The Rhetoric and the Reality:

Curriculum Leadership in New Zealand Secondary Schools

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Abstract

The past three decades have seen significant changes in the variety and nature of middle-level leadership positions in New Zealand secondary schools. As a result of these changes there are now a range of titles used to describe the roles of those who are directly responsible for departmental administration and management, as well as the instructional leadership of colleagues in subject areas. However, current research suggests there is a lack of consistent understanding as to what curriculum leadership entails and of the capabilities required to enact the leadership role.

This research examines different understandings of the curriculum leader role in New Zealand secondary schools. It questions the extent to which the lived experiences and practices of those in departmental and curriculum leadership positions are shaping and being shaped by the perspectives of others, in both their own immediate organisational environment and by professional bodies and associations at a national level. In doing so, it explores a perceived disconnect between "professional literature" (Wellington, 2015, p.55) including material published by the New Zealand Ministry of Education, The Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, organisational job descriptions and actual leadership practice.

Four key new insights emerged from this study. The first of these confirm the proposed disconnect between the theoretical perceptions of curriculum leadership held by policy makers and those who practice curriculum leadership in secondary school organisations. The second key finding is linked to the first and identifies an inconsistent understanding of the leadership capabilities required to effectively lead a curriculum team, as well as of the means for developing those competencies. Due to the complex and ambiguous nature of the curriculum leader role, the third insight identifies significant personal and professional challenges faced by curriculum leaders in reconciling the level of performative expectations with the time and resources available, their pedagogical expertise and their professional ability to enact leadership. The fourth finding reveals that in the absence of a nationally cohesive, professional leadership development pathway, appointment into curriculum leadership is a highly subjective process, based on one's perceived educational expertise and capacity for leadership.

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Attestation of Authorship

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

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List of Abbreviations

AP	Associate Principal
BOT	Boards of Trustees
DP	Deputy Principal
ELCF	Educational Leadership Capability Framework
ERO	Education Review Office
HOD	Head of Department
HOLA	Head of Learning Area
MU	Management Unit
MOE	Ministry of Education
NZCER	New Zealand Council for Educational Research
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
TIC	Teacher in Charge

Chapter One: Introduction

Leadership in educational organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand is essentially influencing others to act, think, or feel in ways that advance the values, vision and goals of the organisation, and the learning and flourishing of each of its learners. Leadership is also about seeking sustainable and ongoing improvement and innovation. It is visible in a range of purposeful actions and ways of working. (*Educational Leadership Capability Framework*, Education Council, 2018, p. 3)

Rationale

Six years ago, I was promoted from the position of 'Teacher in Charge' (TIC) of subject to 'Head of Department' (HOD) in a very large, busy, urban secondary school. Four years later, during a subsequent organisational restructure, this role was re-designated 'Head of Faculty' (HOF). While a generic job description was attached to each position, on reflection, there didn't seem to be a substantial point of difference between any of them. This gave me cause to wonder how middle-level, curriculum leaders know exactly what it is that they should do, what each title means in practice, and whether or not they convey a similar meaning to everyone, not only within my own organisation, but in other secondary schools in New Zealand. Furthermore, regardless of commonality or difference, the question remained, how are the parameters of the middle leadership role purpose and function determined, and by whom, and what are the elements that most commonly shape or influence the experiences and performance of a middle-level leader in a New Zealand school?

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine these different understandings of the curriculum leader role in a New Zealand secondary school. In doing so, it explores what their primary responsibilities are perceived to be, how they are determined and investigates the key factors that influence, support and guide professional practice in the enactment of the middle-level leadership role.

Overview

Leadership in New Zealand education needs to be considered against a political backdrop of neoliberalism during the 1980s and 1990s, where government-initiated educational reforms introduced changes to administration and governance in New Zealand schools; changes which continue to be felt today. Schools were given increased autonomy of governance which meant senior leaders were obliged to assume organizational management and strategic planning responsibilities. In turn, compliance-type tasks and the duties of pedagogical leadership were delegated to middle level teaching staff (Busher & Harris, 1999; Cardno & Bassett, 2015; Thrupp, 2015; Wise & Bush, 1999). De Nobile (2018) notes an evolutionary shift during this period, from the assignation of the term middle-level *management* towards *leadership* which further supports evidence of incremental changes in responsibilities for middle leaders from (and including) administrative-based activities, towards the instructional leadership of curriculum teams, with the ability to directly influence the learning outcomes for students.

Local and international studies subsequent to this period also examined the effects of this devolution of responsibilities upon the role of the middle level curriculum leader (Bennett, Woods, Wise & Newton, 2007; Wise & Bush, 1999). Their commentary focused on qualitative research and empirical studies of middle-level leadership practice, the tensions of working in the organisational *sandwich*, the issues arising from the ensuing duality of accountability and responsibility within the role and finally the effects of this on the learning and teaching of students. Their findings confirmed the fact that schools had moved to an increasingly hierarchical structure post-1990 (Fitzgerald, 2009) and noted that middle leaders were described as occupying a dual role "at the interface between teaching and managing" (Cardno & Robson, 2016, p. 230). Curriculum leaders were found to carry an expanded management role, acting as a key conduit for transfer of operational information between senior management and teaching staff to ensure policy implementation of organisational strategic planning and direction. They were also, in their capacity as instructional leaders, assuming pedagogical accountability for teaching and learning within their departments, which is a significant devolution of responsibility, given that studies have shown a strong correlation between effective leadership, strong departmental teams and positive educational outcomes for students (Dinham, 2006; Fowler, 2012; Robinson, 2007; Robinson, 2010).

Grant, Berg and Cable (2014) conducted research in Mid-West America on the link between job titles and employee's identity within modern business organisations. They contend that job titles are fundamentally important in organisations and describe them as "a recognized shorthand for describing a set of responsibilities held by one employee, (to) communicate the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics that employees who hold the job are likely to possess" (p. 1201). However, in the case of middle-level leadership in the New Zealand secondary school setting, conferment of a job title alone does not seem to necessarily result in a definitively common understanding across the educational sector, or even within individual schools, of what the middle leader role might entail nor how it should be enacted. In fact, in speaking with colleagues in my own organisation and in others, there continues to be significant variance between stated expectations about performance and actual outcome of practice for those who hold positions of responsibility.

However, despite the ambiguity surrounding this role, studies show that understanding the middle leadership position in New Zealand secondary schools remains important on several fronts, not the least of these being the fact that they can directly impact the quality of teaching performance in their departments or faculties and therefore the educational outcomes for students (Bassett, 2016; Cardno & Bassett, 2015; Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2020; Gurr & Drysdale, 2020; Lipscombe, Grice, Tindall-Ford and De-Nobile, 2020). Many bureaucratically driven publications of educational leadership and management have emerged, defining the practice of leadership in certain, generalisable terms. Organisations such as the New Zealand Ministry of Education (MOE) and associations charged with the responsibility for teacher professional accountability and performance such as the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (formerly the New Zealand Education Council), developed and published a range of resources within which they have outlined their vision of educational leadership. They define middle and senior leadership as independent concepts, offer leadership models and guidance as to aspects of leadership qualities and capabilities, professional learning and a collective definition of the roles and responsibilities of an educational leader within the organizational framework of a school, with the clear intention of informing middle-level leadership practice (Ministry of Education, 2012). However, studies published by researchers post-2010, claim that there is still much to learn about the concept and the development of middle level leadership (Bassett, 2016; Gurr & Drysdale, 2020; Harris, Jones, Ismail & Nguyen, 2019; Lipscombe, Tindall-Ford & Lamanna, 2021) and contend that "the

concept remains under-theorised and ambiguities persist in relation to who middle managers or middle leaders are and what they do" (De Nobile, 2018, p.395). Describing middle leadership as a "unique practice" (p. 419) in their documentary analysis, Lipscombe et al., (2020) conclude that "there is an imperative to understand middle leaders' policy, practice and professional development to ensure the architectures surrounding middle leadership are supportive to lead effectively" (p. 420).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which the lived experiences and practice of those in curriculum leadership roles reflect the discourse of their professional environment. The term *discourse* includes but is not limited to official publications from government organisations, school policies and job descriptions, and the institutional and social discourses operating in specific school workplace settings. In this sense, professional discourse captures multiple forms of communication that take place in a professional context, including written, spoken and multimodal. As Gunnarsson, Linell and Nordberg (1997) argue, professional discourse has a key role to play in issues of identity construction and the ways in which different kinds of identities are constantly being constructed, negotiated and sometimes challenged. Hence, professional dialogue provides insight into different understandings and forms of leadership and the ways in which leadership is enacted. This study examines a perceived gap between the professional discourse surrounding middle level leadership and the actual experiences of middle leaders in their daily practice.

Employing a qualitative case study method, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four curriculum leaders and two members of the senior leadership team of Beachview College. Beachview College is a decile 8, state, co-educational secondary school situated in the greater Auckland area. In 2022, it caters for approximately 2200 students ranging from Year 9 to Year 13 students. This school was deliberately selected so that it might typically represent any New Zealand secondary school in terms of organisational structure, roll size, staff numbers, curriculum and subjects taught. This was with the intention that the findings might inform not only my own practice but also that of others working in middle-level curriculum leadership in New Zealand.

Interview questions were intended to explore participants' journeys into and experiences of curriculum leadership, including:

- what they feel they bring to the role

- what they see as their main responsibilities and how these are prioritised
- what they consider to be their focus in their leadership practice
- which contextual elements constrain or enable them to perform this role
- the extent to which they are aware of or can access professional development and support

The same interview questions were also put to the senior leader participants, intended to elicit responses that contributed to the discourse of the professional environment of the middle leaders in the case study organisation. In terms of defining curriculum leaders, the participants in this study are all currently registered, practising teachers who hold positions of responsibility, charged with leading subject departments and who either directly or indirectly influence the learning outcomes of students. They hold positions prefaced by 'Head of Learning Area' (HOLA) or 'Teacher in Charge of …' (TIC).

