. However, proposing and implementing professional learning and development as a culturally responsive method to address student outcomes can have mixed results, as evidenced by key findings in the final evaluation of *He Kākano* (Hynds, Meyer, Penetito, Averill, Hindle, Taiwhati & Faircloth, 2013). *He Kākano* (Ministry of Education, 2013c) is a government policy initiative involving strategic school-based professional development programmes with an explicit focus on improving culturally responsive leadership and teacher practices to ensure Māori learners enjoy educational success as Māori. Although there were some positive outcomes – such as school leaders reporting increased awareness and enhanced understanding of culturally responsive schooling, culturally responsive leadership and systems to support Māori students - there were also varied results and contradictions (Hynds et al., 2013). For example, there was a sense that school leaders could pick and choose aspects of the model to implement that most suited their school context, and this limited the model's effectiveness. Furthermore, not all senior and middle leaders participated in the programme which prompted a lack of ownership of change and even resentment (Hynds et al., 2013).

A more recent investigation supported these main findings and proposed that the central impediments to the successful implementation of important Māori principles and practices were characteristic of a lack of partnership with Indigenous students and their communities (Hynds, Averill, Penetito, Meyer, Hindle & Faircloth, 2016). Clearly, what constitutes partnership needs to be readdressed if professional development like

*He Kākano* (Ministry of Education, 2013c) is to successfully influence practice in mainstream schools.

Another way leaders can influence the strategic goal of Māori students enjoying success as Māori is through student voice (Hayes & Clode, 2012). The authors' research on creative leadership of Māori student partnerships suggests that leading the effective implementation for gathering student voice and then acting on the messages, is one way to achieve this goal because it is a democratic process that includes young people in problem solving (Hayes & Clode, 2012). Likewise, a study which asked Samoan teenagers their views about what helped them to learn, led to the identification of four themes: engaging teacher behaviour, lessons that stimulated learning, positive student-centred relationships, and teachers respecting students' cultures (Knight de-Blois & Poskitt, 2016). Not only does this study utilise student voice, it also gives leaders and teachers some practical advice at the classroom level about how to enhance students learning.

The importance of community involvement is evident in a number of pieces of research on culturally responsive leadership. Historically underserved students and their families seek educational leaders to change long standing educational practices and introduce systems where learners enjoy more academic achievement than has been the norm (Santamaria, Santamaria, Webber & Pearson, 2014). Khalifa et al. (2016) highlight the importance of the school leader engaging students, families and communities in culturally appropriate ways to promote overlapping school-community contexts. Honouring native languages, accommodating parents and creating school spaces for marginalised student identities and behaviours are examples (Khalifa et al., 2016). Additionally, Santamaria (2014) states that one characteristic of socially just educational leaders is their need to honour all members of their constituencies by including voices and perspectives of staff, parents, community members and stakeholders, as well as traditionally silenced groups and individuals. Correspondingly, school leaders can promote a social justice agenda by creating an inclusive culture where all voices are represented, enlisting the community and developing partnerships in support of school objectives (Stevenson, 2007). Santamaria and Santamaria (2015) highlight the importance of practicing humility by seeking participation and accountability with established community leadership and connecting deeply to the community by sharing leadership practice to ensue sustainability and support positive education change.



Findings from a study in Southern California, found school principals can play a key role in family engagement by viewing families as partners in their school community and believing in their leadership capacity (Quezada, 2016). The key word is engagement as opposed to involvement. An example is that when schools involve parents, they can take the position of still leading this process with their institutional self-interest and desires. However, when schools engage parents they are leading with parents' self-interests in an effort to develop a genuine partnership (Quezada, 2016). Two examples of how principals successfully engaged community members are outlined below. Firstly, one female principal who responded successfully to Māori student achievement prioritised community engagement, focussing over five years on providing opportunities to have face-to-face conversations with and listen to Māori students, whānau and the wider community. She also believed that stakeholders, including whānau, needed to have an opportunity to contribute to the school learning community (Ford, 2012). Secondly, caring for others through sharing information and caring for parents' perspectives has also been identified as a theme for culturally responsive leadership (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). The principal involved in the research shared information with students and parents from diverse ethnic groups to enhance their understanding of the school and its expectations, and invited parents to participate in evaluating the curriculum to enhance culturally responsive pedagogy (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012).

What is evident from the preceding literature on culturally responsive leadership is that the principal, in particular, has significant responsibilities to ensure success in multi-ethnic schools. This has obvious implications for the education system and individual schools. Two of these challenges have been identified by Billot, Godard and Cranston (2007). The first relates to the recruitment and selection of principals to lead multi-ethnic schools because those leaders require special capabilities and strong notions of social justice. The second challenge is providing adequate professional development opportunities for those aspiring to lead in these schools such as formal professional development programmes and mentoring. Ylimaki and Jacobson (2013) agree that in order to improve culturally responsive practice, leadership preparation should focus on developing student-centred curricula, providing well supervised field based experiences and having social support and interaction to prevent professional isolation. In their article on leadership for diversity, Cherkowski and Ragoonaden (2016) similarly argue

that educational leadership preparation programmes can play an important role in shifting the leadership environment toward more culturally responsive and inclusive leadership in schools.

Additionally, applied critical leadership (ACL) is an approach that may enable educational leaders in urban school settings to reverse learning trends and outcomes for a wide range of diverse students who struggle with academic success (Santamaria et al., 2014). ACL promotes social justice and educational equity based on the idea that leadership is a professional practice that is developed through a leader's experience and culture (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012). Research utilising ACL characteristics has been conducted in the United States (Santamaria, 2014; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015) and New Zealand (Santamaria, Webber & Santamaria, 2015). Briefly, some of the ACL characteristics that critical leaders exhibit consist of initiating and engaging in critical conversations, using consensus building as the preferred strategy for decision making, being conscious of stereotype threats, honouring constituents, and leading by example (Santamaria, 2014). It is important to note, however, that it is not only Indigenous leaders, but leaders with Indigenous world views who can practice ACL as culturally responsive leadership that contributes to sustainable change. There are leaders who may be white who put privilege aside or use it to practice ACL (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015).

The concluding commentary in this section will look at personal traits and interpersonal qualities deemed crucial for culturally responsive leaders. Describing the personal characteristics of such leaders, Branson (2007) proposes that culturally they must have critical awareness of self, values, beliefs, and dispositions. One way this can be achieved is through critical reflection (Branson, 2007). Although time consuming, structured self-reflection is a way to seek self-knowledge about one's inner self. This is important because all moral judgements involve the making of choices which are influenced by personal motives, values and beliefs so it is important to know these, and how they were formed. The leader must be able to come to know how their self-concept and self-esteem is influencing them personally, and thus impacting on their leadership behaviour (Branson, 2007). Correspondingly, Santamaria and Santamaria (2015) believe culturally responsive leaders will recognise their biases while tapping into positive aspects of their identity to lead with authenticity and integrity. Cherkowski and Ragoonaden (2016)

propose that professional development in the area of intercultural communication competence can help leaders recognise and work with their beliefs and values because it provides leaders with the space, time and structure to become aware and interrogate assumptions about how these influence their practice. Similarly, Nelson and Guerra (2007) propose that educational leaders need to assess the extent of their staff's cultural awareness, because lack of awareness about beliefs can lead to the development of deficit theories about certain cultural, linguistic and economic groups.

Interpersonally, it is important that culturally responsive leaders form working relationships and are confident to interact with their staff. Examples of how this could be implemented are discussed here. Firstly, in terms of intercultural competence, educational leaders should be challenged to learn about the ways they relate to their colleagues and students (Cherkowski & Ragoonaden, 2016). Cooper (2009) recommends that school leaders model and facilitate critical discussions about equity and race in staff and leadership meetings to provide support to make curriculum, teaching and family partnerships culturally responsive. To address changing demographics, leaders must create trust, promote dialogue on pedagogical differences in responding to the learning needs of students of colour, and create teams that dismiss stereotypical roles for students of colour (Madsen & Mabokela, 2014). For example, staff involved with academic mentoring in Youngs' (2014) investigation not only required human forms of capital such as expertise, skills and knowledge, but this had to be accompanied by social capital, which included networks and relations of trust. What is clear from the literature is that culturally responsive leaders have many responsibilities and expectations, but improved educational outcomes will require ongoing commitment not only from principals but other leaders, teachers, students, the whole school and the local community.

## **Summary**

The literature has indicated that culturally responsive teaching practices are a crucial element in addressing the current disparities in New Zealand secondary schools; however, educational researchers have also claimed that school leadership is a fundamental component to any improvement of education, secondary only to teaching (Leithwood et al., 2004). Culturally responsive educational leaders are responsible for ensuring culturally responsive practices are carried out in their organisations, not only

overseeing teachers, but school wide. It is interesting to note that while there are clear expectations on middle leaders in some New Zealand government publications and documents, for example *Leading from the Middle* (Ministry of Education, 2012a), the majority of the research and journal articles in this literature review mention only principals when referring to culturally responsive leadership.

The common factor that linked all four sections of my literature review is the importance of improving academic success, particularly for those students who are ethnically diverse. A second collective theme identified in the literature was the importance of relationships between; teachers and students, teachers and leaders, teachers and families, leaders and families and leaders and the community. Apart from further professional development, ACL is an approach that may enable educational leaders to reverse negative learning outcomes for a wide range of diverse students who struggle with academic success. Critical reflection is another way leaders can improve their moral consciousness. The literature review has generated the development of my central research question:

- What are the perceptions and understandings of culturally responsive practices carried out by secondary school middle leaders in low decile, multi-ethnic settings in New Zealand?

The two sub-questions include:

1. What are secondary school middle leaders' understandings and experiences of the practices of 'culturally responsive practice'?
2. What are secondary school middle leaders' perceptions of the challenges encountered in regards to culturally responsive practice in their school?

The following chapter will outline the research methodology and the research methods that were used to collect qualitative data in order to answer the research questions.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Chapter Three begins with an overview of the methodological approach best suited to my research questions. It justifies and critiques the positioning of my research within an interpretive paradigm, and the use of a qualitative research design. The following section clarifies the acceptability of my research method, and the rationale for using semi-structured interviews as the instrument for data collection. Data analysis techniques and validity and reliability factors are then explained, before the chapter concludes with an examination of ethical and cultural considerations.

### **Methodological approach**

#### **Epistemology and ontology**

An epistemological position can be summarised as ways of knowing, and an ontological position relates to ways of seeing. The way in which research leads us to see and to know should be directed by our basic purpose for doing it (O'Toole & Beckett, 2013). Accordingly, the decision on my research focus arose from my own experiences; it is something I perceive as important, and I aspire to be a culturally-responsive middle leader. Bryman (2008) proposes that the researcher's values will influence the research design process. Although I grew up in a bi-cultural community, being a New Zealand European working in a predominantly Pasifika context, I realise there are a variety of challenges for myself, as well as for the students, when working with people from cultures other than my own. I have been teaching at a school for the past six years that has the same social and cultural context as the secondary school middle leaders whom I invited to participate in this research. I was interested in listening to my participants' interpretations, their knowledge of culturally responsive practice, and how they have come to understand what culturally responsive means to them in their secondary school settings.

Interacting with the secondary school middle leaders involved in my research lead to the construction of multiple realities around the practices, experiences and challenges of cultural responsive practice in their secondary school settings (Creswell, 2012). However, I created the research questions and already had ideas and theories in mind about my topic; therefore, I am not considered neutral. My interest and knowledge precede the research and, even though initial hypotheses may not be the focus in

qualitative research, the establishment of the research topic assumes a particular area of interest (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). To overcome this limitation, it was crucial that I remained as neutral as possible during the interview process by avoiding leading questions, and maintaining transparency throughout the research process. Further discussion of validity and reliability will occur in the following sections of the methodology chapter.

Epistemologically, reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the participants (Creswell, 2012). The creation of knowledge depended on the secondary school middle leaders sharing their perceptions of culturally responsive practices, experiences and challenges. It was created through participants' meaning making, what I observed and what they told me when conducting the semi-structured interviews. Because reality is understood through human activity and it cannot be discovered, it does not exist prior to being constructed (Hartas, 2010). Consequently, the resulting knowledge from my research on culturally responsive practice was not intended to be generalisable to populations, and can only be certain at the time of conducting the investigation. Nevertheless, the findings could be transferable to the practices and contexts of the readers of my research.

## **Paradigms**

A paradigm can provide a conceptual framework to reduce the complexity of social reality (Hartas, 2010). The world-view most relevant for my investigation was the interpretivist view, which stems from humanism, a broad umbrella term for a range of ways of understanding the social world (Newby, 2010). Humanistic enquiry is concerned with the world we live in, the world we create, and the world we experience (Newby, 2010). The humanistic position is appropriate to adopt in order to gather and theorise the experiences and biographies of those who are leaders and managers and those who are managed and led (Gunter & Ribbins, 2003), as it seeks to uncover meaning and understand the deeper implications revealed in data about people (Somekh & Lewin, 2011).

Interpretivist studies in education can be broadly categorised as insider research, which refers to the studies conducted by educators in the service of enhancing pedagogy in their own profession (Humphrey, 2013). The interpretive paradigm aligns closely to the

ontological position of social constructivism. The aim of my research was to critically examine my participants' perceptions and understandings about the culturally responsive leadership practices carried out by secondary school middle leaders in low decile, multi-ethnic settings in New Zealand. The interpretivist paradigm was highly appropriate for this research because I was explicitly interested in the experiences and interpretations of my participants. The chosen methodology proposed that middle leaders in my investigation understand the world in different ways and construct their own social reality. The interpretivist researcher accepts that the observer makes a difference to the observed and that reality is a human construct (Wellington, 2015).

Within an interpretive paradigm, theory is emergent and will arise from a particular situation; therefore, it is crucial that theory follows research, not precedes it (Cohen et al., 2011). Consequently, I interviewed seven middle leaders, and aimed to understand their interpretations of the world around them related to the practices, challenges and experiences of culturally responsive leadership practice in their school settings. The data produced through working directly with my participants helped construct my theories about this leadership practice (Cohen et al., 2011); however, it was also important to understand divergences in participants' views (Newby, 2010). The sets of meanings generated allowed me greater insight, new perspectives, and a heightened understanding of how middle leaders enact culturally responsive practices.

Although I have explained and justified the use of the interpretive paradigm in my research, I must also contemplate the criticisms of this approach. Cohen et al. (2011) consider some of the issues. First of all, critics argue that although understanding the actions of others requires knowledge of their intentions, this cannot be said to comprise the purpose of research. Secondly, a danger of interpretive approaches is their comparative neglect of the power of external influences to shape behaviour and events, which can lead to micro-sociological perspectives. Furthermore, some argue that anti-positivists lack objectivity and have gone too far in abandoning scientific procedures of verification. Another important factor to consider is the power of others to impose their own definitions of situations upon participants (Cohen et al., 2011)

I addressed these potential limitations by ensuring that my paradigm, epistemology and ontology aligned, and that my research methods are valid and have credibility. An

interpretative paradigm partly rests on a subjectivist, socially constructed ontology, and on an epistemology that recognises the importance of understanding a situation through the eyes of the participants (Cohen et al., 2011). Secondly, in the literature review, I addressed the political influences on culturally responsive practice of middle leaders in secondary schools by examining government publications and the effects of educational reform in New Zealand. These external factors were taken into consideration during data collection and analysis. Additionally, there were no obvious power relationships or imbalances between the participants and the researcher, as the participants were all middle leaders like myself, who work in different secondary schools to mine.