Context

It is important also to consider the context within which teachers interact with and interpret policy, in relation to the processes and organisational framework they work within (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012). This study examines the professional context within which teachers work and considers the possibilities and/or constraints in terms of the ways in which they engage with the policies created by others that they must deliver. In thinking and learning about policy in this way, issues around policy enactment (Ball, 1994) have an important place in the analysis. This study also takes into consideration the idea of *professional knowledge landscapes* which is a conceptualisation supporting analysis of the ways the work of teachers occurs in various spaces and with those within them. The work of Clandinin and Connelly (1996) explores the tensions experienced by teachers as their knowledge, experiences and skills come into (at times) conflict with one another and is used in the discussion and analysis of the findings in Chapter Five.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is organised into seven chapters to provide a framework that offers clarity around the structure of this study. The first chapter contains an introduction and an overview of the study. Chapter Two provides a synthesis of the literature from

research and studies of the middle leader role during the past two decades to establish what is currently known and said about the expectations of those in this role. This includes an explanation of the historical context from which the role of middle leader developed during the first part of the 21st century and a close look at how the role is perceived to have continued to evolve in response to government initiatives and structural and workload changes within organisations. The third chapter introduces the research methodology and design, the research questions and sub-questions, and a description of the theoretical framework and methods used for exploring the data analysed in Chapter Five. Chapter Four presents the findings from this study using participant narratives. In Chapter Five the focus is upon the discussion and analysis of the information and data presented in Chapter Four and therefore considers the extent to which the lived experiences of the research participants are consistent with current professional discourse surrounding curriculum leadership in New Zealand schools as presented in the literary synthesis in Chapter Two. The final chapter contains the conclusions and implications that can be drawn from the findings in this study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

As the intent of this study is to investigate the potential incongruity between what is generally perceived, said or written about the middle leader role, and the reality of the actual lived experiences of the middle level leader, this chapter provides a synthesis of the research and literature pertaining to this role in modern secondary school settings.

The first part of this review provides the historical context and describes changes in New Zealand government educational policy during the late twentieth century. These changes initiated a complete restructure of the way educational organisations were run in this country and provided the catalyst for the subsequent transformation of the secondary school curriculum leader role. The second part of this review looks closely at academic discussion concerning the role of the curriculum leader, published after the neoliberal educational reforms, to establish what is known about the primary responsibilities of the present-day curriculum leader. This includes commentary surrounding an anticipated shift in leadership role parameters from being purely administrative and management-focused or task-based, towards a more dynamic and strategic leadership model. In doing so, this review also explores the growing requirement for a curriculum leader to possess not only strong pedagogical and subject competencies, but towards having sufficient personal and professional capacity to enact leadership of others. The existence or availability of professional development opportunities to grow these leadership capabilities is also a focus. To locate this discourse within the different professional expectations of those who perform this role, academic research is compared with professional literature published by the New Zealand government intended to support and guide middle level leaders.

Neo-liberalism and Contemporary Education

Understanding the current state of leadership in education requires an awareness of the political forces and policies that were at the heart of initiatives introduced by the New Zealand government more than thirty years ago. Davies and Bansel (2007) in their paper introducing qualitative studies on the advent of neo-liberalism in national

governance (and particularly in education) argue that the neo-liberal state is one that has been deliberately engineered and constructed, by those who seek to maximise economic growth (ergo organisational and personal wealth) in an increasingly capitalist global market. They say while there are some *romanticists* who would prefer to attribute change and development to natural social processes over time, a more cynical view sees neo-liberalism as a new form of discourse. This discourse reflects a means of social and political control of the individual, context and conditions for the generation of wealth, under a rhetoric of freedom of choice and individual responsibility. They posit that neo-liberalism is "the transformation of the administrative state, one previously responsible for human well-being, as well as for the economy, into a state that gives power to global corporations and installs apparatuses and knowledges through which people are reconfigured as productive economic entrepreneurs of their own lives" (p. 248). They suggest it is this notion of individuals as entrepreneurs in the generation of wealth, and institutions as the means by which these individuals are empowered to succeed, that places education as a highly relevant context within which to restructure in order to effect these outcomes.

It was under the influence of this neo-liberal political environment, that educational administration in New Zealand changed significantly during the latter part of the 1980s. Government initiatives underpinned by the intent to increase economic efficiency and organisational effectiveness paved the way for significant economic reform (Codd, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2009). In New Zealand, these reforms were spearheaded by a report from the Picot Taskforce (New Zealand. Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988) and formed the basis of what was to become the revolutionary *Tomorrow's Schools* policy document (1988). These reforms included the creation of six new national organisations to replace the former *Department of Education* (Devine, Stewart & Benade, 2018). These organisations included the Ministry of Education (MOE), the Education Review Office (ERO), the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and the New Zealand Teacher's Council, which was later rebranded to become the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand. Schools became "pseudo-autonomous entities" (Devine et al., 2018, p. 161) and were given independent governance, via a governing group known as 'Boards of Trustees' (BOT). This group were given financial autonomy and governance, management of staffing, resourcing and organisational structure and strategy, of their individual schools on behalf of their respective communities, ostensibly to allow for greater social flexibility and local control, albeit under state controlled educational

guidelines. They operated under the auspices of a charter document which set out the objectives and conditions under which they would govern their school, and which acted as a contract between the community, the school, and the government. These boards remained accountable to the Ministry in terms of meeting the objectives of their charter and for financial management of their organisation and occupied the top tier of an increasingly hierarchical framework within New Zealand schools (Fitzgerald, 2009).

Ball (2017) captures this change in emphasis when he illustrates how neoliberalism has ushered in a "system of education that at each level, from the national to the student, is modelled on *the firm*, an investment model that requires students, teachers and schools to make decisions about how they invest their time, resources and energy in relation to likely returns – as qualifications and labour market opportunities, as performance improvement, as social advantage" (p. 217). Fitzgerald (2009) also likens the nature of these new responsibilities as those akin to that of a business, especially in terms of public demand for accountability and the meeting of regulatory standards, noting that consequently, "the organisation and hierarchy of schools (now) replicates industrial models of working that differentiates people and activities according to position" (p. 64).

These systemic changes completely altered the landscape of educational administration and delivery across New Zealand and meant a significant increase in the number and type of tasks and responsibilities that were necessarily absorbed into the management portfolio of school leaders. This was particularly so, in terms of fiscal responsibility, organisational governance, strategic planning and management and compliance with central government policies, as well as managing heightened expectations around the quality of school, staff and student performance. In turn, this resulted in a restructure of whole-school organisations internally, to accommodate and manage these new bureaucratic responsibilities (Bassett, 2016; Cardno, Robson, Deo, Bassett & Howse, 2018; Fitzgerald, 2009) which meant a redistribution of internal management and instructional leadership tasks. Middle leaders were compelled to absorb and accommodate a variety of new responsibilities within the organisational structure, assuming pedagogical and instructional leadership duties, in addition to retaining their more traditional organisational management and classroom teaching obligations. Thus, the profile of the modern curriculum leadership role as we

recognise it today was conceived during this period of reform in New Zealand educational history.

New Zealand was not alone in undergoing this process. Academic commentary published during the next ten years noted similar changes taking place in education in a number of countries, including the Unites States of America, Australia and Great Britain (Dinham, 2006; Wise & Bush, 1999). Academic studies about curriculum leadership conducted in those countries are therefore seen to be relevant to the developments occurring in New Zealand. However, there was a notable decline in research attention around the middle leadership role from the early millennium. Harris and Jones (2017), writing in the UK context 15 years ago, depicted a considerable shift in educational landscapes which has rendered out-of-date, if not irrelevant, some of the earliest research around middle leadership. At that time, they proposed a "renaissance of research" (p. 215) from which to inform understanding of this role within a more modern context. More recent studies also conclude that although academic interest in the middle leadership role continues, the "knowledge base would benefit from more sophisticated empirical studies and greater theoretical analysis" (Harris, Jones, Ismail, & Nguyen, 2019, p. 1). This sentiment is echoed by researchers in both Australia and New Zealand, who contend there is a pervasive lack of clarity surrounding this role, particularly in terms of obscure policies, performance expectations and a perceived lack of support or professional development opportunities (Dinham, 2007; Lipscombe et al., 2020).

Smith, Thrupp and Barrett (2020) suggest that it is the socio-political context in New Zealand, shaped by neoliberalism, which has created the conditions under which this confusion has been able to take hold and thrive in an education system driven by accountability, competition and an externally driven demand for quality of performance and high educational outcomes. Furthermore, it has become more difficult to gain access to schools to conduct the research necessary to understand the effects of this upon the organisation and those who work within it. They comment thus:

> The New Zealand of today is not the same as the one of two or three decades ago, but the influence of neoliberal ideology is still very prominent with the structure of education, and society itself, shaped by it. The reconstituted roles for teachers and parents, as technicians under a notion of managerial professionalism and

consumers within a quasi-market of education respectively, continue to operate in an environment of heightened demand and "holding to account". (p. 59)

Curriculum Leadership

Becoming a Curriculum Leader

Despite plenty of academic interest in the purpose and expectations of the middle-level curriculum leader role, and discussion about the challenges and tensions for them in their enactment thereof, there remains a paucity of research specifically addressing why classroom teachers seek promotion at all, how they are identified as potential leaders, and what determines their pathways into educational middle level leadership. It is generally acknowledged that in many cases, it is the competent teacher practitioners who, once recognised, are promoted to middle level leadership positions (De Nobile, 2018; Grootenboer, 2018). Grootenboer says of himself, "… as a young teacher I was promoted to a senior role—a role I was neither prepared for nor aware of what it involved. I had simply been a good classroom teacher, and then I was the Faculty Head!" (2018, p. 2). This reflection mirrors the experience of the participants in this study and continues to be replicated across New Zealand schools. Research suggests that the authority of the subject leader rested not so much on the title itself but on the level of subject proficiency and pedagogy demonstrated in practice (Bennett, Woods, Wise & Newton, 2007). Moreover, in the absence of a formal, nationally accredited middle-level leader education and development programme in New Zealand, one's subject knowledge and degree of pedagogical skill remains the only (albeit subjective) measurable evidence of professional competence. Even recently, evidence from academic literature continues to affirm knowledge based in subject expertise, effective classroom pedagogy and experience in assessment practice as key elements of curriculum leadership (De Nobile, 2018; Dinham, 2016).

The Administrator

Early research investigating the role of subject Heads of Departments in secondary schools found that traditionally they occupied a position beneath that of senior leadership staff and above that of classroom teachers, but that their roles were mostly administrative and predominantly managerial within their departmental teams (Bennett et al., 2007). Later research studies reveal that despite the contextual changes wrought by educational reform, more than three decades later administration

continues to play a dominant part of the curriculum leadership role in practice (De Nobile & Ridden, 2014).

These administrative responsibilities typically include but are not restricted to organisational tasks such as keeping records (student progress, achievement and discipline), creating and maintaining administrational tools and resources, overseeing orders, purchasing and inventory (De Nobile, 2019). Many still regard the ability of a curriculum leader to be effective as an administrator as a critical element, when one considers that this activity underpins the framework and provides the context that allows effective learning and teaching to occur (Bassett, 2016; Bush, 2008). Similarly, others posit that the administrative role played by middle managers promotes the stability and legitimacy of an educational organisation (Farchi & Tubin, 2019).

Ironically, researchers contend that following the educational reform, and despite the change in role parameters to ostensibly include management and leadership, middle leaders rarely get time for anything *other* than administration (De Nobile & Ridden, 2014; Fitzgerald, 2009). They argue that the number and variety of tasks expected of the middle leaders far exceeds the time available or their ability to fulfil their responsibilities. This view is supported by results published by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) in their 2015 report, observing "Teachers in AP (Assistant Principal) /DP (Deputy Principal) roles were more likely to report good morale overall, than those in HOD (Heads of Departments) or class/ subject teacher roles" (p. 95). They go on to note that "more than teachers in other roles, HODs' wanted both the administrative aspect of their work and the number of initiatives at any one time reduced" (p. 95). In addition to this, in most schools curriculum leaders are primarily classroom teachers. However, although studies note that middle leaders usually have a portion of non-contact time available to them, this time is invariably consumed by the day-to-day demands of administration, managing and leading the department. Inevitably, this means that tasks relating to their own classroom teaching such as planning, marking and reporting are relegated to evenings and weekends (Fitzgerald, 2009).

Also indicative of the expansion of the curriculum leader role, has been a gradual but marked shift away from explicitly describing or defining curriculum administrative responsibilities in professional educational leadership literature published by the New Zealand government. In 2012, the MOE in their document *Leading from the Middle* (2012), made vague reference to the fact that middle leaders "fulfil various

administrative functions" (p. 7) and described them as "providing a stable, safe and orderly school environment through managing systems and administrative practices" (p. 8). Later in the same document, administration was described as "general and strategic school administration, such as planning, resourcing, staff appointments, budgeting, timetabling, running school events and academic tracking of students" (p. 15). Six years later, they published the *Educational Leadership Capability Framework (ELCF)* (2018), (designed as a supporting document for the *Leadership Strategy* paper also published in 2018), in which there is no specific mention of administration at all pertaining to the curriculum leader role, beyond the requirement to manage "people, environments and education" (p. 6). Instead, there is a more holistic emphasis upon leadership capacity (to be discussed more fully below), accentuating the personal qualities, values and capabilities one must possess for effective leadership.

This both illustrates a change in focus away from the practical administrative obligations of the middle leader practitioner, and ignores current research literature, which continues to highlight the fact that there are significant challenges for curriculum leaders working in a role that often lacks clear or consistent parameters (Bassett, 2016; Fitzgerald, 2009). It seems that ultimately, the audience who might most benefit from reflecting upon their leadership capabilities, are denied the time and energy to consider and engage with the support material available to them.

Manager or Leader?

As discussed above, the period of post-reform saw significant changes in the organisational structure of secondary schools and thus inevitably, changes to the context within which curriculum leaders work. The increased bureaucratic workload at the senior leadership level meant the devolution of many of their former responsibilities to middle leaders, and so began the marked expansion of the curriculum leader role, from that of largely a departmental administrator, towards managerial, supervisory and pedagogical leadership, occupying a uniquely central position within New Zealand secondary school organisations (Fitzgerald, 2009; Gurr & Drysdale, 2020). As mentioned above, much of the organisational management and instructional or pedagogical leadership responsibilities were redistributed to the middle-level leaders (Bassett, 2016; Bennett et al., 2007; De Nobile, 2019; Harris et al., 2019; Youngs, 2009) and in this capacity they are now expected to be able to manage *and* lead.

At this point it is important to recognise that although the focus of this literature review remains on curriculum leaders formally appointed to manage and lead subject departments, the use of the term *middle leader* is dependent upon context and can reference a diverse range of roles and functions. For example, in some organisations, positions such as the role of DP are designated middle-leader, whereas studies show that in others a DP is included as a member of the Senior Leadership team (De Nobile, 2018). Furthermore, informal leadership (especially pedagogical) can and does occur without official designation or recognition, especially in cases where new teachers are mentored by a more experienced colleague (De Nobile, 2018).

Described as *pivotal* (Bassett, 2016; Ministry of Education, 2012), contemporary curriculum leaders liaise and provide an important link between senior management, teaching staff and students, with the ability to translate organisational policy and initiatives for their teams to influence and effect change in pedagogy and educational outcomes for their departments. In this way, the scope of the middle leader role has changed to extend vertically as well as horizontally within the structural framework of the modern secondary school (Dinham, 2007). Grootenboer et al., (2019) describes modern middle leaders as "relationally positioned … often working as bridge and broker between senior management and the teaching staff" (p. 253). In this capacity, they are employed as a conduit of information as well as a means of overseeing and driving the implementation of operational and pedagogical initiatives (Bassett, 2016).

It is suggested that a discursive shift in title from middle *manage*r to the more widely used middle *leader* (Cardno & Bassett, 2015; De Nobile, 2017) can be attributed to this redistribution of curriculum and pedagogical leadership responsibilities within the organisational structure from senior to middle leaders and reflects the reshaping of the middle leader role itself. Further evidence of this is noted by Harris et al. (2019) in their synthesis of research literature from 2003 to 2017, who reported an increased use of *leader* in a range of titles falling within the domain of the middle. They comment, "a more diverse set of middle leadership positions have emerged in the literature in more recent years e.g. co-ordinators, team leaders, network leaders, professional learning leaders" (p. 4). Lipscombe et al. (2020) argue that "the confusing array of terms to describe the formal positions of middle leaders … has no doubt contributed to the confusion that exists around what middle leadership is and who middle leaders are in schools" (p. 408).

The new centrality of the middle leadership role within the school structure is akin to 'constructive interference', which describes a phenomenon that occurs in the natural world when two waves of equal magnitude meet (BYJU'S.com, n.d.). The waves combine and reinforce each other to form a new wave with much higher amplitude. This analogy could be applied to the middle-level curriculum leadership role, to describe the convergence between the distributed responsibilities of instructional leadership and the inherently managerial and administrative functions of running a department. This has resulted in a heightened, more powerful form of curriculum leadership that should theoretically advance increased organisational effectiveness and greater positive achievement outcomes for students. However, it also brings a far greater level of accountability for those in this role and presents a number of constraints providing challenges and tensions, as well as a lack of clarity as to what is actually required and achieved in practice.

Much has been written about how the two complementary, yet diametrically opposing, concepts of management and leadership now co-exist in a single entity (De Nobile, 2018; Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2020). Researchers argue that studies referring to *middle leadership* describe the leadership *practice* and *behaviours* of those in the middle leader role, while those that investigate the idea of *leading from the middle* explores middle leadership as a part of a *management system*, having the capacity to generate and support organisational change (Harris et al., 2019). This view is supported by Connolly, James and Fertig (2017) who argue that the term *management* indicates a positional level in the hierarchy of school administration where one assumes a level of control over those lower down the hierarchy with the power or resource to delegate tasks to facilitate the functioning of a system. Their research notes a clear conceptual difference between the idea of educational *management* and educational *leadership*. They describe *management* as assuming responsibility for the effective running of systems within an organisation without necessarily involving action that precipitates change, and *leadership* as involving actions taken to motivate colleagues towards a goal. Similarly, Fitzgerald (2009) describes management as being "a range of functional activities whereas leadership is viewed as having a more strategic purpose; teamwork and working with others" (p. 61). Additionally, Grootenboer and Edwards-Groves' (2020) study acknowledges a third component of responsibility carried by the curriculum leaders, in that they teach as well as lead and manage. They describe this role as "fundamentally about creating

and developing practice architectures to enable and constrain the teaching practices of their colleagues, and in turn the learning practices of students" (p. 25).

In practice, it is difficult to see where the act of leadership can be definitively separated from that of management, particularly at the curriculum leadership level, with regards to influencing the actions and behaviours of one's colleagues to effectively coordinate and ensure the smooth operation of an organisation. Cardno, Robson, Deo, Bassett and Howse (2018) contend that principals and senior leadership are still involved *indirectly* in instructional leadership, in that through the creation of mission statements and school goals, they create the learning climate and protect the conditions and standards required to support the activity of classroom teachers. In contrast, middle-level leaders are *direct* instructional leaders who perform both management functions including "managing the instructional programme by supervising and evaluating instruction, co-ordinating the curriculum and monitoring student progress" (p. 34), as well as leadership functions which could include "planning, co-ordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum, and promoting and participating in teacher learning and development" (p. 34). In this way, they contend the curriculum leaders are closer to the point where teaching and learning occur and can have greater influence on the performance of teaching staff and students.

One of the first government publications to formally capture the expanded role of the curriculum leader was '*Leading from the Middle*' (2012), in which the MOE acknowledged the duality of the leadership and management responsibilities of middle leaders, stating "Middle leaders work with and support classroom teachers and students, providing pedagogical … leadership and fulfilling various functions" (p. 7) but also that they have "a focus on pedagogy and on the systems needed to support teachers and students" (p. 6). During the same period, De Nobile and Ridden (2014) wrote that the primary aim of management within the leadership role is the "coordination of people and materials to get tasks done" which entails organising "human and physical resources in activities that help to achieve school goals and objectives" (p. 23). They categorised the tasks of supervision, monitoring staff performance and promoting staff professional development as a predominantly managerial function, whereas they posited that the leadership role "is about influencing the attitudes and behaviours of others" (p. 24). And as mentioned above, the centrality of the middle leadership role, with the direct access to teachers, enables

this to be done more effectively than perhaps by those in a senior leadership position (Cardno et al., 2018). Harris and Jones (2019) concur, saying "the vast literature on educational change reinforces, again and again, the centrality of teacher agency, collaboration and leadership as a core influence upon improved learner outcomes" (p. 123).

More recently, following an extensive review and synthesis of relevant literature, De Nobile (2019) proposed a continuum of middle leadership responsibilities in *The Multi-role Conceptual Framework of Middle Leadership* ranging from that of student management and administration, towards leadership of staff development and strategic department planning (Figure 1, p. 4). This framework delineates more clearly between the acts of management and leadership within the middle leader role and illustrates the extent to which tasks previously attended to by senior leadership in schools have been infused into the modern curriculum leadership role.