## **Research design**

### **Qualitative research**

Qualitative research is situated within the interpretivist paradigm and it seeks to understand social experiences by using participants' perceptions (Neuman, 2003). My inquiry used a qualitative research approach by providing an in-depth and detailed understanding of meanings, actions, attitudes, intentions and behaviours of participants in my investigation (Cohen et al., 2011). The intention of qualitative research is to reveal the reality of research participants by gathering rich descriptions of the area of interest to help others understand it (Mutch, 2005), which links directly to the research questions for this study. My aim was not only to be personally informed, but to enlighten other middle leaders about perceptions, practices, and challenges encountered in regards to culturally responsive practice.

Considering the epistemology, ontology and paradigm of my study, the characteristics of qualitative research made it the most applicable approach for the following reasons. Firstly, Mutch (2005) advocates qualitative research generally uses methods that gather descriptive accounts of the unique lived experiences of the participants to enhance understanding of particular phenomena. Additionally it uses inductive logic which means the key ideas arise out of the data, and it involves researchers who build up relationships of trust with participants (Mutch, 2005). Secondly, Newby (2010) suggests that rather than believing in a single truth, qualitative researchers believe people subscribe to different views and their interest is in exposing these relationships, emotions and other ways we express ourselves as legitimate sources of information that



can be used to make sense of the world. Finally, Morrell and Carroll (2010) propose that qualitative research typically selects small, non-random samples to study; in my case seven middle leaders. My sampling procedure will be discussed in more detail in the next section. Once the research aim and questions are established, researchers must ensure the appropriate research instruments are employed, which are the means by which data collection is conducted (Bryman, 2008).

## **Research methods**

The interview is a way of bringing together the multiple views of people (Kvale, 1996), which made it the most appropriate data collection tool for my investigation. It is one of the dominant modes of data collection in qualitative research (Gibson, 2010). Interviews attempt to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, clarify the meaning of their experiences and to discover their lived world (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I considered the comparative advantages and disadvantages of highly structured and highly unstructured interviews (Hobson & Townsend, 2010), and the purpose of my investigation to acquire non-standardised and personalised information about how my participants view the world (Cohen et al., 2011). As a result, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with seven secondary school middle leaders. The following section will seek to describe and justify the data collection procedures, including the sample, the steps involved, and the use of semi-structured interviews as instruments for data collection.

## **Data collection**

### **Semi-structured interviews as instruments for data collection**

A semi structured interview is the most appropriate tool for collecting data when the researcher seeks more qualitative information and varieties of responses within a common framework, because some degree of structure is needed to ensure that there is a proportion of common data (O'Toole & Beckett, 2013). Semi-structured interviews are defined as interviews with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In semi-structured interviews, the central interests of the investigation are used to create themes that will be addressed in the interviews (Gibson, 2010). Subsequently, I prepared a list of indicative questions in advance of conducting

my interviews which were informed by relevant themes identified in the literature, combined with questions that were relevant to the aim of my investigation that are included in Appendix A of this thesis. However, before conducting my face-to-face interviews, it was important for me to trial the questions.

Conducting the trial of interview questions provided me with an opportunity to receive constructive feedback on the interview questions and technique (Bryman, 2008), and at the same time I was able to trial using my iPhone as a digital recording device. I rehearsed my interview with two colleagues who are middle leaders. As a result of the trial I separated a question into two more manageable parts, introduced the idea of my participant creating their pseudonym as an ice breaker to begin the interview and ensure confidentiality, and I also inserted a question about their role as a middle leader to help form a relationship and make them feel at ease.

Data collection occurred between 25<sup>th</sup> June and 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016, and interviews were conducted at an agreeable date and time for each of my participants. In order to minimise interruptions, interviews were conducted at suitable locations (Coleman, 2012); for example in a participant's office on a Saturday morning, in meeting rooms during the school holidays, and in quiet office locations during school hours. To encourage interviewees to expand on their views, I used both verbal and non-verbal strategies such as deliberate silences and modest encouragement (Tomlinson 1989, as cited in Hobson & Townsend, 2010). During each of the interviews I took brief notes of the key points made by each participant on a separate sheet of paper. The purpose of this was to help trigger my memory during transcription, and to remind myself to clarify information with the participant. To ensure transparency and avoid deception, the notes were on the table between the participant and I so they could see what I was writing at all times. At the conclusion of each interview, I asked participants if there was anything else they would like to tell me about the topic, which allowed them to add any other opinions, experiences and perceptions around culturally responsive practice while the interview was still in session (Hinds, 2000).

To ensure the transcriptions were an accurate record of what my participants discussed, the interviews were audiotaped using the voice memos application on my iPhone (Bryman, 2012). The saved audio was easily uploaded and saved by iTunes on my

personal computer. Besides having an accurate record of each interview, the transcription process also helped familiarise me with the data because I chose to personally transcribe all seven of my interviews. The transcribing process helped me reflect on the interview process for each individual, develop my awareness and comprehension of the data, and identify key themes, including connections and variances emerging from the rich data.

### **Advantages and disadvantages of semi-structured interviews**

Interviews provide the opportunity to cover a broader range of issues than would be possible via observation, and allows researchers to discover things that they would not find out if they did not ask (Hobson & Townsend, 2010). One of the main benefits of semi-structured interviews is that these help ensure coverage of the researcher's agenda while also providing opportunities for interviewees to talk about what is significant to them in their own words (Hobson & Townsend, 2010). Although my interview questions were designed beforehand, I was able to improvise in the research setting and there was flexibility to ask questions at appropriate points of the discussion (Gibson, 2010). For instance, individual semi-structured interviews permitted me to attend to the experiences and perceptions of culturally responsive practice with each participant, but I also had the option to prompt or probe a participant's views for further clarification and a more comprehensive understanding during the interview (Bryman, 2012; Hinds, 2000). In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer and the research participant are moderately free to leave a predetermined list where they feel it is appropriate (Hobson & Townsend, 2010). As a result, the interviews allowed for further clarification and understanding in relation to my research aims and questions.

Kvale (1996) argues that the research interview is part of the social world studied, rather than a neutral conversation that allows us to decide about the nature of the social world. Therefore, advocates of interviewing in educational research have argued that one of the main benefits of interviews is they take advantage of the human characteristics of the interviewer (Hobson & Townsend, 2010). For example, in a face-to-face interview, I had more opportunity to build a connection, and observe important non-verbal data such as gestures. Conversely, the same feature could be considered a disadvantage. Critics argue that because the interviewer co-produces knowledge, interviews are unreliable because the data would be different if they had been generated by a different

interviewer (Hobson, & Townsend, 2010). Additionally, Cohen et al. (2011) acknowledge there is a possibility of researcher subjectivity and bias when collecting data with an interview. The ways in which I minimised bias to ensure trustworthiness and validity are examined in more detail in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Another permanent problem of qualitative data analysis is reducing copious amounts of written data to manageable proportions (Cohen et al., 2011). Correspondingly, Bryman (2008) and Hinds (2000) elude to the onerous task of transcribing interview data. Another significant disadvantage of interviews compared with other research methods, such as questionnaires, is they can be time-consuming and costly (Hobson & Townsend, 2010). I had to consider my participants' demanding workloads and be flexible with interview times, which also connected to a second problem I faced. Because I do not own a vehicle and I live a reasonably long way from my research participants, there were supplementary cost and time factors involved when travelling to each interview location.

## **Sample**

The quality of a piece of research is not only related to the appropriateness of methodology and instrumentation, but also the suitability of the sampling strategy (Cohen et al., 2011). The method of sampling that was the most appropriate for my small-scale research was non-probability or purposive sampling, as I wanted participants that would help inform my research. To ensure my investigation was applicable and relevant, I invited secondary school middle leaders that work in a context similar to mine to be part of my research. I deliberately selected a particular section of the wider population to include from the sample (Cohen et al., 2011). These participants came from secondary schools that met the criteria for my investigation through the *Education Counts*<sup>1</sup> website.

I obtained the *Schools' Directory*, which is an Excel spreadsheet of all 2,543 New Zealand schools from the *Education Counts* website, and used this as the basis for my sampling process (Education Counts, 2016). I narrowed my sample by firstly selecting all secondary schools from years 9-13 through the 'School Type' column. My second search

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<sup>1</sup> Education Counts is a government website which aims to increase the availability and accessibility of information about education statistics and research

was for Auckland schools which I narrowed down by using the 'Ministry of Education Local office' column. Thirdly, I selected schools ranging from a decile 1 to a decile 3 through the 'Decile' column. Finally, I ranked the remaining schools in order of the number of Pasifika students on their school roll through the 'Pasifika' column and using the 'Sort and Filter' tab to rank the schools largest to smallest in terms of their Pasifika roll. I removed the school I currently work at to avoid a conflict of interest. Twenty-five schools matched the criteria requirements of my research.

The secondary school middle leaders who were invited to form the sample for my research aligned with the description of middle leaders in *Leading from the middle* document, which states that middle leaders include; pedagogical leaders, team and syndicate leaders, pastoral leaders, teachers with specific or designated school responsibility, and coaches and mentors who help lead professional learning (Ministry of Education, 2012a). Examples include deans, head or assistant head of department/faculty, teacher in charge of a subject area, specialist classroom teacher or other similar secondary school middle leadership position.

In the six years I have taught at my current secondary school, I have developed links with other schools and teachers in the local community. In order to build rapport quickly in my interviews and ensure I was able to obtain the richest set of data possible, I enlisted the help of my connections when recruiting my sample. I utilised associates, one senior leader, three middle leaders and two teachers who were willing to assist but could not be involved in my research in order to avoid bias. I emailed them the participant information sheet (Appendix B) and the consent form (Appendix C) and they approached middle leaders who they considered to demonstrate culturally-responsive practice and encouraged them to contact me. In another instance snowball sampling was employed because at the completion of their interview, one participant recommended a colleague who had the necessary characteristics, and they also eventually contacted me to arrange an interview time (Somekh & Lewin, 2011).

## **Data analysis**

The following section will clarify and justify the data analysis procedures I undertook while simultaneously collecting data. The concurrence of data collection, coding, and analysis means the researcher can reflexively fine tune further data collection in the

course of the process (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). Analysis of qualitative data implies some sort of transformation (Gibbs, 2007). It involves organising, accounting for and explaining the data by making sense of participants' definitions of the situation while noting patterns and themes (Cohen et al., 2011). However, selecting, organising, analysing, reporting and interpreting data presents the researcher with several decisions and issues (Cohen et al., 2011). Because data collection and interpretation are unavoidably combined, my subjective views may have unfairly affected the choice of data represented and the interpretation placed on it (Cohen et al., 2011).

Therefore, my initial decision involved careful consideration of how I was going to approach my data analysis and present the data, while still ensuring validity and trustworthiness throughout the process. I chose to organise and present my analysis by theme using my research questions as a guiding framework. Consequently, all the relevant data from the interviews were collated to provide a collective answer which enabled patterns, relationships and comparisons to be easily investigated (Cohen et al., 2011). A major feature of qualitative data analysis is coding (Gibbs, 2007). The steps involved in coding the data from my seven semi-structured interviews are outlined below.

### **Coding semi-structured interviews**

Reality is socially constructed by my participants, and within an interpretive approach, theory evolves from the data. Consequently, qualitative data analysis uses inductive analysis. In inductive research, the researcher moves from observation to theory generation (Davidson & Tolich, 1999), and analysis is centred on the data and the themes that emerge from it (Bryman, 2012). To begin my analysis, each transcript was printed individually, using landscape orientation with double line spacing and a 4cm left-hand-side margin to write the codes. I also numbered every line of every document for easier retrieval of data (O'Toole & Beckett, 2013). A code is a label given to a piece of text that contains an idea and it enables the researcher to identify similar information and search and retrieve data with items that have the same code (Cohen et al., 2011).

Immediately after completing each interview transcription, I began to manually open code, line by line, on each transcript. Open coding is usually the initial form of coding undertaken by the researcher (Cohen et al., 2011). The code names originated from the

words or sentences participants used in their interviews. Identifying codes was an iterative process because I read and re-read the interviews numerous times changing replacing and refining codes. Codes were then typed up by question number and colour coded for each participant. Each initial code was manually cut into strips, synthesised, and grouped into categories, question by question, to establish the frequency of codes, similarities and differences, and key points. Each category was given a title based on similar words and concepts used by the participants (Cohen et al., 2011). Apart from identifying interesting data that represent research themes, coding in qualitative research serves other divergent functions such as identifying data that lies outside established research themes, signalling more data on a theme is needed, and identifying an entry as being worthy of storage within a thematic file (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). I realised I had to be discerning in order to reduce the large number of codes that emerged from my data. A summary of the findings that emerged from the coding process are presented according to each interview question in chapter four.

I also used memos during the coding and analysis of my semi-structured interviews. Memos are the written records of analysis and lie at the heart of qualitative analysis, because there is no other way of keeping a record of what the researcher is thinking or doing as they work with data (Somekh, & Lewin, 2011). During analysis and all subsequent writing, I noted any interpretations I had of the data in a diary which included feelings, ideas and hunches about the data (Somekh, & Lewin, 2011). On reflection, I regret not using memos earlier during the interview phase of my research, as I believe I would have identified additional detail if I had done so.

### **Validity, credibility and trustworthiness**

Validity refers to the extent to which a question accurately reflects the concept the researcher is actually looking for (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). According to Cohen et al (2011), the most practical way of achieving greater validity in interviews is to minimise the amount of bias as much as possible. Sources of bias consist of interviewer characteristics, respondent characteristics, and the content of the questions (Cohen et al., 2011). Although I was highly involved in the process of interviewing, there were a number of strategies I used to improve validity and minimise the amount of bias in my investigation. For example, I trialled the interview questions with colleagues beforehand to ensure I was aware of any possible problems related to the clarity of questions.

Establishing a positive rapport was made easier by the fact there were no obvious power relationships between myself as the interviewer and the participants because we were all middle leaders. Also, in order to encourage people to speak freely, it was imperative I promoted and maintained a culture of trust, transparency and confidentiality over the course of the research (O'Toole & Beckett, 2013). The transcripts were provided to participants to review after the interview, the data was only discussed with my supervisor and the taped recordings were only used to transcribe the interviews for the purposes of my research project. It was valuable to the validity of the study that I did not discuss the evolving data with anyone except my supervisor, as conversations conducted during fieldwork could dilute the aims of the project and affect how participants answer questions (O'Toole & Beckett, 2013).

Creswell (2009) highlights the importance of the researcher being consistent in the way they carry out their research. A similar process was used when conducting my semi-structured interviews because I adhered to my purposive sampling instructions, I did not alter the sequence of questions and I avoided bias prompting. Additional principles of validity in qualitative research include the concern for process rather than just outcomes, that data are descriptive and analysed inductively, and that catching meaning is essential (Cohen et al., 2011). I addressed these principles by firstly clarifying participant responses and elucidating terminology they used in the interview. During data analysis of the interviews, I used consistent coding for participants' responses and avoided seeking answers that supported my preconceived notions on the topic of culturally responsive practice (Cohen et al., 2011).

Equally, I believe it was my responsibility to be cognisant of my personal characteristics and the type and amount of capital I possess when conducting interviews with participants, as it may negatively influence the process and affect interpretations of the data. The relative social positions of the researcher and the participant can problematise interviewing as a natural way of getting the data (O'Toole & Beckett, 2013). For example, cultural capital are forms of knowledge and cultural preferences; social capital includes affiliations, family and religious heritage; and symbolic capital, which encompasses all other forms of capital including credentials (Thompson, 2005). Working in a multi-ethnic context similar to the middle leaders involved in my investigation has increased my understanding of cultural considerations. However, I was also conscious of the 'baggage'



I took into the interview situations and consequently I endeavoured to speak less and listen more during the interviews, and positively acknowledged all responses from participants.

In addition to validity, there are two other principles an effective qualitative researcher must employ throughout their investigation. Reliability refers to consistency, although from a qualitative research perspective, reliability is not the goal (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). It can also be called credibility, confirmability or dependability (Cohen et al., 2011). Subsequently, the following paragraphs will discuss the importance of credibility and trustworthiness and how I incorporated these into my research. Using semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data influenced the ways I established rigour in my investigation, as it was interpretive and therefore it would be difficult to produce the same data if the method was replicated (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). Kvale (1996) suggests that in interviewing there might be as many different interpretations of the qualitative data as there are researchers. Furthermore, education is shifting, ephemeral and dynamic (O'Toole & Beckett, 2013). Correspondingly, four key words have been adopted to guide researchers towards ensuring there is as much reliability as possible when conducting research: plausibility, credibility, resonance and transference (O'Toole & Beckett, 2013).

Firstly, research should collect and analyse data so a plausible argument can be mounted that cannot be contradicted by contrary data (O'Toole & Beckett, 2013). To avoid the influence of my personal opinions on culturally responsive practice to affect the way I conducted the research (Bryman, 2012), I did not ask any leading questions in my interviews, and only data that was shared by my participants was used in the analysis. Secondly, if others who have no stake in the research believe the project's results, then it can be termed credible (O'Toole & Beckett, 2013). Because I employed a subjectivist approach, the middle leaders in my study constructed their own social reality and multiple meanings were given to situations around culturally responsive practice. I maintained credibility by accurately recording and transcribing the interviews and returning each participants transcript to them via email for verification and validation. Finally, qualitative research does not seek to generalise to the whole population but rather to provide a description of what people said or did in a particular research location (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). Consequently, although my findings in relation to

culturally responsive practice may not be generalisable to other locations, the results presented accurately reflect the opinions of the participants in my study and may be transferred to other settings by those who read the completed thesis (Davidson & Tolich, 1999), or perhaps used by middle leaders in similar contexts at their discretion (O'Toole & Beckett, 2013).

Trustworthiness needs to be considered before, during and after conducting my semi-structured interviews. To be effective a bond of trust needed to develop between the participants and myself as the interviewer (O'Toole & Beckett, 2013). Before interviews began, all participants knew who I was, what I was researching and why. I assured interviewees that there were no right or wrong answers and I was not there to judge them, but rather to gain insight into their perceptions and experiences of how they practice cultural responsiveness as a middle leader in their school. Ethics clearance procedures to conduct my interviews was granted by Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) which gave participants a high degree of confidence that the data would remain confidential, not altered, and only used for the purpose of my research (O'Toole & Beckett, 2013). Additionally, because a number of my participants were recruited through mutual colleagues, an element of trust had already been established before the interviews were conducted.

## **Ethical issues**

Ethics is a process and it was important for me to think about ethics at every step of my research, from the design stage, through to what I reported in my findings (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). The knowledge produced by interviews depends on the social relationship of the interviewer and the interviewee, and it requires a delicate balance between concern for gaining knowledge and ethical respect for the integrity of the interview subject (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Subsequently, ethical issues pervade interview research. The following section will critically discuss the ethical issues I have considered in my investigation.

Various contexts and purposes of research will bring differing ethical challenges; consequently, no set of principles comes with a single application (O'Toole & Beckett, 2013). Alternatively, situated ethics acknowledges the uniqueness and complexity of each situation (Piper & Simons, 2011). Interviewing as a face-to-face social activity can

be intrusive because participants have a high degree of exposure; therefore it was my responsibility to take appropriate care to minimise the degree of intrusiveness and to minimise the risk of negative consequences in the short and long term for the participants (Lindsay, 2010). For example, interview participants did not need to answer any questions they found difficult for any reason, and they had the option to terminate the interview at any stage or withdraw up to ten days after data collection had taken place.

Informed consent for my participants required informing them about: the purpose, content and procedures of my study; how I reported and disseminated the research; an outline of any foreseeable risks and how they would be handled; and the right to voluntary non-participation and withdrawal from the project. Signed copies of consent forms for participation were collected (Cohen et al., 2011). The use of a participant information sheet (Appendix B) and a consent form (Appendix C) allowed me to inform potential participants about what the research involved before they consented to participate.

Although anonymity could not be given to participants as I was interviewing them face-to-face, I limited the likelihood of identification and promised confidentiality in regard to their identity and the data they provided (Cohen et al., 2011). I did this by treating all information given to me by my participants as confidential. Secondly, the coding of my interviews allowed important information to be used, while still maintaining the anonymity of the participant to the readers of the completed thesis. Thirdly, I did not include interviewees' names or any other identifying information on transcripts, and codes were kept separate from the data to which they applied (Lindsay, 2010). All electronic data was password-protected. Confidentiality allows people to talk in confidence but they can also refuse the publication of any material they think might harm them (Piper & Simons, 2011). Finally, it was critical to the ethics process to avoid deception. Deception may occur when the researcher does not tell the truth, tells lies or compromises the truth (Cohen et al., 2011). To minimise the risk of deception, I informed my participants about the purpose of my study at the outset of the investigation, and highlighted any risks or discomforts that may be experienced by engaging in the research and ways in which I could minimise or remove these (Health Research Council of New Zealand, 2016).

## **Cultural considerations**

I also reduced harm by respecting cultural factors and paying attention to cultural responsiveness when conducting my interviews. For example, Jenkin (2005) needed to contemplate the implications around the ethnicity of the teacher participants in her study, which made her more aware of possible potential pitfalls and how to minimise or remove these (Jenkin, 2005). When researching in New Zealand, it is important to demonstrate a commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi because it forms part of our constitution. It was vital to consider the three broad principles suggested by the 1988 Royal Commission on Social Policy when working with my participants: partnership, participation and protection (Ministry of Education, 2012c). How I attended to each of the three principles will be outlined below.

In relation to partnerships, I aimed to develop and maintain meaningful relationships with the participants in my research (Health Research Council of New Zealand, 2016). I treated my participants how I would want to be treated. Because interested participants contacted me if they wished to participate in the study, there was no coercion or harassment from me as the researcher. At the outset of the interview I was transparent and truthful about my research and its aims, and the benefits to myself, my participants and the community. To help grow respectful relationships with my participants, I provided hospitality during the interviews and thanked my participants. I also showed my gratitude by giving each secondary school middle leader a small koha at the completion of the data collection phase to recognise their knowledge and their time.

The principal involvement of participants in my research was one of information sharing through semi-structured interviews. However, their involvement was voluntary and I ensured participants were aware they had a right not to participate, or to not answer any questions. I included active validation during my interviews by asking for further understanding of the key terms used by participants, which ensured the secondary school middle leaders were participating and I was not interpreting the meaning of the language they used. I let the participants know they had a right to ask questions about the study and their role. After I transcribed the data from the participants who consented to be interviewed, they had the option to approve their transcripts to ensure they agree, as well as having an opportunity to change or remove any information. I also

offered to inform the participants of the results of the study by either emailing or posting them a summary of the findings.

In relation to protection, transparent consultation with a number of people was completed at the outset of the project to help design my research and to ensure I respected the culture and diversity of my participants. As a result of the consultations I decided not to invite teachers or senior leaders to be a part of my research and, rather, just invite middle leaders to focus my research and make it more specific and relevant to my qualification and my current position. The consultation affected my research question, and I spent a lot of time ensuring it matched my research aim and my epistemological position. After advice from Pasifika lecturers, I also decided to not exclusively interview Pasifika teachers in my investigation, but rather invite middle leaders from all ethnic backgrounds to participate. Through the consultation process I learnt how to ethically recruit participants. I also included questions in my interview around obligations to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

## **Summary**

This chapter has validated the methodological approach, research design and data collection methods I used to examine the perceptions and understandings of culturally responsive practices carried out by secondary school middle leaders in low decile, multi-ethnic settings in New Zealand. A step by step discussion of the data analysis procedures is also provided, with a justification for using an inductive approach based on the themes that emerged from my data. In the succeeding chapter, I will present the results, relevant to each question from my seven participants.

## **Chapter 4: Presentation of findings**

Chapter Four presents and explains the results from my research investigation. I used seven semi-structured interviews to examine the perceptions and understandings of culturally responsive practices carried out by secondary school middle leaders in low decile, multi-ethnic settings in New Zealand. To begin the chapter, information about the research participants is examined, including their demographic data. Further detail is also provided about how the findings are presented. The results are organised in order of questions. Questions One and Two are discussed, then the main themes that emerged from Questions Three to Ten are displayed in table format with commentary and participant quotes, which are used as evidence to support the findings. To conclude the chapter, a brief summary is provided.

### **Research participants**

Purposive sampling was the most appropriate method for my small-scale study, as I wanted to recruit participants that would help inform my research in order to ensure it was applicable and relevant to where I am currently positioned in my teaching career. Initially, I decided I needed a minimum of six interviews with leaders in middle leadership positions in secondary schools to ensure there were sufficient data to be analysed, but I hoped to interview eight middle leaders. I was only able to complete seven interviews because many middle leaders found it difficult to find the time to be interviewed. The invited participants aligned with the description of middle leaders from the *Leading from the middle* (Ministry of Education, 2012a) document, which states that middle leaders include: pedagogical leaders; team and syndicate leaders; pastoral leaders; teachers with specific or designated school responsibility; and coaches and mentors who help lead professional learning. 25 schools in Auckland, similar in context to mine, matched the criteria for my investigation. I interviewed seven middle leaders from six different secondary schools. Participants are numbered according to the order in which they were interviewed.

Table 4.1 Participants' demographic information

Participant number	Gender	Ethnicity	Years of teaching experience
One	Female	Tongan	11-15 years
Two	Female	Pākehā	1-5 years
Three	Female	Fijian/Samoan	6-10 years
Four	Female	Tongan	11-15 years
Five	Male	NZ European	16-20 years
Six	Male	Māori/European	6-10 years
Seven	Female	Samoan	21-25 years

In general the participants represented a mix of ethnicities and were experienced practitioners. In retrospect it would have been valuable to have more voice from male middle leaders. However this was not possible because only two male middle leaders responded to the invitation to participate.

## Presentation of findings

The semi-structured interviews consisted of ten questions and were designed to answer the two sub-questions of my investigation:

1. What are secondary school middle leaders' understandings and experiences of the practices of 'culturally responsive' practice?
2. What are secondary school middle leaders' perceptions of the challenges encountered in regards to 'culturally responsive' practice in their school?

The subsequent section will present and analyse data from the seven interviews. Questions One and Two are discussed, then significant sub-themes from Questions Three to Nine are identified separately, and presented in table form. The 'Number of responses' indicates how many middle leaders commented on that particular sub-theme and these are listed in descending order from the most number of responses to the least. I have only presented and examined the most common themes throughout the interviews, unless an individual theme had a point of interest. All seven participants added supplementary comments when given the opportunity in Question Ten. Data from participants that commented on previously discussed sub-themes in Question Ten were added to the data in the appropriate questions to avoid any data replication. New sub-themes that emerged in Question Ten are organised by participant number.

## Findings

Question One asked the participants to describe their current leadership role in their schools. The main role of responsibility for two participants was that of pastoral leader or dean, and five participants' main role of responsibility was pedagogical or curriculum leader. One of the participants held two roles of responsibility - dean and curriculum leader. Additionally, three other participants held more than one specific school responsibility in their organisation. For example, one female participant was a dean and held one other designated school responsibility. Another female participant was teacher-in-charge of a subject and held one other designated school responsibility. One male participant was a curriculum leader and held two other designated school responsibilities. Apart from middle leadership responsibilities, all seven participants also had teaching commitments within their school.

Question Two asked the participants to describe the ethnic make-up of the students at their schools. As discussed in the Methodology chapter, the sample of 25 schools that met the criteria for my research all had a high proportion of Pasifika students, which was evident in participants responses with comments like; "predominantly Pacific Island ethnicities", "99% Pasifika – Māori make up", "predominantly Samoan and Tongan", and "majority Pasifika". All seven participants had a very good understanding of the ethnic make-up of their student population. For example:

*Participant One: 90% Pacific Islander and 10% other. The Pacific Islander make-up, the majority of them are Samoan, it would be 60% Samoan, 30% Tongan and 10% Niuean and Cook Islanders.*

*Participant Three: It is predominantly Pacific Island ethnicities. We do have a growing Māori population of students coming through, but yeah it is predominantly, I would say probably about 85% of Pacific Island descent.*

One participant whose school had a student population of up to "90% from the South Pacific", highlighted a particular issue around how some students at the school identified themselves:

*Participant Seven: And the Māori would be less than I would say 4%, and that is with students that identify themselves. We have got a lot of half cast, but if they had to choose one, it wouldn't be Māori. So if they were half Māori, half Tongan, they would identify with Tongan as their first preference.*



**Question Three: What are your understandings of the term culturally responsive practice?**

Table 4.2 Participants' understandings of the term 'culturally responsive practice'

Sub-themes	Number of responses
Recognising, reflecting and responding to students and their community	7
Having an awareness, understanding and respecting cultures	6
Going beyond surface level relationships and ethnicity of students to get to know the individual	4

Sub theme 1: Participants' understandings of the term 'culturally responsive practice' highlighted the importance of knowing their students and community, and responding appropriately. As Participant Two stated, such practice is not just about responding:

*Participant Two: I think it is probably about recognition and reflection in terms of the word responsive as well. So we are responding to the different cultures in our class or in our community and them being able to reflect on how we approach them or how we learn from them and support learning, in terms of their individual culture I guess.*

Sub theme 2: Acknowledging and respecting all cultures was expressed by one participant as a way of understanding students and improving teaching and learning:

*Participant Seven: So I suppose to me, what that would look like, is teaching and communicating across cultures. And that means again, teachers should be aware, or be made aware of the different ways how students learn. And if teachers understand that, then the better the teaching and learning is really.*

Sub theme 3: Responding to a student's cultural background was described as more than just responding to their ethnic group. Additional factors, such as where a student was born, and how they learn were also important for teachers to consider.