Figure 1

The Multi-role Conceptual Framework of Middle Leadership

Student Focussed	Administrative	Organisational	Supervisory	Staff Development	Strategic
* Student behaviour * Student academics * Assisting students * Home-School liaison * Other student issues	* Record keeping * Record creation * Creating/maintaining admin tools (eg forms) * Keeping inventory * Orders & purchases	* Timetables & rosters * Agendas & itineraries * Curriculum planning * Setting up teams or committees	* Grade/stage supervision * Subject supervision * Monitor performance * Providing feedback * Discussing tasks and Performance * Appraisal	* Coaching staff * Advising staff * Demonstrating * Modelling * Induction/Mentoring * Leading staff Development	* Establish and share Vision for area of resp. * Goal-setting * Leading innovation and change * Inspiring peers * Heading teams related to the above
Management	<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<	<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<	>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>	>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>	**Leadership**

This framework (Figure 1) provides a practical model from which we can compare the views and experiences of the case study participants in the characterisation of their work. But it is important to remember that in terms of workload, it highlights only the administrative and professional leadership aspects of the curriculum leadership role. It does not address the additional functions performed by middle leaders in terms of their own teaching and all that this encompasses (class preparation, assessment, feedback and reporting, teacher interviews, etc), nor socio-professional functions such as co-curricular obligations, playground duties, tutor teacher and/or other pastoral tasks.

However, this framework does illustrate that the perception of the curriculum leader role has significantly evolved during the past two decades, including the fact that

curriculum leaders are now expected to fulfil a more complex range of functions, with an increasing emphasis upon strategic planning and instructional leadership of colleagues (Bassett, 2016; Cardno et al., 2018). Hirsh & Bergmo-Prvulovic (2019) argue that the practice of enabling middle level leaders to play a more active part in effecting school reform is underpinned by "an assumption that leadership distributed over those who still have a practical foundation in the activities they are intended to lead will have a direct and positive impact on practice" (p. 352). Their research concurs with a large number of similar studies contending that the primary function of middle leadership is to implement change of policy or to introduce new ideas, and identifies the contemporary middle leader position as a key component in the potential for change in schools, particularly and increasingly, in terms of instructional or pedagogical leadership to improve educational outcomes for students (Cardno, 1995; Cardno et al., 2018; Robinson, 2007; Robinson, Hohepa & Llyod, 2007). In this way, both contemporary academic literature and the rhetoric of professional discourse from within organisations has moved away from describing the practical task and duties required of the curriculum leader in favour of a more progressive emphasis on instructional leadership capabilities. However, it does not necessarily follow, that simply being well-positioned to support the implementation of organisational strategies and having the mandate to monitor and supervise staff development, learning and teaching programmes and pedagogy, means it will happen in practice. While there appears a significant shift in focus towards the *how* of department leadership which describes the personal and professional characteristics and capacities required to effect leadership of organisational change and support organisational policy, there is still a deeply embedded expectation that basic functional administrative and bureaucratic tasks, the *what*, will continue to be managed by the curriculum leader. Furthermore, in essence, research continues to note that for many, the reality of bureaucratic demands and practical management of people and resources in real time, in real contexts, continues to dominate curriculum leadership practice, and the traditional model of departmental administrative manager persists.

Leadership Development

Recurrent themes in research concerning middle leadership development, are the barriers created by a lack of professional guidance and scarcity of leadership skill

development opportunities to enable and support growth into and within the middle leader role. This extends to every facet of the role, but especially in enacting instructional or pedagogical leadership of colleagues. For example, data published by the NZCER in 2019 on the role of teachers mentoring a provisionally registered teacher recorded the following response: "Fewer indicated they have had useful professional learning focused on being an effective mentor (38%). Over a quarter (28%) feel left to "sink or swim" in their mentoring role" (p. 91).

In fact, although often curriculum leaders are appointed to their role because they have been outstanding practitioners in the classroom, research shows that this does not necessarily mean they possess the ability or skill set to effectively manage and lead their colleagues (Bassett, 2016). Research published by Dinham (2006) noted that commonly, successful middle leaders shared similar personal qualities and characteristics and projected a "professionalism underpinned by humanity" (p. 77) that gave them leadership potential. Conversely, Bassett (2016) makes the point that simply being appointed to middle leadership because of perceived leadership potential without adequate preparation, ill-prepares the curriculum leader to cope with the ensuing challenges of the role. His study identifies three key challenges facing middle leaders; "developing interpersonal relationships; tensions between collegiality and accountability; and a lack of allocated time" (p. 100). This echoes the findings from a review of empirical research almost a decade earlier by Bennett et al (2007) which found a further fundamental tension to be that which is created by the duality of the curriculum manager/leader role. They found that middle leaders were expected to maintain both a "whole-school focus" within a "growing culture of line management within a hierarchical framework" and "loyalty to their department, (within) a professional rhetoric of collegiality" (p. 453). Thus, middle leaders must seemingly be adept at transposing organisational policy initiatives, conducting appraisal and monitoring staff pedagogy and professional development in such a way that ensures they can retain the trust and cooperation of their curriculum team. It could be argued that the middle leader's ability to resolve and meet these challenges will depend both upon innate leadership characteristics and the level and quality of support available to them, as well as their ability to reconcile externally imposed conditions and expectations with the contextual environment in which they lead.

The idea of middle leaders being skilled in developing effective working relationships is an element often commented on in modern research. Robinson (2010) studied

leadership capabilities, and observed a strong link between effective educational leadership, where leaders are focussed on the core activities of teaching and learning, and positive student outcomes. She cautions, that "evidence about effective leadership practices is not the same as evidence about the capabilities that leaders need to confidently engage in those practices" (p. 2). Her definition of *capabilities* is a description of what people "need to be able to do and to be" (p. 3) to carry out the role of instructional leader. Her research identifies three key capabilities that a leader needs to possess to be an effective instructional leader. These include the ability to solve complex problems, to be able to integrate educational knowledge and to build relational trust. Robinson (2010) argues that leadership development programmes should consider the "holistic and integrated nature of effective leadership and developing leadership curricula that teach the integrated rather than the discrete components" (p. 24). Grootenboer and Edwards-Groves (2020) also recognise middle leadership as "relational work" (p. 27) but as "social, material and cultural practices; rather than a set of personal characteristics or dispositions, or a series of precepts to be followed with rigid and impermeable boundaries" (p. 24). In their work on praxis in education, they find that it is the intent and commitment to moral action and to act with integrity in decision making and conduct that makes middle leadership a critical element in creating the environment for positive change and for others to do well.

Following a government-initiated study by the NZCER, the Teaching Council published the ELCF (2018) outlining a set of nine leadership 'capabilities' to be observed in educational organisations across New Zealand. It is intended "to provide high-level guidelines for leadership development based on shared understandings of what leadership in different spheres of influence looks like in practice; in early childhood educational services, kura and schools" (p. 3). These include;

- Building and sustaining high trust relationships.
- Ensuring culturally responsive practice and understanding of Aotearoa New Zealand's cultural heritage, using Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the foundation.
- Building and sustaining collective leadership and professional community.
- Strategically thinking and planning.
- Evaluating practices in relation to outcomes.
- Adept management of resources to achieve visions and goals.

- Attending to their own learning as leaders and their own well-being.
- Embodying the organisation's values and showing moral purpose, optimism, agency and resilience.
- Contributing to the development and wellbeing of education beyond their organisation. (p. 6 & 7)

These capabilities are then broken down into descriptions of what actual practice might look like across three tiers of leadership, or "spheres of leadership influence" (p. 4), which refer to leading an organisation, a team, or as an expert teacher who has responsibility for leading curriculum or an initiative. Since this study is focused upon the practice of curriculum leaders who lead teams, it is suggested that two of the three leadership spheres are directly applicable to the participants in this study. Each capability is referenced in conjunction with the research studies discussed and in terms of the participant responses in Chapter Five: Discussion and Analysis.

Ten years ago, Dinham, Anderson, Caldwell & Weldon (2011) in their research into school leadership development in Australia, noted that to date;

> Competencies have (also) been criticised for being more about measuring performance 'now' than being aspirational in guiding and encouraging further growth. With the move from competencies to leadership capabilities, there has been a commensurate shift from use of the term 'standard' to the use of broader 'frameworks', some seeing standards as implying standardisation and with frameworks being conceived as more flexible and applicable to varied contexts and settings (p.142).

Described as "a promising work in progress" (p. 151) their findings advocated support for the development of a national standards framework to support and guide the development of school leaders, providing a clear model of expectations and recognition of career and salary progression. New Zealand currently has no equivalent framework in use in secondary education to support and promote competencies and capabilities of the middle level leaders.

The next section discusses the way in which context influences and shapes curriculum leader professional practice. This includes reference to the secret, cover and sacred stories within *professional knowledge landscapes*, as proposed by Clandinin and Connelly (1996) in their work on conceptualising teachers' practice. This framework is particularly relevant to this research in light of a perceived disconnect between the

professional discourse (government policies and professional literature, published academic research, organisational policies and expectations) and the reality for curriculum leaders in their daily experience.

Leadership in Context

Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2020) highlight that beyond the personal characteristics, skills and knowledge of the middle leader individual, efficacy of leadership practice and enactment of educational policy, can be influenced or determined by a range of contextual factors and by the leader's capacity to flex their responses to manage those factors. Their findings are supported by research from Busher, Hammersley-Fletcher and Turner (2007) in their studies of middle leadership, which draws upon the concept of communities of practice, (Wenger, 1998), referring to groups of people with common expertise in their fields, a commitment to learning and interacting with each other in the pursuit of, and a desire to share, their practice. Their study posits that although there are a wide range of contexts within which educational communities of practice sit, policy contexts are governed largely by both external policy makers (in New Zealand's case the MOE, the Teaching Council and NZQA) and internally by organisational leaders (BOTs and senior leadership). Additionally, that these bodies determine or influence the extent and the manner in which policies are either introduced or imposed, and subsequently translated and enacted at the departmental level. They argue that too much of the literature to date has focused on "describing the functions and characteristics of middle leaders, paying very limited attention to the institutional, social and political contexts in which they operate, or to the strategies they use or may use to implement policies and actions that allow them to fulfil their functions" (p. 406). They assert that the influence of the middle school leader over school change and improvement, is subject to the "impact of social and political contexts, including those of the internal policies of senior staff in schools … and it is the interplay between these contexts and the choices and values of leaders" (p. 407) which will determine the level of success in the outcomes for organisations and for their students.