*Participant Three: Well to me it means as a teacher being responsive and understanding to the cultures that make up my classroom. So, and I think it goes beyond their actual ethnic background, it's like the culture as in the society that they live in. So for example we could have a Samoan student who was born in Samoa and who has just recently migrated to New Zealand, and I also have another Samoan student who is born in New Zealand, has grown up in the New Zealand school system. They can both be Samoans but their perception of being a Samoan is quite different. So I need to be able as a teacher to understand where they are coming from, what world are they coming from and just not assume that all Samoans are the same.*

*Participant Five: But it is dealing with the individual. Who are they? How do they learn? This Māori person might not learn like the other Māori person.*

#### **Question Four: What are your understandings of the practices of culturally responsive practice?**

*Table 4.3* Participants' understandings of the practices of culturally responsive practice

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>
Learning relationships between student and teacher, teacher and leaders work relationships and family relationships are key factors	5
Approaches and practices that are appropriate for teachers, students and school	5
Knowing, understanding and using the languages and different cultural values with students and families	5
Understanding the 'whole' student and their learning needs	4

Sub theme 1: Results from Question Four clearly show the importance of learning relationships between middle leaders and their students, and that it can be a shared process:

*Participant Three: It is also about, almost moving away from me being a teacher, and when we are building those relationships I too am learning from them and understanding where they are coming from and you know I can pick up a lot of things they can teach me, so that the lines, I don't know, they become quite blurred between who is the teacher, who is the learner. Actually it can change.*

Work relationships with other staff members were also seen as vital as suggested by Participant Four:

*Participant Four: It is a team effort and it's the same as, in that way that will ensure the practices is culturally responsive when you have other people to work with and to share your ideas and your practices, what you are doing in class with them.*

Sub theme 2: Although some of the participants' responses were quite broad in this sub theme, there were some obvious commonalities. Participants Two, Three and Five talked about the importance of adjusting their teaching practice and lesson planning, while participants Four and Seven emphasised the point that it is the teacher's responsibility to be the role model in the classroom. Participants Two and Seven both mentioned the value of collaborative learning with multi-ethnic students. Participant Seven gave more specific examples of what culturally responsive practice would look like in the classroom, for example:

- The aim and learning intention need to be made specific;
- Providing speaking and writing frames help give students a pathway;
- Providing communicative tasks force students to think, read, speak and listen;
- Scaffolding work so students learn to be more independent; and
- Classroom activities need to be student centred to encourage students do all the talking.

Sub theme 3: Participant Six drew attention to the importance of having the confidence to use the language of the students to help motivate them in the classroom:

*Participant Six: So I use always welcomings, basic instruction in as many language, you have got to be tri-lingual or quad –lingual if you can. Just to show the kids that ok I am trying to speak and I am going to embarrass myself in your language, so now embarrass yourself in my language when I am teaching you anatomy and physiology, like give it a go, you know, cause here I am.*

According to Participant One, communicating clearly with parents in their mother tongue is also considered culturally responsive practice because it assists with mutual understanding:

*Participant One: Ok so using the language of the culture that I am in, using the values. So for example surveying parents, ringing parents and talking to them in the language that they know. So I think the main*

*thing is language so that they understand where we are coming from and then also we get an understanding of where they are coming from.*

**Sub theme 4:** The fundamental idea that emerged from participants in this sub theme centred around knowing learners and their needs. Participant Five commented on the significance of tracking, mentoring and talking to students. Participant Three mentioned the importance of utilising students' prior knowledge and the cultural tool kit they bring to the classroom.

While it was not a common theme throughout the seven interviews I thought Participant Seven, an experienced Samoan female middle leader, raised an interesting point that should be added to the commentary:

*Participant Seven: So you don't have to be Pasifika to be culturally responsive. You just need to I suppose, examine your own beliefs and attitudes towards yourself, towards your students, their families, their community.*

**Question Five: As a member of middle management, what are your perceptions of the challenges you have confronted leading this multi-ethnic school?**

*Table 4.4* Participants' perceptions of the challenges faced in their schools

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>
Challenges with other staff members:	5
a. Staff not willing to change or get on board with initiatives that will benefit students	
b. Staff that are ineffective and who do not pull their weight	
c. Problems with staff understanding culture	
Challenges with students not being engaged in school and in class	4
Challenges around communicating with parents and families and getting them on board to support the student	4
Challenges personally as a middle leader being unaware of students background, particularly when it is different to their own	2

Themes for Question Five were divided into four main categories. The biggest challenge faced by middle leaders in their multi-ethnic schools was about other staff members.

**Sub theme 1:** The following quotes summarise the frustrations of two middle leaders when attempting to introduce school wide initiatives and address issues with staff:

*Participant Five: But the staff don't necessarily know how to deal with it so, that is why I said earlier, I don't think probably a third of the staff don't know how to talk about the information. And the ones who do, we try and teach them but they don't always listen so you have to say*

*it about 60 times before they actually get into it. It is a bit frustrating I think because I have got a lady in my department that's like that. You tell them how to do it, they write it down somewhere, and then they go and do it but they don't carry on practicing it.*

*Participant Six: And for me with staff, I find that there, again is denial, through laziness. I believe it is laziness. A lot of teachers don't want to upskill; they claim this life-learner thing but they are not. And when you try to have these hard conversations, or these courageous conversations regarding their inadequacies, it is a lot of bullshit. It is lies to cover up. When if they just acknowledge what had happened and made a change they wouldn't go through the same shit all the time.*

Sub theme 2: Four participants expressed their concerns regarding the perceived challenges with students' attitudes towards school and their motivation for learning. One participant has noticed similarities between students from different generations:

*Participant Four: My main challenge is the students, my focus is on the students and how there has been a shift in terms of attention within the classroom, in terms of attendances, in terms of the work effort. But the young people now, their self-motivation to complete their educational career, I feel is, sometimes feel is not there, like how we used to experience back in the 80's and 90's.*

Sub theme 3: Apart from communication issues with families, getting parents 'on board' to support their child to succeed in school was also a challenge for four middle leaders. Participant Three suggested that in her experience with working with Pasifika families, they tended not to challenge people in positions of authority. Instead, they just accepted what was said and there was no dialogue about how everyone can support the learner together. Participant Three associated this trait with part of the parents' upbringing. Participant Seven also alluded to how students from Pasifika backgrounds are taught not to challenge, critique and ask questions which are required of a school culture. In both instances, there is a mismatch between the culture of the school and the culture of the Pasifika families.

Sub theme 4: Incidentally, even though a number of participants commented that it is a challenge when other staff members do not understand the students' culture, two participants suggested that not being personally aware of the different cultural backgrounds students are bringing to the classroom poses challenges for them.

*Participant Two: So I guess I kind of make assumptions based on my students. But I kind of have to learn as I go in some respects and I might make some*

*errors that a teacher who is a bit more aware, or had a more ethnic background, or diverse background, might be less inclined to do.*

### **Question Six: How do you manage these challenges?**

*Table 4.5* How participants' manage the challenges

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>
Communication: Conducting conversations between middle leaders and staff	6
Interacting with students to gain an awareness and understanding of the whole package a student brings to the classroom	5
Implementing school wide initiatives to help students and having support from senior leaders and other middle leaders	5
Communication: Conducting conversations between middle leaders and families	3

Sub theme 1: Managing challenges as a middle leader required participants to have regular dialogue with other staff members. The reasons included: notifying staff about students' pastoral information; discussing student achievement; and sometimes having difficult conversations.

*Participant One:* *But it's just communication. I think it's huge. I mean the teachers don't like it when all of a sudden that student has been away for like two days and like then you tell them, that's really annoying to them. I think as the Dean I have learnt that as soon as you get information in, it has got to go out.*

*Participant Seven:* *But I have also got to ask the right questions because you know we talk about these challenges, for me being an appraiser I have learnt to become better at my job because I have learnt the art of questioning. You tell me your story, but it is the questions, and it makes them think about it. I don't need to tell them how it is, I just say 'so what does that look like'? And they are sort of just sitting there going okay. Because they are tricky, they are not one where you can sort of give an answer, it is one you have to really think about.*

Sub theme 2: Having awareness, not only of their academic ability, but all aspects of the student, was a strategy discussed by five participants as a way to help manage challenges with students. Similarly, for this to happen required communication - conversations between middle leaders and students. A greater awareness lead to a greater understanding of each student:

*Participant Four:* *One strategy I use is making myself as a teacher aware of the package should I say, that each student brings into the classroom,*

*and each package. I know in a positive way I am talking about their cultural background, their family background, their reading background, and their academic background they are bringing. So in a way I have to do a lot of homework in finding out those backgrounds and it doesn't take long to understand a child, a student. So one of strategies I always use in the beginning, in the first week you know is introduction. I tell them all about myself, my background, my family, my children in an attempt to open them up to talk to me and so I model that. So it is the whole awareness of the Fale (House), the Fale Tapa Wha (four sided house).*

Sub theme 3: Underachievement and other challenges faced at the participants' multi-ethnic schools were addressed by school wide initiatives and applicable strategies for each issue. For example, two participants discussed initiatives that were in place to help raise Māori achievement in their schools, and Participant Five commented on how Individual Education Programmes (IEPs) and new courses were created at his school to help with underachieving students. Having support from other middle leaders and senior leaders was seen as an essential factor in managing challenges. Participants Two and Four considered how the senior management were supportive and offered guidance. Other middle leaders, such as deans, were relied upon to deal with student achievement issues and contacting home.

Sub theme 4: Whether it was at academic mentoring meetings or parent teacher interviews, over the phone, through email, having hui (meetings), or conducting home visits, open communication with families was considered another way to manage the challenges faced in multi-ethnic schools. Participant Six talked about the importance of home visits at his school to keep parents informed about their children and having hui (meetings) to set goals:

*Participant Six: In regards to the whanau (family), I just go door knocking. I just go to four-five homes a week. Like I am doing them tomorrow last period, I have organised four home visits. I will just rock up with the information, knock on the door, speak to Mum at the door. Cause if they are not wanting to come to us, we have to go to them otherwise they are not going to care you know. And if no one is home, we leave a note, please contact us and then we just keep ringing and keep ringing and keep going.*

*We have hui, whanau (family) hui here. We supply food and during the conversations we set goal amongst our whanau (families)*

**Question Seven: What do you perceive as being effective practice to ensure your school and staff are culturally responsive to their students?**

The results for Question Seven are arranged differently to the other research questions because the themes emerged in three categories: (1) the effective practice that is currently occurring in participants schools; (2) issues influencing culturally responsive practice; and (3) perceptions of what effective practice should look like.

*Table 4.6* Participants' perceptions of effective practice to ensure their school and staff are culturally responsive to their students

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>
<u>(1) Effective practice that is currently occurring in participants schools:</u>	<u>Total:</u> 17
Middle leaders and staff network with each other to provide resources, advice and support for one another	6
In the classroom middle leaders have an awareness of the background, and respect the name and identity of each student, use the language of the student and ensure they have a voice	4
The school and senior management support students and recognise the importance of communicating with parents to help their students	4
Having cultural leaders that represent the different core ethnicities in the school	3
<u>(2) Issues influencing culturally responsive practice:</u>	<u>Total:</u> 3
Professional development is not consistent and staff input is not sought	3
<u>(3) Perceptions of what effective practice should look like:</u>	<u>Total:</u> 3
Professional development should be on-going with more support for those new to teaching at multi-ethnic schools	3

Participant Six concisely stated that relationships are the essence of what effective practice is at his school:

*Participant Six: Well we go back to that old chestnut of relationships. That's the key to all of this. And we are starting to break walls down through that avenue. And then acknowledgment of culture through relationship.*

Comparably, the examples of effective practice in sub theme One that are currently occurring in participants schools all require relationships as a basis.



Sub theme 1.1: Various examples of how middle leaders and staff network and support each other were commented on. Some examples include:

- Staff running professional development, stepping up and providing resources (Participant Two);
- Supporting teachers and encouraging young staff to make the lesson interactive (Participant Seven); and
- Having conversations with teachers, giving suggestions and encourage other teachers to try (Participant One).

Sub theme 1.2: Apart from knowing the whole student, as previously discussed in Questions Six, respecting the name and identity of students, and using the language of students not only in greetings, but as part of their learning, is also considered effective practice:

*Participant One: I mean I think that's one of the things people forget too. It's like the name of a child and their identity is really important and if you stuff that up, and you don't want to try to honour them and respect them, and respect their parents who named them, it's probably you know the name of a grandparent, so if you stuff around with that name you might have lost them first up.*

*Participant Seven: But we want their thought processes, if it's Tongan, then write Tongan. When I talk about Tsunamis for example, I always go, it is that whole acknowledging of that culture. I always go 'so Sione, so what is Tsunamis in Tongan'? And then he goes oh it's this and this. 'Great, how do you spell it? We will put it up there'. And he's looking at me going? You know, what is it in Samoan? What is it in Filipino? When the students see it they go 'oh can we do that'? And I said 'but we are discussing it'. When you go to write about it, you will know, oh my gosh, I know what it is in English, they can make that connection.*

Sub theme 1.3: Although the responses were broad, support from the school generally, and senior management more specifically is considered to be culturally responsive:

- The school gives students a high level of support (Participant Five);
- The school communicates and works with what students need or support what parents might require (Participant Two);
- When I sit back and reflect and consider students, the school is doing a lot to help (Participant Four); and

- School helps students where the environment can determine outcomes (Participant Four).

Sub theme 1.4: Three participants stated that having cultural leaders representing the majority ethnic groups was a practice they thought assisted their schools to be culturally responsive to the students. Participant Two suggested it assisted the schools' relationship with the community:

*Participant Two: I think we have a really good relationship with our community. So the school has recognised certain leaders in the different cultures among staff. We have a really strong Samoan leader in among our staff who does the, he has evenings with the parents, the Samoan parents. We also have Tongan staff who do the same thing. We have got Māori staff who do that.*

Participant Four commented that her school also had Māori, Cook Island, Samoan, Niuean and Tongan cultural leaders because the understanding at her school is that to be effective, is to go back to your root or base. Even though she thinks the school is doing their best, there is a bigger problem with this method:

*Participant Four: So we are trying to respond culturally to these kids here that grew up in a mixed culture that are not really Tongan and are not really Kiwis, but in between. So I feel it is good to try that. And at the same time there should be a different model that we need to look, no foresee now, of an improved model that could cater for the two environment that these kids. These are a different generation of kids that are growing up now, they are New Zealand born Pacific Islanders, they are not purely Pasifika and they are not purely Kiwis because they grow up there.*

Sub theme 2.1: Even though a number of schools conducted culturally responsive professional development with their staff, three participants considered it to be inconsistent, and two participants felt staff should have more input and be consulted on the professional development.

*Participant Two: I would find it useful to have more PD on, more development on, I guess on our learners and on Pacific cultures and it's been a bit ad hoc and it's been a bit kind of do it yourself at times.*

*Participant Three: There is no real buy in from staff. And that is because I believe that we haven't shared all our opinions or ideas have not been considered in order to make this effective. Do you know what I mean? It has sort of just been given to us, this is it, this is what we are doing.*

Sub theme 3.1: Results from sub theme 3.1 indicate that effective practice equates to increasing the amount of time spent on professional development in schools and ensuring that it is ongoing. Participant Three suggested that it could be done with staff members in different departments to help get a fresh set of eyes and to keep the motion running:

*Participant Three: So I would consider that effective practice, if we are shown what it could look like, if they give us a lot more time to maybe work with another professional, not necessarily in our same department but someone else in the school where we are sort of just observing one another, trying to apply what these culturally responsive pedagogy is all about and then just make that ongoing throughout the year.*

Participant Seven also commented about the importance of utilising staff members within the school:

*Participant Seven: And I think that is the problem with my school. They don't utilise the strengths of the Pacific teachers, But we have got some fantastic non-Pacific teachers. Ask them what works.*

Two participants discussed the need for more support for beginning teachers and those new to teaching in South Auckland:

*Participant Two: So I think some better support for staff who, and also not just myself, but other teachers who are new to teaching at a school like this, who may have come from a different background or their teaching experience might not be at a really multi-ethnic school as well, so then they are having to adjust practices quite a lot.*

*Participant Seven: So I think you know effective practices, especially induction with new teachers, if they are new to South Auckland, new to teaching, then that has to happen. Because they can have the worst experience at the school that I am at.*

There were no more common themes in this section, however there were other individual suggestions on what effective practice should look like:

- Building stronger partnerships with our families in the community and making them feel valued and what they say does count as it supports students (Participant Three);
- Principal should be living and breathing cultural responsiveness in all their dealings and deputies should be modelling it (Participant Three);
- We need a model of effective practice to fit the Kiwi-born Pasifika students (Participant Four); and

- Teachers need to step out of their comfort zone and reduce their authority because that is where respect comes in (Participant Seven).

**Question Eight: Do you have any culturally specific examples of how you or other secondary school middle leaders at this school have been responsive?**

Table 4.7 Participants' examples of how they or other middle leaders have been responsive

Sub-themes	Number of responses
Giving students responsibilities and empowering them both in and out of the classroom	5
Middle leaders dedicate significant amounts of time outside of teaching hours to support other staff, families and students in extra-curricular or personal matters	5
Cultural values are consulted and considered before decisions are made that affect students, families and community	4
Being reflective and showing vulnerability	4
Effective teaching and behaviour strategies in the classroom	4
Continuous open communication with parents	3

Of interest is the notable difference between Question Seven where participants were asked to give their perceptions of effective culturally responsive practice, and Question Eight, where they were asked to give examples of cultural responsiveness in their school. It would appear that there is little alignment between perceptions of effective culturally responsive practice, and what is actually occurring. The sub themes in Question Eight were generally based around what the middle leaders were personally doing in their school.

Sub theme 1: The notion of empowering students' was a common example of being responsive, both in the classroom and in relation to the students' cultures:

*Participant Three: I think it is really powerful for students to have something to contribute to the end result which is the assessment. And to be asked questions for answers that their peers don't know, it is almost empowering to them, that like yeah I know something.*

*Participant Six: Acknowledgement. It is acknowledging of Māori culture. And it empowers our boys, cause there is set criteria and they have to take Te Reo, they have to do Kapa Haka.*

Sub theme 2: Five participants highlighted that being responsive also meant spending time after teaching hours to assist families and students:

- Participants One, Two and Six all commented on how cultural leaders or head of departments 'step up' during language weeks and promote their culture through optional professional development, performances, food, greetings and pronunciation;
- Participant Four discussed the commitment involved in tutoring a group for the Polynesian Festival;
- Participant One even mentioned attending graduations, ceremonies, and seeing families after hours, especially for bereavement; and
- Participant Seven went to watch her students play sport on the weekends.

Sub theme 3: It was apparent that the middle leaders in the investigation believed it was important to abide by the values of the cultures in the school where possible:

*Participant One: We had a Tongan meeting last week Monday with the parents, we called them. We were just talking about it in the staff room and then it just became, ok we need to do this for our Tongan community. They need to know that these kids are not demonstrating the values that we think that they should be demonstrating, which is respect for your elders.*

*Participant Four: When it comes to placing kids in their positions which has some kind of the status, you have to consider the status of the kids, and their background and at the same time as their academic part of success and their achievement. And we have to place, as a tutor you have to place them, position them. And that's major for a lot of schools, it causes tensions. So culturally what I did was I had to seek the support of the other Tongan teachers who are in the cultural group. I wanted to make it right.*

Sub theme 4: Four participants talked about how it was beneficial, especially with their students, to be open and even show some vulnerability:

*Participant Three: So it almost feels like I am trying to show them that because I am a teacher it doesn't mean I know everything. Like you can teach me lots too, like what they have to show me, they can teach me lots. And it's sharing that power between me and them and them and me, the students, and understanding that all of us are in this journey.*

*Participant Two: Just asking for help and recognising I think, that I am not so familiar perhaps with it, getting more familiar the longer I am here but perhaps in some instances I might be a bit out of my depth and so asking for help when required*

Sub theme 5: A number of participants believed that quality teaching was at the heart of being responsive. For example:

- As Participant Two has become more familiar with students she has changed the programme and hardly ever reuses lesson plans;
- Participant Five recommended that knowing your subject area was crucial; and
- Instead of telling students the answers, Participant Seven creates a pathway for them to get there.

Sub theme 6: Family involvement to support students' learning was considered important, and one way to ensure this happened was through open communication. Not only did the middle leaders contact home regularly, share information and have meetings, but one participant also encouraged parents to have their say:

*Participant Seven: And I say to the parents, tell me about your child, tell me about John. And I get the parents to tell me what they see as their strengths. And that's being inclusive. I have learnt so much about these students because the parents will tell you.*

**Question Nine: How do you ensure obligations to Te Tiriti o Waitangi are met?**

Two initial themes are presented here, then the remaining findings for Question Nine are presented in three sections which represent the three Treaty principles of participation, protection and partnership. Table 4.8 presents all the themes discussed for Question Eight, rather than the just the most common ones because each idea is valid.

Table 4.8 How participants' ensure obligations to Te Tiriti o Waitangi are met

Sub-themes	Number of responses
Although Treaty obligations are important, and we are aware of Māori students, all students and cultures are treated equally in the classroom and around school	4
In a predominantly Pasifika school the students don't care much for Māori but we have to try and change that culture	1
<u>Participation</u>	
Identifying, being more aware and tracking Māori students and their needs in the classroom	5
Māori staff are consulted on strategic goals with senior management and the Board of Trustees	1
The importance of allowing our families to express their thoughts	1
<u>Protection</u>	
Using Māori customs and language at school, pronouncing it correctly and including it in the curriculum and every-day use	7
<u>Partnership</u>	
Te Tiriti o Waitangi has become a priority and part of an everyday focus at school	5
Consequences, causes and effects, and learning from a contract by looking at different perspectives	1

A number of interesting points were raised in Question Nine including:

- All seven participants had an understanding of the Te Tiriti o Waitangi when questioned and did not hesitate to put forward ideas on how they thought they, or their school were ensuring obligations were being met;
- Four participants suggested that in their multi-ethnic school, no one culture was prioritised over another, rather all students were treated equally;
- Protection of Māori language and customs was the most common way participants ensured obligations to the Treaty were met. This was commonly achieved through the curriculum in subjects like Social Studies, in school traditions like Pōwhiri (welcomes) and during Māori language week; and
- Although the topic was sometimes covered in specialist subjects, five participants recognised that the Treaty was naturally becoming part of their everyday practice, and an increasing focus for their schools.

### Question Ten: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about this topic?

All participants considered cultural responsiveness to be important. Additional sub-themes are presented by participant number.

Table 4.9 Participants' additional comments on the topic

Additional sub-themes	Participant number
Cultural responsiveness also includes the school environment	1
My ethnic background may influence my future career options	2
Admitting our weaknesses will be important if cultural responsiveness is going to be effective	3
Cultural responsiveness is part of the bigger picture of how a teacher functions combined with the instructional and management function	4
Cultural responsiveness also applies to staff interactions as well as with the students'	5
There is a clear line between teachers who are and who are not culturally responsive	6
We need more teachers that are culturally responsive in every sense of the word to become effective leaders and effective agents of change by being in roles of responsibility	7

Participant One: Hanging Tapa cloths and having cultural patterns displayed in school buildings are examples of how cultural values are included in Participant One's school environment. She used an analogy to portray how she believes this contributes to cultural responsiveness:

*Participant One: So I'm from this village right. If I go into this village I know it's not my village and then when I go there, I'm really respectful but it doesn't feel like mine. Yeah? So people are like 'hey you're new to this so you be quiet and no loud laughing, no like screaming and yelling, no playing around ok?' So that's the concept of when you are at someone else's house you just make sure you are respectful. So I think the school and their culturally responsive practice, has tried to make this feel like it's their house, like the kids' house.*

Participant Two: Because she is in her first teaching job and it is at a multi-ethnic school, Participant Two contemplated whether her ethnicity may influence her future career options as it is different to that of the students:

*Participant Two: Currently I am on a curriculum path because of my current position, but I am considering whether I would like to go down a pastoral path. I have been reflecting on the interaction deans have with families; having to communicate and having the language to relate*



*to families, understanding the different home environments like lots of relatives living at home, different primary care givers. And I wonder if maybe I am lacking confidence to tackle these challenges because of my background and therefore maybe I should stay on a curriculum path but I am still thinking about that.*

Participant Three: Participant Three believed that in order for cultural responsiveness to be truly effective, it was important to build partnerships between the school and home and acknowledge the faults and address them, rather than trying to comply with requirements:

*Participant Three: And how do we work together. How do we admit our weaknesses for something like this, rather than trying to make out that 'oh no no no we are doing this, we are doing that, yeah we are ticking these boxes'. But I do think it is a collective thing.*

Participant Four: Participant Four justified the significance of cultural responsiveness as one of three important functions of a teacher:

*Participant Four: There is this part, the instructional function of a middle leader or a middle person, or a teacher in the classroom. And there is the managerial things, the management functional part of you, and there is the cultural responsiveness part. It is part of a bigger parcel of a function of a teacher in order to make us effective.*

Participant Five: It was suggested that cultural responsiveness not only applies to student interactions, but it also extends to how staff interact:

*Participant Five: Cause it's probably not culturally responsiveness to the students, it is probably the staff as well. I don't think a lot of people probably think about that I think. Because if I go to the staffroom and I sit there with my colleague and somebody wants to know something they always come to us. They won't go to the senior leadership people, they come to us because I think the way we deal with them is a bit better. So we will sit and listen and find out what needs to be done and then we will give them whatever answer we need to give them.*

Participant Six: Participant Six felt guilty for profiling, but he was so frustrated with staff that he felt were lazy and resistant to change that he felt he could clearly identify those staff that are and are not culturally responsive:

*Participant Six: I think from my perspective, and cause it is only because I have been teaching for eight years, is that there is a clear line in the sand that has been drawn between teachers that do this and teachers who don't. And it is a generational thing. You can pretty much put a birth*

*date, you could actually guess how old they are, what culture they are, where they are from, what their background is.*

Participant Seven: Participant Seven was extremely passionate about the topic of cultural responsiveness and that being a middle leader requires her to be an agent of change. But if it is going to be embedded in the school culture, other effective leaders need to be in roles of responsibility:

*Participant Seven: So to be an agent of change, these wonderful teachers that do have the relationship, the rapport, need to be in roles of responsibility because then they are able to. You need to be in roles of responsibility. That is the only way it is going to happen.*

## **Summary**

My qualitative investigation used inductive analysis and coding to generate common themes from my seven semi-structured interviews. The results of the analysis procedure have been presented and explained in Chapter Four. Common themes were organised in table format by question number, explanations were provided to clarify the meaning of each theme and participant quotes were used as evidence. The significance of these findings will be discussed in Chapter Five.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion of findings**

Chapter Five will critically analyse the important findings presented in Chapter Four, and provide an interpretation of the results in relation to the relevant literature on educational leadership, middle leadership, culturally responsive practice and culturally responsive leadership, reviewed in Chapter Two. The discussion will be framed by the two research questions: 'What are secondary school middle leaders' understandings and experiences of the practices of 'culturally responsive practice?'; and 'What are secondary school middle leaders' perceptions of the challenges encountered in regards to culturally responsive practice in their school?' Three central themes have been identified in the findings that influence culturally responsive leadership: namely, personal factors, interpersonal factors and school factors. The first section of this chapter critically examines these three central themes in relation to the literature. In the second section these themes will be incorporated into a model that acknowledges the importance of, and contributes to, the current knowledge in the field of culturally responsive leadership.

At the outset of the critical analysis it is essential to acknowledge there were a wide variety of responses from the middle leaders in the study because of the different pedagogical or pastoral roles they held in their schools, in addition to their teaching responsibilities. This aligns with research by Fitzgerald (2000) who suggests middle leaders are seen to have administrative functions as well as teaching responsibilities. Furthermore, the findings emphasised the importance of what each individual middle leader does on a day-to-day basis. However, three themes still clearly emerged from the findings and each of these themes will be examined below.

### **Personal factors influencing culturally responsive leadership**

This section is concerned with the behaviours, traits, characteristics, skills and abilities of the individual middle leaders in the investigation, and critically analyses their personal actions in relation to culturally responsive practice and leadership. In the first instance, the findings showed that a large number of responses reflected the participants' personal understandings and experiences of culturally responsive practice. All seven middle leaders believed it was important to recognise, reflect and respond to students and their community, but how they enacted this varied between participants. Although

not explicit, the findings inferred that these middle leaders had their students' best interests at heart, were reflective about their practice, open minded, and willing to connect with students in order to engage them, and ultimately improve their achievement. One participant described this as how we create 'buy in' and get success. This aligns with the literature that proposes that culturally responsive practice involves improving student achievement and outcomes (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bishop & Berryman, 2010; Samu, 2006). For example, Samu (2006) claims that responsiveness to diversity is about tailoring teaching to learner diversities in order to raise academic achievement.

It was important to some of the middle leaders to have effective teaching and behaviour strategies in the classroom. Although there is some literature that notes the importance of quality teaching and the ability to manage classrooms (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bishop & Berryman, 2010; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004), Larrivee (2000) suggests that becoming an effective teacher involves considerably more than accumulating skills and strategies. Moreover, these types of teaching and management abilities are aptitudes that could be learnt, as opposed to a middle leader's natural dispositions. As emphasised by Henderson (2013), no matter how proficient teachers are, or how well they implement learning and teaching tools, without involvement in the dual heritage of this land they will not see or be able to form healthy effective relationships with Māori learners and their whānau. Further discussion around bi-culturalism and Te Tiriti o Waitangi is presented in the School section of this chapter.

Conversely, additional examples of middle leaders' experiences evident in the findings demonstrated the importance of values, decisions and behaviours. These traits required middle leaders to feel confident and comfortable within themselves to step outside their comfort zone, and indicate that being culturally responsive is not just a matter of having the appropriate knowledge and skills. Several traits that appear to be important to culturally responsive leadership might not be so easy to learn: for example, being aware of students' backgrounds; giving students responsibilities; empowering students; showing vulnerability in the classroom; ensuring students have a voice; using the languages of the students; and dedicating significant amounts of personal time after hours to help students and their families. These middle leader experiences all validate a number of critical characteristics discussed in the literature that reflect culturally responsive practice. For instance, one important trait is demonstrating care for students

and creating a caring environment. This trait is also highlighted by a number of authors (see for example: Bishop & Berryman, 2010; Gay, 2002; Ford, 2013; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004). There is also substantial evidence in the literature that supports the finding that being aware of students' backgrounds is considered to be a culturally responsive practice (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bishop & Berryman, 2010; Blair, 2002; Bourdieu, 1986; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2002; Ford, 2013; Samu, 2006; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). Additionally, another personal characteristic emphasised in the literature that endorses the middle leaders' behaviours is the ability to share power with and incorporate student voice in the classroom (Bishop & Berryman, 2010; Ford, 2013; Larrivee, 2000).

Knowing, understanding and using the languages and different values with students and families indicated middle leaders were aware of their communities' cultural capital, and the capital that students were bringing to school. Substantiating literature advises that matching home and school culture is a culturally responsive practice that contributes to a higher level of learning for multi-ethnic students (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bourdieu, 1986; Delpit, 1995). One participant believed it was part of his culture to acknowledge students as individuals, and show them that they have cultural capital. Apart from talking to parents and students in their native language to ensure mutual understanding, one participant believed being culturally responsive was also knowing the values of respecting your elders, and the way you dress yourself. Another participant communicated how detrimental it was when teachers assume students don't come in with any prior knowledge, and suggested that teachers have got to find out what students already know. The participant thought it was important to help bridge the home culture and school culture by making connections. Supporting literature that reinforces the actions of these middle leaders focuses on the central positioning of culture within culturally responsive and relationship-based learning contexts (Bishop et al., 2009; Glynn, 2013). Furthermore, all of the middle leaders in the investigation understood and demonstrated the importance of knowing and respecting their students' backgrounds. Supporting research by Santamaria and Santamaria (2015) implies that one element of applied critical leadership involves leaders entering into their leadership spaces with an informed knowledge, or a willingness to learn the socio-political, cultural and linguistic context surrounding the learning environment.