In their editorial of a special issue of *School Leadership and Management* (2019), Grootenboer, Edwards-Groves and Rönnerman posit that the current "neo-liberal foci on performative conceptions of accountability, reductive understandings of 'effect sizes' and decontextualised 'what works' approaches have been promoted as solutions

to intractable educational problems" (p. 251). But equally, they argue that researchers have not necessarily considered the "situated understandings of practice as the real drivers of educational development" (p. 252). Similarly, De Nobile (2017) posits that it is "desirable to describe and explain the nature of the roles, uncover examples of best practice and how the roles are executed, accounting for the situated nature of leadership practices" (p. 410). He suggests that further research to investigate the "uncovering of narratives that explain how factors such as professional development and senior leadership relate to roles in detail . . . could identify which roles impact most significantly on outputs such as teaching quality and student outcomes" (p. 410). This view is supported by recent work from Grootenburger et al., (2020), who assert that "the situatedness and locally responsiveness of middle leading is of critical importance since the fundamental goal undergirding any educational activity – be it leading, researching, teaching, learning, evaluating or developing – is to educate students" (p. 252). Hirsh and Bergmo-Prvulovic's (2019) research on the role of middle-level leadership in career progression further illustrates the need for this *local responsiveness*, finding that "role definition and clarity … are important in the initial phase" (p. 368) but that "external professional development and collegial support within shared experiences towards a more "supported autonomy" (p. 365) are sought to develop practice within the role.

Also in terms of context, Clandenin and Connelly (1995, 1996, 2000b) categorise teachers' professional lives into three distinct levels of construct or *stories* that collectively form the *knowledge landscape* within and across the many (often conflicting) dimensions of their workplace. The sacred stories refer to the cases where teachers are seen to comply with the external policies imposed from government, BOT or senior leadership, groups that outwardly and officially direct professional practice. These carry the weight of regulatory authority and are not to be outwardly challenged or questioned (Phillips, 2001). The secret stories disclose the actual personal practice of the teacher within the relatively safe environment of their own classroom, describing how knowledge gained through personal and professional experience is translated to determine actual practice. Cover stories are those which are constructed and used by the teacher in public, to make sure their professional credibility and reputation are protected and may or may not align with the secret stories.

This conceptualisation of knowledge landscapes is particularly relevant in terms of the main research question of this study, since the main focus thereof is to determine the extent to which the lived experiences of middle level curriculum leaders in New Zealand secondary schools reflect the discourse of their professional environment. Phillips (2001) in her research into sacred and secret stories in the pre-school environment stated "The use of secret, cover and sacred stories is a way of viewing the dilemmas and contradictions of living among multiple demands as a teacher. Indeed, the descriptions provide an intriguing way of thinking about how teachers function in the midst of competing educational power structures" (p. 261). These stories assist in providing a means of better understanding how the curriculum leaders role is determined and by whom, and to establish the key factors that influence the professional practice of a curriculum leader in a New Zealand secondary school.

The next chapter presents and explains the methodology of this study, which focuses on capturing the reality of the actual lived experiences of the middle level leader in the daily enactment of their role.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This study explores different understandings of the curriculum leader role in New Zealand secondary schools. It questions the extent to which the lived experiences and practice of those in departmental and curriculum leadership positions are shaping and being shaped by the perspectives of others, in both their own immediate organisational environment and by professional bodies and associations at a national level.

The motivation for this study came from a discernible lack of clarity and consistency in the expectations and responsibilities of the middle level curriculum leadership role, from many key stakeholders within the New Zealand education system. This includes a perceived disconnect between the discourse of "professional literature" (Wellington, 2015, p.55) which includes material published by the MOE, the Education Council and organisational job descriptions, and actual leadership practice.

Research Questions

Key research question:

To what extent do the lived experiences of those in secondary school middle level curriculum leadership roles reflect the discourse of their professional environment?

Sub Questions:

- *What are perceived to be the primary responsibilities of a curriculum leader within a secondary school organisation and how are they determined?*
- *What are perceived to be the key factors that influence, support and guide the professional practice of a curriculum leader?*

Research Methodology

Overview

This research uses a qualitative case study approach to explore the experiences and professional practice of middle-level curriculum leadership in a New Zealand secondary school. A case study is defined by Gerring (2004) as "an intensive study of

a single unit with an aim to generalise across a larger set of units" (p. 241) and is an appropriate methodology for this study because it facilitates the exploration of a phenomenon within its context, using a variety of data sources through the means of semi-structured interviews. This will ensure that the issues are not examined through one lens, but rather a variety of data sources, which allows for multiple aspects of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood. The affordances and opportunities it creates to explore and describe a phenomenon in context using a variety of data sources also helps to account for the complex contexts that school settings pose.

Crotty (1998) describes constructionism as being where "meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world" (p. 8). In order to examine how contemporary curriculum leaders understand and make meaning of their leadership role and how they enact policy within their own organisation, this research adopts an interpretivist theoretical perspective within a constructivist epistemological position to guide the methodological approach to this research. An interpretive paradigm promotes a deeper understanding of the 'real-life' context within which middle leaders work (Taylor & Medina, 2011). This information is best captured by employing an interpretivist approach, since this view recognises the correlation between situational contexts, the attitude and the experiences and behaviour of the middle leader. Cohen and Manion (1989) argue, "the central endeavour in the context of the interpretative paradigm is to understand the subjective world or human experience. To retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated, efforts are made to get inside the person and understand from within" (p. 38).

Critical Policy Analysis

In order to understand the concept of leadership policy, what it is, what it means and how and why the goals of policy do or do not manifest in the spaces of formal schooling, it is necessary to consider the inter-relationship between research concepts, leadership scholarship and theory in action around curriculum leadership and middle management in secondary schools.

It seems that the concept of leadership is more complicated than being merely part of a lineal structure where policies imposed from above inevitably flow through to practice in the classroom. Busher et al (2007) argue that there is a deficit of ethnographic research that considers the "institutional, social, and political contexts

in which they operate, or to the strategies they use or may use to implement policies and actions that allow them to fulfil their functions" (p. 406). In this way, researchers are increasingly viewing middle leadership, not as a definitive role within an organisation, but as an interactive practice, which cannot be studied in isolation without regard for the context and the people in it (Lipscombe et al, 2020). Grootenboer and Edwards-Groves (2020) describe it as "social, material and cultural practices unfold(ing) as a complex, dynamic interaction between the individual and the collective, context and systemic pretexts, practices and practice architectures" (p. 24). In this chapter, I consider the concept of policies and policy enactment within education and discuss the extent to which the contextual landscape within which middle leaders work, determines the way in which they interpret educational policy. This includes exploring the tensions that result when generic government-driven educational initiatives are interpreted and used in local contexts.

Ball (2017) maintains that education is viewed as a key element in "ensuring economic productivity and competitiveness in the context of 'the knowledge economy'" (p. 2) and has conducted extensive sociological research into the interpretation and effects of educational policies on communities, schools, teachers and students. In his discussion of policy discourse, he asserts;

> Policies are very specific and practical regimes of truth and value, and the ways in which policies are spoken and spoken about, their vocabularies, are part of the creation of their conditions of acceptance and enactment. They construct the problematic, the inevitable and the necessary. Educational problems are not just *there*, they are identified and defined by particular actors with specific interests. Within the processes of policy discourse, individuals and groups of 'policy intellectuals' play an important role in establishing credibility and 'truthfulness'". (Ball, 2017, p. 8)

A normative view of educational policy considers policy as a tool of the government, used to identify a problem and prescribe a set of actions intended to solve said problem (Colebatch, 2006a). But the work of education policy is more complex than this description recognises and is complicated by the structure of education systems themselves. Harris and Jones (2019) posit that "policies are insufficiently fine grained to take account of (such) contextual variance which is why teachers and their collective professional voice should be a part of any decision making and policy making process" (p. 123). In fact, who has control over the decision-making process

is a central tenet of the debate. How schools interpret, enact and experience education policy and change – or as Ball et al., put it, *how schools do policy* – is an important component of the policy process as they ultimately deliver what policy makers and government create.

Consequently, policy enactment in schooling is commonly viewed as an iterative procedure, involving the navigation of a complicated web of elements that determine the way in which individuals translate and interpret policy in their own particular environment or social context. Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard and Henry (1997) make the point that policy is more than a specific text and that policy is not static or singular but rather an ongoing process. This idea is supported in an earlier study by Ball (1994), who says that policies in and of themselves do not dictate enactment decisions. They simply "create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed, or particular outcomes are set" (p. 19). Colebatch (2002; 2006b) and later Maguire, Braun, and Ball (2015) also make strong arguments that call into question these normative policy descriptions. Instead, they indicate that there is great value in considering the "messiness" of policy activity. Considering the "often jumbled, sometimes ambiguous, messy process that is experienced on the ground by policy actors" brings to the forefront the "moments in the processes of policy and policy enactments that go on in schools, and other organisations" which risk "becom[ing] marginalised or go[ing] unrecognised" (Maguire, Braun & Ball, 2015. p. 485).

Braun, Ball, Maguire and Hoskins (2011) in their case-study research of four schools in England, propose a set of useful "contextual dimensions" (p. 588) which they describe as *situated*, *material*, *professional* and *external* circumstances, seen to influence the way the curriculum leader and teachers translate, navigate and decode policy, in the enactment process. This paper uses these dimensions to explore policy enactment in the curriculum leader role.

Situated contexts describe the history and positionality of a school in its physical location. Factors such as student intake, ethnicity and the social-economic status of the community within which the school sits, can either subliminally or consciously influence the way in which policies are enacted, as teaching staff and curriculum leaders strive to meet externally (nationally) imposed regulations and achievement targets from within their own particular context. In this way, the situatedness of the school does not provide a passive setting in which teaching and learning occurs, but

rather provides the context within which policies are reconstructed and developed as an active process of negotiation between community, students, schools and nationally required policy "imperatives" (Braun et al; 2018, p. 590), for mutual benefit.

Material contexts describe the physical infrastructure and assets of a school environment, such as classrooms, technical and practical equipment and resources, funding and organisational staffing capability.