Only a small number of personal challenges were raised by the participants in relation to enacting culturally responsive practices in their school. Two participants did acknowledge that being unaware of students' backgrounds presented a challenge and may even influence teachers' future career options. This finding supports research by Samu (2006) who postulates that tailoring teaching to learner diversity in order to raise academic achievement could be a challenge for teachers, especially when their language and culture varies from that of their students. However, the findings also suggest these middle leaders had a critical awareness of how their own background and values may influence their leadership and the way in which it impacts on their students' and their families. Research by Branson (2007) emphasises that a leader must be able to come to know how their self-concept and self-esteem is influencing their motives, values and beliefs. Similarly, Santamaria and Santamaria (2015) believe culturally responsive leaders will recognise their biases while tapping into positive aspects of their identity to lead with authenticity and integrity. Culturally responsive practices were a fundamental concern for the middle leaders, because they understood that being more aware about their students' backgrounds would ultimately help their learning relationship together. It also emphasised the aspirations of these middle leaders to do the best by their students. Having power with, rather than over, learners begins with teacher self-awareness (Larrivee, 2000).

The findings from my seven interviews indicated that middle leaders' personal traits were perceived to have a significant impact on culturally responsive leadership. In general, the middle leaders I interviewed appeared to possess characteristics that allowed them to be innately and intuitively culturally responsive. These personal traits are reflective of their own experiences, upbringing, knowledge, values and beliefs. For example, participants respected all cultures, languages and values, and believed it was important to get to know each student as an individual.

Moreover, depending on their responsibilities in the school, all of the middle leaders 'walked the talk' and role-modelled aspects of culturally responsive practice and leadership. Particular examples from the interviews were being an agent of change, advocating for students, leading culturally responsive professional development, initiating difficult conversations, being inclusive, using the language of students and families, having high expectations for staff and students, supporting staff, celebrating

student successes, using research and theory to inform decision making in their multi-cultural school, and focussing on Māori and Pasifika achievement. Leading by example is considered to be an ACL characteristic that critical leaders exhibit (Santamaria, 2014). Additionally, some of the middle leaders demonstrated a further characteristic of being a culturally responsive leader because they were also willing and felt responsible to challenge the status quo. This finding aligns with literature by Khalifa et al. (2016), who posits that interrogating exclusionary and marginalising behaviour is fundamental for culturally responsive school leadership. Correspondingly, a New Zealand government publication also states that middle leaders have a critical role is disrupting and changing the status quo of Māori underachievement (Kia Eke Panuku, 2016).

Overall, the findings suggest that the individual middle leaders displayed morally conscious behaviours and a passion for being culturally responsive. Even if the school was not considered to be culturally responsive by the participants, the individual middle leaders felt they could still make a difference by having an influence over what they could control. Louis et al. (2010) similarly propose that leadership is about direction and influence. However, the outcomes also present a discernible concern related to middle leaders who do not possess these personal characteristics, and raises a pertinent question: Can cultural responsiveness be 'taught,' if some middle leaders are unwilling to change their personal attitudes?

### **Interpersonal factors influencing culturally responsive leadership**

In relation to my findings, interpersonal refers to the factors that influenced culturally responsive practices as a result of the interactions between middle leaders, other staff, students and families. The interpersonal level encompasses the relationships between people, their communication and interactions. Aside from the prominence of personal characteristics, the findings also revealed that middle leaders' perceptions and experiences of effective culturally responsive practice were centred on effective communication through conversations, and forming learning, working and caring relationships with students, staff and families. Both these abilities could be described as capital which are the resources that are acquired, accumulated and are of value in certain situations (Spillane et al., 2003). Middle leaders in this investigation were similar to staff involved with the practices of academic mentoring described in Youngs' (2014) investigation, because these individuals possessed human forms of capital such as

expertise, skills and knowledge and social capital, which included networks and relations of trust. Whether it was understanding the whole student by forming learning relationships, supporting staff, informing parents, or conducting consultation, having effective interpersonal skills was an essential ability according to the participants. This finding aligns with literature by Cranston (2007) who found that interpersonal skills were critical to carrying out the role of a school leader in New Zealand secondary schools.

Middle leaders in this investigation interacted with students to establish learning relationships that helped them understand their needs. However a number of participants also recognised the importance of going beyond ethnicity and not seeing students as a homogenous group. One participant encapsulated this when talking about diversity in her multi-ethnic school. The participant suggested teachers need to acknowledge there are similarities but also differences within ethnicities, therefore, we should not teach students as one group, or label them homogenous. These findings suggest that some middle leaders have recognised the problems with stereotyping students in their multi-ethnic school. Samu (2006) also cautions against standardising ethnicity because within the Pacific there are various ethnic and linguistic groups who each have their own unique attitudes, values and perspectives. In order to go beyond surface level relationships and the ethnicity of students, trusting and caring relationships had to be initiated by the middle leader which helped them get to know each individual student. Forming respectful learning relationships with students is considered an essential component of culturally responsive practice (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bishop & Berryman, 2010; Ford, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Siope, 2013; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). For instance, research by Ford (2013) advises that a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations is characterised by an environment where relationships of care and respect are essential. Equally, Ladson-Billings (1995) proposed that culturally responsive teachers maintain fluid student-teacher relationships and demonstrate a connectedness with all students.

Relationships and communication practices between middle leaders and families were also perceived to be culturally responsive. One crucial role for culturally responsive leaders is to engage students, families and communities in culturally appropriate ways (Blair, 2002; Ford, 2012; Khalifa et al., 2016; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Quezada, 2016; Santamaria, 2014; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015; Stevenson, 2007).



Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) state that caring for others through sharing information and caring for parents' perspectives has been identified as a theme for culturally responsive leadership. Moreover, Santamaria (2014) agrees that one characteristic of socially just educational leaders is their need to honour all members of their constituencies by including voices and perspectives of staff, parents, community members and stakeholders. In one school, a well-respected teacher who was also a leader in the community helped create mana for their school community through consulting with the parents, and then coming back to talk to the school.

However, the findings also suggest that most of the middle leaders' responses were in relation to family involvement through sharing important information and open communication, rather than their engagement in school. One participant advocated that their school should make more of an effort by building stronger partnerships with the families in the community and making them feel valued in what they have to say because it is in support for the students. Supporting literature resulting from Quezada's research (2016) indicates that most of the schools in her investigation were still leading with their institutional self-interest and desires, rather than developing more genuine partnerships between school and home. As I have indicated in Chapter Two, most of the research on culturally responsive leadership has been conducted in relation to the role of the principal, and this could be one reason why family engagement was not seen as a priority for middle leaders.

The interpersonal challenges experienced were between middle leaders and their staff, students and families. Although challenges such as ineffective staff and problems with staff understanding culture could also be considered as a personal factor, in this situation it is categorised as an interpersonal influence, because the middle leaders that believed it was a challenge were also responsible for addressing these challenges through conversations and communicating effectively with their colleagues. The motives encompassing the interpersonal challenges were multi-layered. For example, not only were the middle leaders frustrated with staff not wanting to get on board with culturally responsive initiatives, but at a deeper level they realised this would have implications for students and their families. It is possible that challenges with other staff members presented the biggest concern for the middle leaders because they experienced tension when staff were seen to be ineffective. This could be due to the

fact they felt obligated to maintain relationships with colleagues, whilst also improving student achievement. This concern was highlighted by Fitzgerald and Gunter (2006) who proposed that it is middle leaders' responsibility to influence and work with others in a highly collaborative, collegial and supportive environment. Furthermore, enhancing student achievement is an important role for all educational leaders (Cardno, 2012; Dimmock & Walker, 2005). Culturally responsive leaders have a crucial role in ensuring that teachers are, and remain, culturally responsive (Gurr, 2014; Khalifa et. al, 2016; Nelson, 2007; Robinson & Timperley, 2007).

The findings showed that some staff in schools were perceived to be unwilling to change their practices or get on board with initiatives, were ineffective, and were unaware of the different cultural backgrounds in their classrooms. Blair (2002) suggests this lack of awareness means teachers are not prepared to deal with racism, let alone critically reflect on their own stereotypes and assumptions. One strand fundamental for culturally responsive school leadership is having a critical awareness of self, values, beliefs, and dispositions when it comes to serving poor children of colour (Branson, 2007; Khalifa et al., 2016; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015). However, the findings indicate that this would also be an essential skill for teachers as well. Those unmotivated to participate in cross cultural experiences often remain unaware of their own cultural lens and this affects the way they live, their professional practices and relationships (Henderson, 2013). Staff challenges do not only affect middle leaders, but the students, families, other colleagues and the school as a whole.

Because the participants I talked to were passionate about seeing their students achieve, a few felt obligated, or were required, to address these challenges through conversations. All the interpersonal challenges middle leaders faced were dealt with through communicating. In relation to staff challenges, this required participants to have difficult face-to-face conversations, share their knowledge, role-model, and ask more questions. This finding aligns with the literature's emphasis on the culturally responsive leader being responsible for promoting, facilitating and engaging in critical conversations (Cooper, 2009; Madsen & Mabokela, 2014; Santamaria, 2014). The ability to engage in critical conversations can only be enacted through productive interactions between the middle leaders and their staff which indicates that forming relationships is also an essential aspect of culturally responsive practice. Research similarly reinforces

the importance of leaders forming working relationships with staff and working collaboratively (Cherkowski & Ragoonaden, 2016; Gurr, 2014; Santamaria, 2014). For example, Cherkowski and Ragoonaden (2016) believe educational leaders should be challenged to learn about the ways they relate to their colleagues. Furthermore, using consensus building as the preferred strategy for decision making is one ACL characteristic that critical leaders exhibit (Santamaria, 2014). Communicating effectively reflects the essential people skills of both the leadership and management aspects of the roles of middle-level school leaders (Cranston, 2007).

Overall, the data suggest that relationships and communication are fundamental bases for effective culturally responsive practice. Equally, further questions have been produced as a result of these findings: Can interpersonal skills such as forming working and learning relationships with staff, students and families, and communicating effectively be learnt by middle leaders? And how is a middle leader supported to deal with staff who do not meet the criteria set out in the *Practising Teaching Criteria* (Education Council New Zealand, 2015) or appraisal system?

### **School factors influencing culturally responsive leadership**

Finally, a number of participants believed it was imperative, and the school's responsibility, to have school-wide culturally responsive practices in place. In most cases the findings implied the onus was on senior leaders and the principal to implement and role model these initiatives. All seven middle leaders could comfortably talk about and give examples of how they and the school were meeting their obligations to the Te Tiriti o Waitangi. According to the document *Leading from the middle* (Ministry of Education, 2012a), middle leaders are responsible to help in the establishment of the reciprocal relationships implicit in Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Of interest, however, is that the responses in the findings section from Question Nine could be regarded as incongruous. For example, participants discussed how Te Tiriti o Waitangi was seen as a priority in five schools, but four middle leaders also commented that all students and cultures are treated equally because of the multi-ethnic nature of the school where Pasifika students, not Māori, are the dominant ethnic group. Henderson (2013) proposes that it is not uncommon for teachers in New Zealand to describe themselves as treating all students the same. Even though it is challenging, it is essential to help teachers

reposition their cultural lens to acknowledge cultural identity and that equal treatment does not always lead to equality of outcomes (Henderson, 2013).

It is possible that as schools are becoming more diverse, there is an increased focus on multi-culturalism, as seen in documents such as *The Statement of Intent* (Ministry of Education, 2012b) and *The Starpath project* (University of Auckland, 2016), which could detract from the central place of bi-culturalism in New Zealand schools. Bishop and Berryman (2010) advise teachers to take an agentic position where they see themselves as being able to express their professional commitment and responsibility for bringing about change in Māori students' educational achievement, and accept professional responsibility for the learning of their students. What works for Māori students may not be relevant for Pasifika students in New Zealand and vice versa.

The findings of this study indicated that schools and middle leaders understood the importance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and were working on their obligations through using te reo Māori, tracking students progress, and including relevant topics into the curriculum. Pronouncing Māori words correctly and incorporating Māori examples and customs could be seen as static and superficial understandings of culture because teachers may not have an understanding of the collective vision and strategy required to work in genuine partnership with Māori students and communities (Hynds et al., 2016). Although it may have not been entirely considered in the interviews, there were only a few examples of partnership between the school and Māori students, their families and the community. Lourie (2016) argues that auditing systems such as teacher appraisal, registration and external reviews by the Education Review Office that require schools and teachers to provide evidence of bi-cultural practices can result in tokenism. For example, one participant mentioned they have to show evidence of using Te Tiriti o Waitangi in their teaching practice. Lourie (2016) argues that these current demands keep the focus on teaching and learning relationships, pedagogy and curriculum. Whilst still important, it ignores wider contemporary social and political inequalities that need to be addressed (Lourie, 2016). Therefore, as a teacher, middle leader, a member of senior management or a principal, it is crucial to have a deep understanding of both multi-cultural and bi-cultural contexts, including the Te Tiriti o Waitangi, in New Zealand secondary schools if Māori are to achieve success as Māori (Ministry of Education, 2013c).

Middle leaders perceived there to be very few school wide challenges encountered in relation to culturally responsive practice. Although some professional development was provided around culturally responsive practices, three middle leaders suggested it was not consistent in their school. In light of the findings around the importance of personal and interpersonal traits and practices of middle leaders, the benefit of school-wide professional development is questionable because a number of personal traits and interpersonal characteristics would be difficult for some teachers to learn if they are unwilling to change.

Some middle leaders believed school wide initiatives and having support from the principal, senior management and other middle leaders can help overcome challenges in relation to culturally responsive practice. One participant proposed her principal must live and breathe cultural responsiveness, and the deputy principals should also model it. Leaders themselves must know how their self-concept influences their motives, values and beliefs, and thus impacts on their leadership behaviour (Branson, 2007). Other relevant literature suggests that if school leadership is to be effective in a multi-ethnic context the leader should acknowledge culture and promote diversity (Billot, 2008; Blair, 2002; Starratt, 2003).

Additionally, a small number of participants recommended that on-going professional development and more support for those new to teaching at multi-ethnic schools would help overcome challenges. Several researchers have highlighted the prominence and concerns with preparing culturally responsive teachers (Gay, 2002; Griner & Stewart, 2012; Jester and Fickel, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). For example, a problem highlighted by Sleeter (2001) concerns how students of colour tend to bring richer experiences and perspectives to multi-cultural teaching than most white students who represent the majority numerically. Furthermore, in their study on addressing the achievement gap through the use of culturally responsive practices, Griner and Stewart (2012) propose that the lack of student-teacher connections, led by the cultural divide between school and communities, continues to overwhelm the educational community.

Considering the nature of the challenges confronting middle leaders, school wide professional development could conceivably focus on evaluating and reflecting on one's

personal values. One participant believed it was important to get teachers to step out of their comfort zone by examining their own attitudes and beliefs. Larrivee (2000) argues that in order to transform teaching practice, teachers need to engage in critical reflection in order to examine their personal and professional belief systems and consider the ethical implications and impact of practices. Rather than just teachers, the critical reflection should involve all staff including teachers, support staff, middle leaders, senior management and the principal.