Professional contexts characterise the school values, culture and dynamics in the way that policy is enacted. These are also reflected within subject departments as microcosms of the parent organisation. The middle leader in this context has an important role to play in translating policy changes or initiatives at the department level in such a way that they can be implemented in accordance with the requirements of senior management, despite the potential for conflict with personal and professional values, cultural backgrounds and experience of the staff within their departments. Braun et al (2018) also note the autonomy of the subject department and comment that "new teachers or teachers in large departments may work with reference mainly to their immediate colleagues and departmental contexts and policies" (p. 592). This assertion supports findings earlier in this section that confirm that the middle leader is a key vehicle for leading staff professional development and monitoring performance appraisal, as well as the implementation of educational and organisational reform.

The fourth dimension is that of the *external contexts*. These take into account relationships with nearby schools, the legal obligations to be adhered to in the management of an educational institution, relationships with local authorities which can advance or constrain infrastructure that impacts on school access to improve building and transport networks, and finally the performative expectations of government and society that create pressure on schools to churn out graduates who are ready to 'succeed' in the world. For instance, a study based in England, which reviewed aims and values in primary schools across six countries, including New Zealand, found a conflict in principles between the maintenance of a flexible system of education embracing a child-centred approach and the neo-liberal emphasis on socio-economic and political aims with the resulting emphasis on meeting standards (Braun & Maguire, 2018). This study concluded that differences in policy enactment in schools can be attributed to contextual factors that mean teachers and curriculum leaders are at times obliged to enact policies that conflict with their own pedagogical

philosophies. We see a similar point of tension in secondary schools in New Zealand, with the desire to promote social and individual well-being, standing in direct contrast with the requirement for students to meet national *Achievement Standards* in senior examinations, and for the schools to meet self-imposed achievement targets, made worse by the subsequent publication of national examination results in print media which facilitate and *prove* the perception of good and bad schools across the country.

To summarise, policies in themselves do not dictate behaviour and are not simply implemented (Braun, Ball, Maguire, and Hoskins, 2011). Rather, policies and the actions taken to put them into practice, or the enactment of policy, is a creative process where those involved with the policy interpret, translate and enact it within their specific context. Educators, therefore, are both policy subjects, those who produce and consume policy, as well as policy actors, those who interpret and effect the policy process (Braun, Ball, Maguire, and Hoskins, 2011). Consequently, they are in a position where they experience policy as done both *by* them and *to* them. Rizvi and Kemmis (1987) describe teachers' policy actions as involving interpretations of interpretations, or as Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012) explain, the creative and iterative processes of interpretation and recontextualization – that is, the translation of texts into action and the abstractions of policy ideas into contextualised practices" (p. 3). In this way, this paper considers the context of policy enactment and the degree to which educators may engage in the interpretive process, as well as the way they interact with the policy in relation to the processes and apparatuses of power they work within (Ball et al., 2012). Moreover, we are mindful of the fact that the concept of policy enactment in schools, like the contexts they are being enacted in, is not a static process, but is eternally changing to meet a dynamic environment. However, very often, policy analyses do not take into account the inconstancy of the educational environment, nor the physical, financial and social challenges of the context studied (Braun et al, 2018). They argue that conversely, government-imposed policies often assume 'best possible' environments for 'implementation' which is neither real, nor reflective of the actual educational climate in schools.

Research Design

Case Study

This research seeks to capture the lived experiences of the middle-level curriculum leader in the enactment of their roles, and in doing so, to develop an in-depth

understanding of how the context within which they practice and the professional discourse of their environment, impacts upon them. Qualitative case study methodology provides the tools to study complex phenomena within their contexts and establishes an 'organizing' framework (Hancock, Dawson and Algozzine, 2017). Two key approaches to case study methodology proposed by Stake (1995) and Yin (2018) both seek to ensure that the topic of interest is well explored, and that the essence of the phenomenon is revealed. Stake (2003) asserts that the case study, as a form of research, is "defined by interest in an individual case, not by the methods of inquiry used… [and that] the object of study is a specific, unique, bounded system" (p. 443). Similarly, Yin (2018) suggests considering a case study approach when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer *how* and *why* questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. He contends that it also allows the examination of individuals and organisations, simple through to more complex happenings, relationships, communities and programmes by supporting the deconstruction and construction of various phenomena and defines this approach as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 14).

To ensure that this study remained reasonable and realistic in terms of time and definition, it was decided to restrict this research to within the boundaries of one school, within a constrained timeframe and to restrict the number of participants to between 3 and 7 people using selective sampling (Bernard, 2017). The design of a single case study (Yin, 2018) was better suited to this type of research as opposed to multiple case studies, because it allowed for an in-depth examination of the research question within one, complex school setting. As Gerring puts it, a case study should be "an intensive study of a single unit . . . a spatially bounded phenomenon observed at a single point in time or over some delimited period of time" (2004, p. 342), which accurately captures the essence of this study, by considering the varied understandings of middle leadership within the real-life context of a single New Zealand secondary school.

Sampling

After ethics approval had been granted, telephone contact was made with four principals of Auckland secondary schools to canvas interest. The participating school was intended to be representative of a typical New Zealand secondary school, so it was decided to conduct this research in a co-educational secondary school or college, with enrolment numbers of approximately 1500 students or more, teaching the New Zealand Curriculum to students between and inclusive of Years 9 to 13.

A copy of the Principal Information Sheet (see Appendix A) was forwarded to those principals who expressed an interest in the study. The first principal to indicate their willingness for their school to participate became the case study school and was emailed a copy of the consent (see Appendix B) to conduct research in their school, to complete and return. The principal then distributed the Participant Information sheet (see Appendix C) outlining the purpose and the format of this study to the HOLA group and invited them to indicate their interest in becoming a part of the study. This eliminated the opportunity for researcher bias in participant recruitment and protected the confidentiality and identity of the participants. Four curriculum leaders (three Heads of Learning Area (HoLA) and a Teacher in Charge of Subject (TIC)), a Deputy Principal (DP) and the Acting Principal responded to the invitation and were sent information asking for confirmation of their intent to participate, and on receipt of this, were subsequently sent consent forms outlining the conduct of the research and ethical guidelines to complete and return (see Appendix D)

Data Collection

Data was collected using a laptop audio-recording software application called *Audacity* during one-hour semi-structured interviews with each of the participants. Interviews are constructed transactions that facilitate the seeking and giving of information (Cohen & Manion, 1989) and unlike a questionnaire, allows for a focus on the research questions without being too constricting or directed, to provide a richness of data and to support the potential to gain a diversity of responses. Each of the curriculum leaders were asked 15 questions (Appendix F) designed to explore their professional qualifications and experience prior to, and during, their appointment to the position of curriculum leader, their perceptions as to their managerial and leadership responsibilities in the enactment of their role and the quantity and type of professional development and support available to them.

Both members of the senior leadership team were asked the same set of questions as the curriculum leaders. However, while the first three questions were related to their own professional journey into leadership, the remainder of the interview required them to respond as members of the senior leadership team, to assist in gaining an understanding of a different perspective towards curriculum leadership, both within their own organisation and more generally.

All responses form a part of the professional discourse discussed in the research findings and analysis.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were held in a mutually negotiated meeting place.

The digital recordings were transcribed by the researcher and transcriptions sent to each of the participants who had indicated on their Consent forms that they wished to review their transcripts, thereby facilitating the opportunity for a member-check in accordance with the Ethics approval.

All digital recordings were stored securely and separately from the participant Consent forms.

Data Analysis

The qualitative approach to research design used in the case study approach allowed a thematic analysis of the data. Used widely as a method of analysing qualitative data, thematic analysis is the most appropriate method for finding and describing patterns across the data that will be collected, because according to Mills, Durepos and Wiebe (2010) it "is a tactic for reducing and managing large volumes of data without losing the context, for getting close to or immersing oneself in the data, for organizing and summarizing, and for focusing the interpretation" (p. 2).

Each participant was offered the opportunity to review their transcript and data collected (member checked). Then, all data was collated and reviewed for commonalities which were coded into groups of common interest. The process of review and coding is the opportunity for the researcher to become more familiar with the data as it was presented by the research participants (Stoneman & Gilbert, 2016). These coded groups of common interest were then sorted into common themes.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure that qualitative research results can be considered valid and reliable, it is necessary to ensure the research is conducted ethically (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research design and methodology outlined in the application to the Auckland University of Technology to conduct this research and the methods outlined in the AUTEC approved ethical application, further evidence the fact that this research met stringent research protocols and requirements to ensure the validity of the data and findings.

"Rigour in qualitative research derives from the researcher's presence, the nature of the interaction between the researcher and the participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions, and rich, thick description" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 200). Their work suggests using a variety of strategies to ensure "internal validity" (p. 206), where the data collection is authentic and valid, and to avoid the possibility of researcher bias. This research employed several of these strategies; data triangulation, member-checks, adequate engagement in the data collection exercise and consideration of the researcher position 'reflexivity' (discussed in the next section).

Triangulation using multiple sources of data, meant that information collected from each participant was compared and analysed thematically to compare and cross-check information from a range of perspectives. Participants were then invited to check the transcripts from their interviews to avoid misinterpretation or errors in transcription. In order to ensure 'adequate engagement', Merriam and Tisdell (2016) posit that "data and emerging findings must feel saturated; that is you begin to see or hear the same things over and over again, and no new information surfaces as you collect more data" (p. 209). While interviews were restricted to one hour in length, participants were encouraged to give as much information as they could within this timeframe, to add the rich detail and validate their experiences and perspectives.

'Reliability' in qualitative studies is inherently problematic because researchers are attempting to describe and explain the reality of the world experienced from the perspective of others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The results from this research are reliable insofar as the findings are consistent, in that they explain and accurately reflect the data collected from a range of perspectives within a single context.

Reflexivity

Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) fourth strategy as it relates to the integrity of this research, concerns the positionality of the researcher and the potential for their inherent values, beliefs and assumptions to influence or distort the findings. Epistemologists would argue that "knowledge is never simply a representation of what exists but always amounts to a social construction, and therefore reflects the perspective and social location of the researcher" (Lewis-Beck, Bryman & Futing, 2004, p. 2).