### **Discussion of personal, interpersonal and school influences**

Evaluating the findings has emphasised the fact that culturally responsive leadership for middle leaders is a complicated matter. Although it may not be easy, it is essential for both bi-cultural and multi-cultural secondary school contexts. Culturally responsive practice for middle leaders in this study was not just a matter of possessing knowledge and skills, but it was also related to having personal traits linked to their values and beliefs about working in a multi-ethnic school; being able to communicate and form relationships and being part of an organisation that valued cultural responsiveness. The findings implied that personal, interpersonal and school perspectives are all required for culturally responsive leadership to be effective.

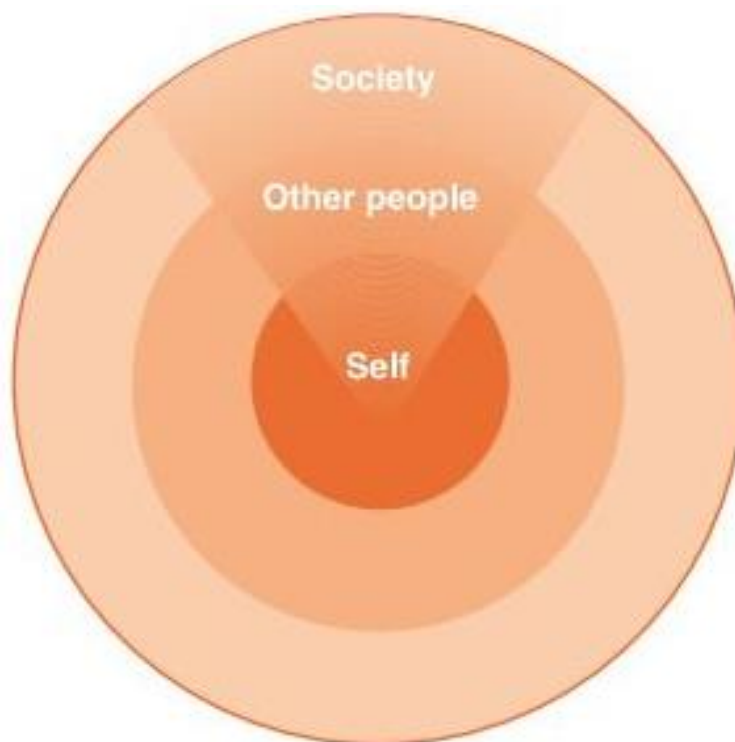
### **Incorporating the themes**

After reflecting on the themes that emerged in each of the research questions, it occurred to me that I was sub-consciously grouping them into a framework utilised in my teaching field. In health and physical education, there are four underlying and interdependent concepts that underpin the subject area; however I have chosen to utilise one concept, the socio-ecological perspective, to help represent my culturally responsive model. In health and physical education, the focus is on the well-being of the students themselves, of other people and of society (Ministry of Education, 2014). More detail about the socio-ecological framework is outlined below, as well as my reasons for its selection.

### **The socio-ecological perspective**

The socio-ecological perspective is a way of viewing and understanding the interrelationships that exist between the individual, others and society (Ministry of Education, 2014). Socio is to do with people and society and ecological is to do with an

individual's environment, in particular their social environment (Robertson & Dixon, 2012). Figure 5.1 below shows the model taken from the Ministry of Education website (Ministry of Education, 2016b). The individual or personal factors are in the centre, the interpersonal factors are around these in the middle circle, and the societal factors are wrapped around all others on the outside (Robertson & Dixon, 2012).



*Figure 5.1 The socio-ecological perspective  
(Ministry of Education, 2016b).*

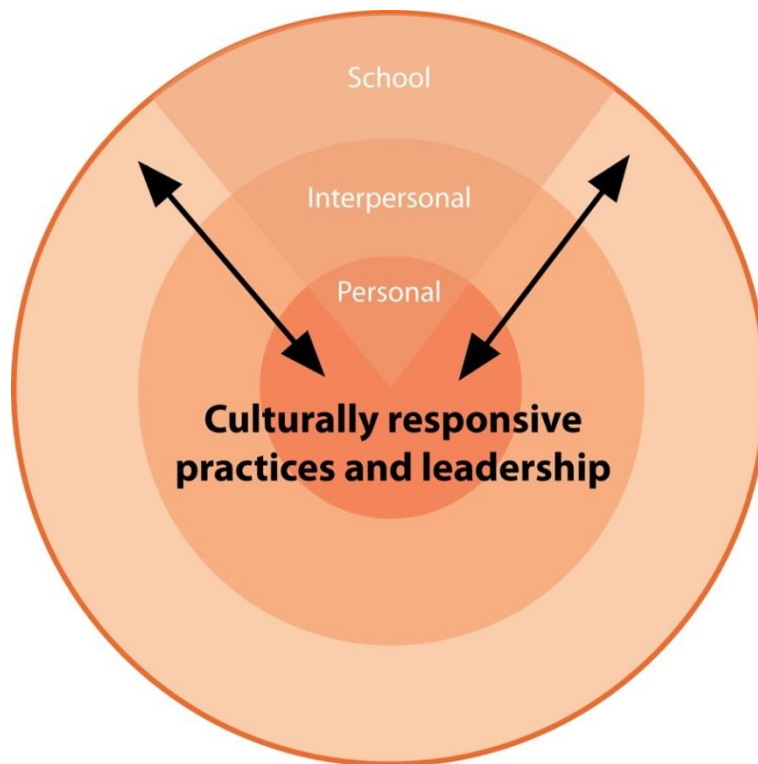
The word self may be used inter-changeably with the word personal. The personal level encompasses the self or another individual person's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, opinions, decision making, values, beliefs, knowledge, experience, characteristics and behaviours (Robertson & Dixon, 2012, 2014). When linking the model to my research, I am linking the word personal to the individual characteristics of middle leaders who participated in the study. Other people may be used inter-changeably with the word interpersonal. Inter means between, and personal is to do with the person (Robertson & Dixon, 2012). In my investigation, interpersonal relates to the interactions between the middle leaders and their students, staff, senior management and families. The societal level would normally comprise influences from social, economic, environmental, cultural and political aspects, including the Ministry of Education. A society refers to ways communities of people live and work together and why they do

what they do. A society also refers to the cultural practices of the people. A school community would be considered a small societal community (Robertson & Dixon, 2012). It is an example of an organised community of people bound together by similar traditions, or an institution, and encompasses the total of the relationship and interactions between these people (Robertson, & Dixon, 2014 ). In my case, societal will be replaced with the word school, and encompasses some societal aspects as well as the local community.

I chose to utilise the socio-ecological perspective because there were a number of links to the model and its purpose. Firstly, findings from the seven semi-structured interviews clearly fitted into the personal, interpersonal and school categories. Secondly, all three levels have an influence on cultural responsiveness. Thirdly, personal, interpersonal and school levels of the model do not operate independently; they are all inter-related and inter-dependent. For example, the findings indicated that cultural responsiveness is positively enhanced when personal, interpersonal and school factors are integrated and working effectively. The reverse is also true; personal, interpersonal and school challenges can negatively impact on culturally responsiveness. Lastly, the model takes into consideration wider external factors that influence cultural responsiveness such as obligations to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and educational professional publications, such as those discussed in Chapter One which have affected my rationale for conducting the investigation.

So instead of a model that shows the factors that influence well-being, my model as depicted in Figure 5.2, shows the personal, interpersonal and school factors that influence and affect culturally responsive practices and leadership. This adapted framework will enable me to more clearly align my findings, and identify the characteristics and influences at each level of the framework.





*Figure 5.2 The redesigned socio-ecological model (adapted from Ministry of Education, 2016b).*

The redesigned socio-ecological model acknowledges the importance of both culturally responsive practices and culturally responsive leadership by the middle leaders who worked in the multi-ethnic secondary schools involved in my investigation. Furthermore, it emphasises that personal, interpersonal and school factors all influence, and are essential elements for, culturally responsive leadership. However personal factors and interpersonal factors are positioned in the inner circles of the model. This is because the findings indicated, that even if the middle leaders were part of a school that valued cultural responsiveness, possessing personal traits that allowed them to be innately and intuitively culturally responsive, and, being able to effectively communicate and form learning and working relationships, were considered to be the most influential factors for culturally responsive middle leadership.

## **Summary**

Chapter Five has critically examined the three themes that emerged from the data in relation to the literature presented in Chapter Two. The discussion was positioned about personal, interpersonal and school factors that influenced culturally responsive leadership. These three themes were incorporated into a model that acknowledges the importance of, and contributes to, the current knowledge in the field of culturally

responsive leadership. Chapter Six will clarify the conclusions of this investigation, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the research, and present recommendations for future practice and further research.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

To conclude, chapter Six summarises the overall findings of the investigation and reviews the strengths and limitations of the study. Recommendations on how the findings can be applied to practice are provided as well as further research suggestions regarding culturally responsive leadership carried out by secondary school middle leaders in low decile, multi-ethnic schools.

### **Overview of the research**

The overall aim of this research was to critically examine the perceptions and understandings of culturally responsive practices carried out by secondary school middle leaders in low decile, multi-ethnic settings in New Zealand. The research was positioned within an interpretative paradigm and employed a qualitative approach to answer the two research questions. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with seven middle leaders from six different multi-ethnic secondary schools. The following section will outline the conclusions under the two subsidiary research questions that formed the basis for this study.

### **Conclusions**

What are secondary school middle leaders' understandings and experiences of the practices of 'culturally responsive' practice?

This research highlighted both similarities and differences in middle leaders' understandings and experiences of culturally responsive practice. The findings were affected by the pedagogical or pastoral role middle leaders held in their school. Nevertheless, they conclude that culturally responsive practice is influenced in varying degrees, by personal, interpersonal and school factors. Some of the research findings align with previous literature, while others propose new understandings of culturally responsive practice by middle leaders.

Although Gay (2002) suggests culturally responsive curriculum designs and instructional strategies are an integral aspect of culturally responsive practice, the innate personal behaviours, traits, characteristics, skills and abilities of the individual middle leaders in my investigation appeared to have a greater influence on culturally responsive practice. For example, the findings conclude that having a deep understanding and knowledge of

students' and their families' backgrounds was a critical characteristic of culturally responsive practice. Supporting literature by Waniganayake et al. (2012) suggests that having an awareness of the local community and the needs and interests of children and families can enhance the way leaders work within their organisation. A number of other authors also highlight the importance of having a knowledge of and utilising students cultural and ethnic diversity (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bishop & Berryman, 2010; Blair, 2002; Bourdieu, 1986; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2002; Ford, 2013; Samu, 2006; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995).

Additionally, the findings conclude that culturally responsive practices require middle leaders to be aware of and utilise the cultural capital that their students bring to school. All of the middle leaders in the investigation understood and demonstrated the importance of knowing and respecting their students' language and cultural values. These findings are supported by research by Delpit (1995) who proposes that matching school and home cultural capital requires teachers to understand the different forms of capital students bring to school with them. Although a knowledge of cultural capital was important, a key finding indicated that it was essential for middle leaders to go beyond surface level relationships and the ethnicity of the student to get to know the individual. Overall the findings indicated that culturally responsive practices were not just a matter of knowledge and skills. Alternatively, it was the innate and intuitive personal characteristics and behaviours of my participants which had a considerable impact on culturally responsive leadership.

Aside from the prominence of personal traits, the findings determined that middle leaders' understandings and experiences of culturally responsive practice were also centred around interpersonal factors such as forming relationships and effective communication. The findings concur with research by Tamiti (2011) who believes leaders should ensure leadership is about people and relationships. More specifically, the middle leaders in the investigation established respectful learning relationships with students through understanding the whole student and their learning needs. Validating evidence indicates that relationships are an essential element of culturally responsive practice (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bishop & Berryman, 2010; Ford, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Siope, 2013; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). Literature presented in Chapter Two emphasised that the core work of educational leaders is to facilitate school development

and influence quality teaching that focuses on improving learning and achievement for all students (Cardno, 2012; Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Starratt, 2003). However, middle leaders in my investigation did not overtly refer to this goal, although, it was their belief that their interpersonal abilities of forming relationships and having effective communication with students, colleagues and families contribute to, and, impact on this core work

A less prominent finding concluded that school factors also have an impact on culturally responsive practice. Middle leaders agreed it was imperative that both senior leaders and their school took responsibility to ensure school-wide culturally responsive practices were in place. Although middle leaders worked hard to ensure their leadership practices were culturally responsive, and were obligated to influence their colleagues actions, they felt the onus was on senior leaders and the principal to implement and role-model initiatives. Supporting literature that focused on the role of principals, recognised that if school leadership is to be effective in a multi-ethnic context the leader should acknowledge culture and promote diversity (Billot, 2008, Blair, 2002, Starratt, 2003). Lastly, the findings infer that although schools and middle leaders understood the importance of and were working on their obligations to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, there is still much work to be done to ensure a deeper understating of bi-culturalism. For example, although it may not have been considered in the interviews, the findings suggest that there were only a few examples of partnership between the school, Māori students, their families and the community. Te Tiriti o Waitangi acknowledges Māori as the indigenous peoples of New Zealand, and there are three broad principles that underpin it; partnership, participation and protection (Ministry of Education, 2012c). Yet, the findings imply that aspects of these principles, in particular partnership, were not implemented effectively in schools.

Overall, the findings denote that personal, interpersonal and school perspectives are all required for culturally responsive leadership. However, the understandings and experiences of the middle leaders in the investigation indicate that they made a significant difference in their secondary school, because even if the school was not considered to be implementing culturally responsive practices, the middle leaders believed they could influence the colleagues they worked with. Possessing personal traits that allowed middle leaders to be innately culturally responsive, which linked to

their values and beliefs about working in a multi-ethnic school, and being able to effectively communicate and form learning and working relationships, were considered to be the most influential factors for culturally responsive middle leadership.

What are secondary school middle leaders' perceptions of the challenges encountered in regards to 'culturally responsive' practice in their school?

The findings in this question highlighted that middle leaders also face personal, interpersonal and school-wide challenges in relation to culturally responsive practices in their school. Firstly, only a small number of personal challenges were encountered by the participants which were centred around being unaware of students' backgrounds. Having the ability to consciously acknowledge these challenges, demonstrated that the middle leaders had a critical awareness of how their own background and values may have influenced their leadership and the way it would impact on their students and their families. Supporting literature by Branson (2007) posits that culturally responsive leaders must have a critical awareness of self, values, beliefs and dispositions. While the participants did not discuss practicing critical reflection (Branson, 2007), I conclude that the middle leaders were conscious of how their choices impact their leadership behaviour. As emphasised in research question one, the personal challenges were also addressed through the participants utilising their personal traits and behaviours to ensure they met the needs of their students.

Secondly, the interpersonal challenges reported by the middle leaders were: communicating to families and getting them on board with initiatives; students not being engaged in school and class; and other staff members who were ineffective and unwilling to change their practices, or get on board with initiatives that would benefit students. The middle leaders experienced tension, particularly around the challenges faced with other staff members, because they felt obliged to maintain relationships with colleagues, whilst also improving student achievement. Participants believed they were responsible for addressing these challenges through conversations and communicating effectively with their colleagues, otherwise they realised there would be negative consequences for students and their families. This finding aligns with literature that proposes culturally responsive leaders are responsible for ensuring teachers are and remain culturally responsive (Gurr, 2014; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis, 2016; Nelson, 2007;

Robinson & Timperley, 2007). Additionally, supporting research posits educational leadership is concerned with professional dialogue, professional learning and the enhancement of teaching within classrooms (Southworth, 2004; Waters et al., 2004). This finding reinforces the importance of how interpersonal skills, such as forming working and learning relationships with staff, students and families, and communicating effectively were fundamental in overcoming the interpersonal challenges.