It is therefore important to consider that my position of employment and experience as a curriculum leader may influence my analysis of the research and in turn, the findings. However, although the motivation to conduct this research stemmed from questions I had about my own practice in my own organisation, to counter or minimise the potential for personal bias the analysis will compare evidence gained from a synthesis of peer-reviewed, academic research pertaining to curriculum leadership and government and organisational documents in Chapter Two, with empirical data collected through participant interviews, in order to present thematic consistencies or points of differences across both.

Ethical Considerations

An application for Ethics Approval (EA1) to conduct this research was submitted to Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) and approved on 19th February 2021 for 3 years, reference number 20/403. The Ethics Approval submission include the following:

- Principal Information Sheet (for the principal) (Appendix A)
- Permission for Researcher to access Organisation - School / Staff / Students' (signed by the principal) (Appendix B)
- Participant Information Sheet (for participants) (Appendix C)
- Consent Form (for participants) (Appendix D)
- Interview Questions (Appendix F)

In accordance with the requirements of the Ethics Approval, the design and practice of this research protected the participants at each stage of the study, from recruitment, through to the interviews, data collection, storage and analysis process. This included the following; locating the study in a school other than my own and ensuring the

participants were unknown to me at the time of recruitment; respecting the free will of the participants in their choice to participate or withdraw from the study at any time; ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants before, during and after the research process and similarly protecting the data collected from them; ensuring the data was member checked to verify its authenticity and prevent bias, while also   adhering to the Teaching Code of Professional Responsibility and Standards throughout the process

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this case study research which examines a range of understandings of the curriculum leader role. The purpose of the study was to consider the extent to which the lived experiences of secondary school curriculum leaders reflect the discourse of their professional environment. This includes what the primary responsibilities of this role are perceived to be and how they are determined, and the key factors that influence, support and guide professional practice in the enactment of the role.

The findings are presented in the form of participant narratives. The data informing these narratives was obtained using semi-structured interviews with six participants working in this secondary school. Three interviews were held with Heads of Learning Areas (HOLAs), one interview was held with a Teacher in Charge (TIC), one interview was held with a DP who is currently acting as an AP, with line management responsibilities for the HOLAs and one interview was conducted with the AP, who is currently Acting Principal.

The first three narratives frame the responses made by each of the HOLAs, followed by that of the TIC. They were asked fifteen open-ended questions collectively designed to encourage them to reflect upon their professional environment and their leadership practice in leading their teams within the organisation. In order to establish a professional profile, each narrative describes their teaching journey into middle level curriculum leadership and outlines the personal characteristics, skill sets and abilities they believe they bring to their role. Next, they summarise what they see as their main responsibilities, priorities and challenges in the day-to-day enactment of their role. This is followed by how well they feel prepared for and supported in their leadership, their level of engagement with professional literature and any professional development offered to them and finally, their views on school leadership and management. The fifth narrative is with the DP and uses the same framework as that of the HOLAs, except it also draws upon her perspective as their line manager with leadership responsibility for this group. The final narrative presents the profile of the AP, his journey into senior leadership, reflection upon his time spent as a middle manager, and his views and beliefs about the role of the middle level curriculum leader, both in this school and generally within New Zealand.

Natasha

Leadership Background and Current Role

Natasha has more than ten years teaching experience and has held leadership roles for the majority of that time. She secured a job as a beginning teacher in a new school in the United States of America and was part of establishing this school, moving quickly into two minor leadership roles over a period of five years before moving to New Zealand to her current school, where she was appointed as a Head of Mathematics with responsibility for a team of twenty-two staff. Natasha views herself as lucky to have secured this role, coming as she had, into a new country with almost no understanding of the curriculum or assessment programmes:

> I had experience leading a much smaller team in a very different curriculum, but after having been here for two terms and working with everyone – I think the direction of the school was moving and I was sort of on the same page in terms of that part, so although actually I was probably very unqualified in terms of organisation, structure, curriculum, any of that stuff, philosophically they really liked where I was at, so (I) ended up applying.

After three and a half years in this position she applied and was appointed to a second curriculum leadership role, overseeing a new initiative at the College leading an integrated-curriculum programme called the *Innovation Stream*, within which she had been teaching. She has now been running this programme successfully for two years. In this role, she teaches three classes and is responsible for a team of approximately forty-two staff spanning a range of ages and experience, across the four traditionally 'core' curriculum areas of Mathematics, Science, English and Social Studies.

When asked whether or not Natasha felt her job description described her role, she stated that she felt it was fairly generic and covered the straight-forward management competencies required of a middle level leader, but that it was rather more vague when it came to detailing the leadership responsibilities, which were less explicit and perhaps best covered by a disclaimer included at the end of the job description which stated "and anything else as required".

Leadership Characteristics

Natasha believes it was her characteristic passion for taking risks and particularly in developing innovative ideas and programmes to improve the learning and teaching of

key concepts that led her to winning the role of the HOLA of the Innovation Stream. However, in both HOLA positions, Natasha believes she brings an element of humility to her leadership, in that she is quick to admit mistakes and accept advice, especially in her latest role where she can no longer be the last authority on curriculum content or assessment practice. She describes her practice during her transition into this role as:

> …. just a lot of listening and a lot of learning and I think that was the key – just hearing and deciding who my key people were that I really trusted and really respected and whose opinions I really wanted to hear before making decisions and because I was making heaps of mistakes and – just being really open and admitting every time I made a mistake.

There is strong evidence in this and other research, to support the view that effective middle level leadership practice lies at the intersect of one's professional competence and the leader's individual ability to create and sustain trusting and productive relationships with colleagues, senior leaders and students. That is, the possession of "a seamless and dynamic integration of knowledge, skills and personal qualities" (Robinson, 2010, p. 5). Natasha has consciously and deliberately sought to develop her leadership capability in this regard, by building mutually dependent relationships with key people in her department and drawing a team of subject 'experts' around her, upon whose advice and opinions she can trust:

> I've got a curriculum expert from each of the four areas and so we've become a very close-knit team and I completely and totally trust and rely on them when it comes to issues around curriculum.

Natasha lists 'flexibility' as a further key leadership characteristic she brings to her practice:

> I think I'm quite good at picking my battles because I know what's really important to me, but I'm also willing to be flexible on other things and I'm OK backing down or being wrong or going with something else and so that when I do really insist that this is important to me, I haven't found that I've gotten much pushback.

It is also her ability to make people feel at ease that Natasha considers has been another significant characteristic that has contributed to her success in leading her team:

I think honestly, because I make people feel very valued, is the feedback that I've gotten. I will always take the time to listen, whatever the situation may be. And I think… not scared of me."

Natasha references times that she has had to defend or champion members of her team to senior staff and feels that in doing that, she has gained the respect of the more "*stubborn*" members of her team. She says "… it's definitely something that I'm always happy to do and has always ended really positively."

Responsibilities and Challenges

The complex nature of the middle leader role remains undisputed in current educational leadership research and many studies have created frameworks to define and categorise the responsibilities inherent in this position (Cardno, Robson, Deo, Bassett and Howse, 2018; De Nobile, 2019; Grootenboer et al., 2019). Of particular note, much of the academic attention continues to focus on the middle leader potential to initiate and drive change in their organisation. Described as "high leverage practices pivotal for facilitating and managing school-based development initiatives" (Grootenboer et al; 2019) they conclude that "their place in this change endeavor is critical for establishing collegial and collaborative practices, and for understanding and drawing on site-based evidence to inform the reform and sustain development at the school level" (p. 253).

For Natasha, this observation is especially pertinent and constitutes a significant part of her role in the implementation and leadership of the Innovation Stream. Students learn skills such as critical thinking and application of knowledge within an integrated curriculum developed around key capabilities. For example, students undertake a *Problem-Solving* course using Mathematics and Science to solve real problems. Initially developed with a small group of students invited to participate, the programme has grown to one hundred and eighty students in Year 9 and is now taught at every year level in the school. Senior students still complete national qualifications as they would if they had followed a traditional programme of study and Natasha reports that the results from these students have exceeded their expectations.

However, in guiding and leading more than forty teaching staff in the pedagogy of the Innovation Stream and overseeing a rapidly growing number of students, Natasha balances a vast portfolio of responsibilities and admits it's been a very different

experience. She comments thus, "... having taught Innovation for the past five years I was very familiar with the programme itself but (there are) very different leadership issues and struggles that are coming up because it's a huge department."

In addition to this, Natasha identifies the 'messy' nature of the planning needed to make this programme successful:

> We do a lot of planning at the end of the year once the seniors go where we have to get everyone to the table because it's so messy and between them, they need to make sure that they're covering everything that needs to be covered, not doubling up on things, and finding really exciting authentic projects for the students to do that are going to make that learning happen. So, it's a lot more planning – you can't wing things – not that we were winging things in maths but there has to be deliberate planning."

When asked to identify her main responsibilities, Natasha divided them into three areas. First and foremost was setting the new curriculum and tracking student learning to ensure positive outcomes for the students:

> I think there's a bit of added pressure because we are taking them out of what they could have had in the mainstream and so I feel it's my responsibility to make sure that they have almost a better education than they would have in their other program.

Natasha reports to having more direct contact time with staff than students in the enactment of her role. Accordingly, she identifies the second key area of responsibility in her middle leader role as being teacher-support, particularly in developing teachers in the philosophy and pedagogy of the Innovation Stream programme. It is the pedagogy of teaching an integrated curriculum and *"navigating those interpersonal relationships with teachers"* where she finds that her team needs her the most:

> ……….it's actually not as much of that pastoral side - I do a lot of that, but the bigger thing is new teachers coming into the program and so there's a lot of fear and uncertainty about what is Innovation Stream, what it looks like, and "am I doing this right?" – so a lot of my time is actually working to help them cope with the uncertainty and destressing the load – and because it's co-teaching there's often a lot of drama between the co-teachers.

Additional responsibilities include offering classroom teachers relevant material for their own PD and resources for her staff, as well as supporting staff with classroom management, conducting classroom observations and *walk-throughs*. Natasha sees this as a particularly effective method to determine which classrooms are running well and feels that her physical presence means her teachers feel supported. However, she identifies one of her main challenges as catering for some quite diverse needs across the forty-two staff, in that some staff are "philosophically on board, they're just new teachers and can't manage a classroom", whilst others, typically older staff, struggle with the student-centered pedagogical nature of the integrated-curriculum programme.

The third area lies in the growth and development of the programme itself, which Natasha really enjoys, but she admits, as the student numbers at each level increase, it is becoming a bigger logistical challenge.