Finally, inconsistent professional development was considered to be a school wide challenge. Apart from the initiatives that were already in place, middle leaders recommended this challenge be addressed through more on-going culturally responsive training in schools, and additional support for those new to teaching at multi-ethnic schools. However, a number of pieces of literature argue that these challenges should be addressed before the teacher gets to the classroom. For example, researchers agree that culturally responsive teaching is not effectively addressed in teacher education (Gay, 2002; Griner & Stewart, 2012; Jester & Fickel, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). On the contrary, Blair (2002) proposes that it is leadership that is most likely to influence the creation of an inclusive and anti-racist environment.

Furthermore, considering the prominence of the personal and interpersonal traits and practices of middle leaders exhibited in the findings, the benefits of school-wide professional development may be negligible. In respect of the challenges that confront middle leaders, an alternative school-wide professional development could revolve around all staff evaluating and reflecting of their personal values. Larrivee (2000) claims that in order to transform teaching practice, teachers need to engage in critical reflection in order to examine their personal and professional belief systems and consider the ethical implications and impact of practices.

Overall, I conclude that the middle leader's understandings, experiences and challenges they encountered in regards to culturally responsive practice in their school were diverse and multi-faceted. Nevertheless, all seven participants shared common perceptions of the value and importance of implementing culturally responsive practices in order to meet the needs of their students. The redesigned socio-ecological model acknowledges that personal, interpersonal and school factors all influence, and are essential elements for effective culturally responsive leadership. However personal

factors and interpersonal factors are positioned in the inner two circles of the model because the findings indicated, that even if the middle leaders were part of an organisation that valued cultural responsiveness, possessing personal traits that allowed them to be innately and intuitively culturally responsive, and being able to effectively communicate and form learning and working relationships were considered to be the most influential factors for culturally responsive middle leadership. Additionally, it emphasises that middle leaders also experience personal, interpersonal and school challenges in relation to culturally responsive practices. The following section will present three recommendation related to the above conclusions, which are of relevance to not only middle leaders, but the Ministry of Education, board of trustee members and senior leaders. Additionally, suggestions for further research are also provided.

## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendation One**

The research findings indicate it is possible that, as New Zealand schools are becoming more diverse, there has been an increased focus on multi-culturalism which could detract from the central place of bi-culturalism. Therefore, I recommend an increased focus on Te Tiriti o Waitangi, to ensure a deeper understating of bi-culturalism, without detracting from the importance of multi-culturalism. In particular, an increased emphasis on building authentic partnerships between the school and Māori students, their families and the community. It is imperative at a policy level that the Ministry of Education concentrates on ensuring all New Zealand schools understand their obligations to the indigenous people of New Zealand. For example, the Education Review Office should ensure all teaching staff comprehend Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and schools work towards achieving authentic partnership between themselves and their Māori students, families and community. Principals, boards of trustees and senior leaders need to value Māori. Schools need leaders and/or teachers who have an awareness of their own culture, a knowledge of Māori culture, customs and language, and who are capable of forming positive relationships with others. Holding regular hui (meetings), consulting, and openly communicating with whanau are other ideas. Whanau must feel comfortable coming into their child's school, and this can be enhanced through open communication between teachers, deans, middle leaders, students and whanau. Teachers need to exhibit care for their students and respect their



culture. Contacting home to celebrate success, rather than just for disciplinary reasons, is essential to help foster positive relationships.

### **Recommendation Two**

Without undermining the school-wide programmes run by staff members in the study, I recommend a focus on professional development that concentrates on individual staff members' personal attitudes and beliefs. Considering the nature of the challenges confronting middle leaders, a school wide adaptable and tailored professional development should include evaluating and reflecting on one's personal values. Rather than just teachers, the critical reflection should involve all staff including teachers, support staff, middle leaders, senior management and the principal. Although I agree that more support is required for those new to teaching at multi-ethnic schools, culturally responsive practices should also be reinforced through teacher training and education. Being exposed to a variety of students from diverse backgrounds on practicum, learning about and utilising students cultural and ethnic diversity, as well as having multiple opportunities to critically reflect on how personal beliefs and values can influence teaching would be beneficial.

### **Recommendation Three**

Given the implications of the findings that personal, interpersonal and school factors are all essential elements for culturally responsive leadership, there are a number of recommendations that should be implemented throughout the school that acknowledge these influences. To begin, at a school level it is important that the principal and the senior management team role model culturally responsive leadership, are authentically engaged with the families and local community, communicate effectively and have positive working relationships with their middle leaders. At an interpersonal level, teachers who are considered culturally responsive need to be in prominent positions, such as pastoral and pedagogical roles, to enable them to influence their colleagues and be agents of change. Finally, beginning teachers and staff members new to teaching at multi-ethnic schools should be supported through their head of faculty, pastoral leaders, and senior management to ensure a smooth transition into a new environment. Simultaneously these teachers should critically reflect on how their own personal values and beliefs may impact their teaching and interactions with students.

## **Recommendations for further research**

The findings emphasised how culturally responsive leadership for middle leaders is a complex and complicated matter. My investigation has contributed in a small way to the current knowledge in the field. Considering the significance of both middle leadership and culturally responsive practices, further researchers could continue to investigate these areas. There is scope to separately research pedagogical and pastoral leaders understandings and experiences and compare the findings. Research could also be conducted to elicit the perspectives of all middle leaders, not just those who have an interest in the topic. Furthermore selecting other multi-ethnic schools around New Zealand and including rural school may produce some noteworthy results.

More specifically, the finding that other staff members presented the biggest challenge to the middle leaders in my investigation warrants further attention. Moreover, there was no mention in the interviews of any policies or procedures in place that could assist middle leaders in relation to these challenges. Consequently, two further areas of interest could include: How do effective middle leaders, senior leaders and schools train staff to be more aware of the cultural behaviours required in multi-ethnic schools? Secondly, in successful schools, how is the middle leader supported to deal with staff who are ineffective or not willing to change in relation to culturally responsive practice? To conclude Chapter Six, the strengths and limitations of the study will be analysed.

## **Strengths and limitations of the study**

Positioning my research within an interpretive paradigm, using a qualitative research design and utilising semi-structured interviews as the instrument for data collection were strengths of this study. The chosen methodology and methods were appropriate because the seven middle leaders who agreed to participate, provided me with rich findings which helped me critically examine their perceptions and understandings of culturally responsive practices carried out in their low decile, multi-ethnic school. However, this strength of the research could also be considered a weakness as I only interviewed those middle leaders who volunteered. Because I did not require school or board permission for my study, I did not interview a range of secondary school middle leaders. Instead, my findings came from the participants who had an interest in the topic which may have biased my data.

A second strength of the study was the researcher was fortunate to gather a variety of perspectives by interviewing middle leaders from different ethnicities including; two Tongans, two Pākehā/NZ European, one Samoan, one Fijian/Samoan and one Māori/European. Although working in a multi-ethnic context similar to the middle leaders involved in my investigation has increased my understanding, the research was conducted through my New Zealand European perspective which differs from a number of the participants. This could be perceived as a limitation of the study because I may have misinterpreted some of the participants cultural beliefs and values. As a consequence the data may not entirely reflect the understandings and experiences of the middle leaders. Additionally, the varying responses from pedagogical and pastoral leaders may have negatively affected the researchers ability to extract concise conclusions.

Only interviewing seven middle leaders from six different secondary schools in Auckland is also a weakness of the study. The restricted size and sample of my participants is not representative of all middle leaders. Although my findings in relation to culturally responsive practice may not be generalisable to other locations, the results presented accurately reflect the opinions of the participants in my study and may be transferred to other settings by those who read the completed thesis.

## **Final conclusion**

This research has acknowledged the significance of individual middle leaders and the central role they play in enhancing culturally responsive practice and leadership in their secondary school. The redesigned socio-ecological model contributes in a small way to the current knowledge in this field. Apart from highlighting the nature of the challenges faced in multi-ethnics schools, it also emphasises the importance of three inter-related and inter-dependant influences on culturally responsive practices and leadership, which include personal, interpersonal and school factors. The aim of this study was to critically examine the perceptions and understandings of culturally responsive practices carried out by secondary school middle leaders in low decile, multi-ethnic settings in New Zealand. Overall, this study acknowledges the topic is a complicated matter, and although it is not easy, it is and will continue to be essential if schools are to meet the needs of their diverse students.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Indicative interview questions



### **Indicative Interview questions:**

#### **Research title:**

Investigating culturally responsive practices: Perceptions and experiences of secondary school middle leaders.

#### **Research aim:**

To critically examine the perceptions and understandings of culturally responsive practices carried out by secondary school middle leaders in low decile, multi-ethnic settings in New Zealand.

#### **Researcher:**

Leigh Morgan

### **Indicative research questions:**

#### SECONDARY SCHOOL MIDDLE LEADERS

- i. How would you describe the ethnic make up of the students at this school?
- ii. What are your understandings of the term and practices of culturally responsive practice?
- iii. As a member of middle management, what are your perceptions of the challenges you have confronted leading this multi-ethnic school?
- iv. How do you manage these challenges?
- v. What do you perceive as being effective practice to ensure your school and staff are culturally responsive to their students?
- vi. Do you have any culturally specific examples of how you or other secondary school middle leaders at this school have been responsive?
- vii. How do you ensure obligations to Te Tiriti o Waitangi are met?
- viii. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about this topic?

***Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> April  
2016 AUTEK Reference number 16/123***

## Appendix B: Participant information sheet



### **Participant Information Sheet**

#### **Date Information Sheet Produced:**

12th April 2016

#### **Project title:**

Investigating culturally responsive practices: Perceptions and experiences of secondary school middle leaders.

#### **An Invitation:**

Kia Ora my name is Leigh Morgan. I am currently a full-time student at AUT University completing my Masters in Educational Leadership. My thesis question is “What are the perceptions and understandings of culturally responsive practices carried out by secondary school middle leaders in low decile, multi-ethnic settings in New Zealand?”. As a middle manager in your school, I am inviting you to partake in my investigation. Involvement is voluntary and as a participant you have the right to withdraw at any time up to 10 working days after the interview has taken place. In the event that a conflict of interest arises, choosing to participate in the research or not will neither advantage or disadvantage the participant.

#### **What is the purpose of this research?**

The aim of my investigation is to critically examine the perceptions and understandings of culturally responsive practices carried out by secondary school middle leaders in low decile, multi-ethnic settings in New Zealand. The purpose of my research is to obtain rich descriptions of educational middle leaders’ perceptions of culturally responsive practices in their context. These insights will assist me as an educational leader to comprehend and appreciate different perspectives around cultural responsiveness in contexts similar to my own. Themes that emerge from the data will heighten my understanding of middle leader behaviour which will assist my journey as a culturally responsive middle leader. On successful completion of the thesis, I will earn my Master in Educational Leadership qualification.

#### **How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?**

To ensure my investigation is relevant, it is important that I interview middle leaders that work in a context similar to mine. Consequently, I identified schools through the Education Counts website that met the requirements of my research: Auckland secondary schools ranging from decile 1 to 3 who have a high number of Pasifika students on their school roll. I used the contact details of the principal provided on this website and sent information letters to the relevant schools inviting them to participate in my research. The secondary school middle leaders who I invited to form the sample for my research, aligns with the description of middle leaders in the Ministry of Education document, *Leading from the middle: Educational leadership for middle*

*and senior leaders.* It states that middle leaders include; pedagogical leaders, team and syndicate leaders, pastoral leaders, teachers with specific or designated school responsibility, and coaches and mentors who help lead professional learning. Examples could include Deans, Head or Assistant Head of Department/Faculty, Teacher in charge of a subject area, specialist classroom teacher or other similar secondary school middle leadership position. You responded by contacting me as you were interested in participating.

**What will happen in this research?**

You are invited to a confidential 60-minute individual interview. The session will be conducted at a venue that suits you at a time that causes least disruption to the school day. You and your school will not be identified in the Thesis. I will be digitally recording the interview and I will provide a transcript for you to check in case you want to add or remove any information before data analysis is undertaken. The data collected will only be used for the purposes of my investigation, and a possible conference presentation and journal article. If you have any queries about the project, you may contact my supervisor Alison Smith at AUT (details at the bottom of the information sheet).

**What are the discomforts and risks?**

One issue involved in the research is confidentiality and anonymity. Because I am conducting face-to-face interviews it is not possible to have anonymity, however, I can ensure confidentiality which will be outlined in the next section. The use of a device to record the interview may be uncomfortable for you.

**How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

To ensure confidentiality, you and your schools name will not be used on any written or electronic documents, and a pseudonym will be used instead. You have the option to review and change your transcript up to one week after you receive the transcript. If you do not contact me after that time, the original transcript will be used for data analysis.

**What are the benefits?**

As the researcher, on successful completion of this 90-point research project I benefit by being awarded my Master in Educational Leadership degree. For you, and other secondary school middle leaders who participate, you benefit by getting an opportunity to share your ideas around culturally responsive middle leadership practices and the teaching and leadership community benefits by getting an opportunity to have further insights into the topic area.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

Only my academic supervisor and I will have access to the information contained in the interviews. Any hard copies, data analysis and consent forms will be stored for six years in a secure location at AUT. Electronic data will be contained in a locked file and be password protected. At the end of six years all hard copies will be destroyed and electronic copies deleted from my files. The data gathered at your school and content from the subsequent Masters thesis may be published for a wider academic audience, but the identity of you and your school will not be disclosed at any point.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

If you consent, there are no monetary costs involved in the research for you. The only cost will be in terms of time. The interview should take up to an hour to complete and you have the option to review your transcript after the interview. A total of 2 hours of your time.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

You have one week to consider the invitation and you can let me know if you accept or decline the offer to participate after that time.

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

If you agree to participate in my research project, you will need to complete a Consent form that I will provide you at the start of the interview. You will need to sign two copies, one for me and one for your records.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

You will be presented with a summary report of the findings, either electronically or hard copy, on request.

**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, Alison Smith, email: [alison.smith@aut.ac.nz](mailto:alison.smith@aut.ac.nz) phone: 921 9999 ext. 7363

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTECH, Kate O'Connor, email: [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz) phone: 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 research team as follows:

**Researcher Contact Details:**

Leigh Morgan, email: [leighmorgan77@gmail.com](mailto:leighmorgan77@gmail.com) phone: 0275128749

**Project Supervisor Contact Details:**

Alison Smith, email: [alison.smith@aut.ac.nz](mailto:alison.smith@aut.ac.nz) phone: 921 9999 ext. 7363

Thank you

Kind regards

Leigh Morgan.

***Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> April  
2016 AUTECH Reference number 16/123***



## Appendix C: Consent form



### Consent Form

**Project title:** Investigating culturally responsive practices: Perceptions and experiences of secondary school middle leaders.

**Project Supervisor:** Alison Smith

**Researcher:** Leigh Morgan

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated \_\_\_\_\_(dd/mmmm/yyyy).
- ☐ 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 I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time up to 10 days after data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one):  
Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant signature : .....

Participant name : .....

Participant contact details (if appropriate) :

.....  
.....  
.....

Date : .....

***Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> April  
2016 AUTEK Reference number 16/123***