In terms of administrative duties, such as timetabling, writing reports for the Board of Trustees and answering emails, Natasha tries to prioritise her load. She says, she largely does what she has to do:

> I find a lot of that stuff, a lot of the emails and the things that come - actually quite frankly some of it I can ignore completely and it will not impact anybody's life whatsoever - and I just don't get a lot of satisfaction from that part of my job.

In this way, Natasha identifies management as being the *admin* side of her role, the tasks that *"need to be done",* and states, "as long as no one … SLT does not get on my back about not doing enough paperwork then I would say it's a success in terms of management". Whereas she views the idea of leadership as being "the part where I get to develop the programme. It's the vision and moving people towards that vision".

Natasha sees leadership success in terms of being able to make students and teachers confident and comfortable about what they are doing and willing to take risks in their learning and teaching. Her next priority, now that this programme has been established, is to work to maintain its core identity even while it is being further integrated into the school-wide curriculum.

When asked about her work/life balance, Natasha reported that despite working longer hours in her current role, she was better able to 'switch off' after work, which had led to a more positive experience overall:

I found in the Maths department I felt like it was sort of one step forward three steps back trying to pull people along with me whereas Innovation Stream - the type of work I'm doing is quite different and it's a lot more energizing.

She says "... although I spend more time doing work now, it doesn't really feel like it and I think I've just over the years I have gotten better at switching off when I need to switch off."

Professional Development and Support

Natasha characterizes the support she receives from her Senior Leadership team as consistently excellent. She feels there are open channels of communication between herself and the DP team and appreciates their level of accessibility. Often, they can supply her with professional literature to engage with and assist in problem-solving an issue within her team, and she can work through what she terms *wicked problems* with the AP who is an expert on coaching his staff in their leadership. De Nobile (2018) notes strong evidence that reveals the principal to be a key figure, both in creating a culture within a school that supports and promotes leadership opportunities and in mentoring and encouraging aspiring leaders. Natasha's comments support these findings. However, observing them (senior leaders) in action is another more incidental form of professional development that Natasha feels is often very useful in terms of her own practice:

I see things and I think – some things I could literally copy exactly what they've done procedurally – I think that is so much smarter and faster than what I do – I must learn that. And others – I think – Aah – I must watch my face – I don't want to look like that. You know – so definitely just watching and absorbing".

She is also grateful for a subsidy towards her current Master's degree study which she feels will enable her to progress to the next leadership level in the future. Although Natasha does not identify specific programmes targeted at middle leadership development offered internally at the school, she reports the most beneficial professional development as being the weekly meetings with her colleagues – other HoLAs. When asked for ideas for professional development that she would want to enhance her leadership practice, she replied:

It's a bit tricky because you don't know what you don't know. And so, on the one hand I know that there's a lot I don't know about leadership…. I feel like I have

so much I can still learn just from being here - not that I don't think that I wouldn't benefit from more development ……. – but that time is very valuable.

Jenny

Leadership Background and Current Role

Jenny is currently the HOLA for the Expressive Arts which is a portfolio that encompasses a variety of subjects, including Visual Arts, Music, Dance and Drama, as well as a team of itinerant teachers, an Arts Coordinator, technicians, and support staff. After three years of teaching art, music and drama in the United Kingdom, Jenny and her family emigrated to New Zealand where she took up her first middle level leadership role (referred to by a colleague as a "*mini-HOLA")* as the Head of Performing Arts. After the retirement of the Head of Visual Arts four years later, Jenny's role expanded to encompass those subjects too, which meant she became a "*bigger*" HOLA, a role that she has now held for almost ten years.

It is widely accepted that one of the functions inherent in the role of middle-level leader, is to drive instructional and organisational reform (Hirsh & Bergmo-Prvulovic; 2019). Jenny exemplifies this, and in fact has taken it to a national level, in her work contracting to the MOE as part of a panel of Subject Expert Advisors (SEG) in the review and development of new Achievement Standards for the New Zealand Curriculum in Levels One, Two and Three. She says of this work, "… to me while that's not in-school, it allows me to support schools - and that's really exciting to be able to help make some positive changes across the country, which is so cool." She has also had several contract *opportunities* with NZQA which has given her a wealth of experience and a sound understanding of assessment within the New Zealand education system.

When asked to consider whether her job description accurately encompassed her position, Jenny confirmed she is comfortable with the newly reconstructed job descriptions for HOLAs:

> I think it covers all the core foundations of what we do, and I think if we listed every single thing that we did, it would be constantly changing and evolving, so we've kept them relatively fluid. But it covers the basics you probably expect to see on any job description in any school for those particular roles. I think it's a

case of now that we've got them in place, which kicked in this year, which was kind of cool, to go "that's what it looks like on paper". They will be reviewed.

She especially appreciates the opportunity to add in particular elements for her role into her job description. She says of this:

> We've had the opportunity at the bottom to add in the specifics - so I know in my role, I'm theatre manager. I know a colleague who teaches down on the South Island. They're also a theatre manager, but a teacher at another school wouldn't be. So, it's having the opportunity to put our specifics in. Our Head of Science - he would be making sure that he's liaising with his technicians around the safety of chemicals and health and substances, but he's not managing a theater. The technicians I manage are different. They're working with light, sound and whizz, bang pop!

Leadership Characteristics

Jenny's passion for the arts and theatre stems from her early work in the theatre industry and her involvement with teaching painting and drawing in England. She feels this background, together with her experience has given her a complete understanding of arts as a living concept, rather than just as a subject. When asked what she thought characteristically made her a good fit for this role, she replied:

> … that I had worked in the theatre industry. So, I appreciate what it's like bringing things together in the performance space from the sweeping of the floor, not just the actors on it, from the musicians, the design, and everything – my degree was theatre design. So, I'd like to think it's because I appreciate all the arts.

In instances where Jenny has received feedback from her colleagues and faculty team, she reports that they comment upon her empathy and her willingness to reflect upon and change her practice in response to the feedback, which has meant she has been able to establish positive relationships with those around her, staff, and students:

> Some, I think would say I work too hard. I know some would say I'm empathetic, others would say that I'm there to support others all of the time. Sometimes I know relationships have been and can be challenging. I don't like to let people down. I am a sensitive soul – which I think some know and pick up on.

When asked to clarify whether she felt this was a learned leadership characteristic or something more innate, Jenny replied:

> That's just me. And it's like growing a thicker skin – it's like any leader without losing a sense of who you are as a person. Because I think, you know, when you're working with a team of people, and students are part of that team, you've got to be true to yourself because it shows that you're human, so that you can connect with those people. Cause every PD course I've ever been on - it comes back to that one word. It's relationships.

In fact, it is evident that Jenny's leadership practice is mindfully grounded in forming and maintaining relationships with her colleagues and students and characterises her leadership. She readily promotes her Arts faculty as a means of providing and sustaining an environment for positive well-being and healthy, productive connections. She consciously and deliberately ensures that her physical presence in the classroom is felt, through walk-throughs, in directing and organizing productions, driving groups of students in mini-buses, singing in the school choir and making sure she attends every school event she can.

> I think within the school community and the wider community that actually the arts are really important for our young people. It's a way that they can connect. And I think COVID has highlighted that more - it's that time to be able to express. And have a safe space where you're part of something and you have a place where you can connect and it's not always going to be on the sports field or in a 'core' subject - I don't like that terminology.

Responsibilities and Challenges

As a part of their research into the motivation of middle leaders in seeking and maintaining their leadership positions, Hirsch and Bergmo-Prvulovic (2019) examined a wide range of studies that suggested "motivation can be related to *altruistic* factors (teaching as socially worthwhile; a desire to help; a calling), *intrinsic* factors (interest in the activity of teaching and/or in a specific subject), and *extrinsic* factors (length of holidays, level of pay, status, etc)" (p. 356). These studies found that in the Western world, the predominant motivators for teachers were altruistically and intrinsically based, and Jenny's responses, discussed below were wholly consistent with these findings.

When challenged to reflect upon what she views as her main HOLA responsibilities, Jenny identifies her duty to support staff to be at their professional best, giving them the tools they need to fulfil their roles, as key:

> It's supporting them. It's guiding them, sometimes it's reminding them of professional responsibilities. It's - I'd like to think it's giving them a platform if they need to come to me for a sounding board, and I really appreciate the fact there are members of my team, I can go to as a sounding board - it's not a one-way thing. Knowing that they can come to me if there are challenges in the classroom or elsewhere.

This includes a level of mentoring at all levels between staff, senior staff and students, where Jenny advocates and helps work through issues towards a productive conclusion. And within this aspect of her role, she acknowledges that managing people is at times a significant challenge. She says "people - yeah, but I think if you've got everybody understanding what the vision is or the job entails, and that we're all in it together."

In terms of departmental management-style tasks, Jenny endorses working in a supportive capacity, identifying the *nuts and bolts* of her role as being a conduit of information and making sure that her team are completing their own administrative responsibilities as required. In her reference to the annual Board report, she says of the HOLA's:

> At the end of the day, we've got one common denominator and it's getting this beautiful beast groomed ready to shine brightly, but I'll spend quite a bit of time putting the foundation together because I know some of my teachers. They've got a full load. Some of them are teaching in more than one subject area, so if I can get the foundations there, then when they go in, it's not so overwhelming. Which I know they've said quite a few times they appreciate it. And through (doing) that some of my colleagues who I was chasing, I'm not anymore because the foundations are there and they can see that I'm wanting to work with them and support them, which is nice actually - so yes, we've got reports, budgeting, board reports, school reports for students."

Class allocation also features in Jenny's duties as a HOLA, one that she prefers to address collaboratively with the staff involved, to promote staff professional development and to foster collegiality within her team. She mentions bringing the

teaching team together physically, as well as philosophically as a faculty, as being a further significant challenge in the day-to-day reality of a busy College:

> We are across the campus which does make that journey quite bumpy because we're not all in one place… in one space…. and getting the team together is always a fun journey because they might be busy with co-curricular events such as art club, orchestra etc. So, it's really variable, and we try, and we keep trying, and it's a very unique team of personalities and different strengths."

Jenny identifies a second area of considerable challenge as that of time management and in her ability to prioritise and deal with tasks as they arise. She herself, carries a significant teaching load (6 classes) and due to staffing requirements, is three periods over the normal allocation in her school for a HoLA.

She does her best to maintain an 'open-door' policy but admits this can be difficult and while being flexible, tries to anticipate jobs that might arise. She reports:

> Sometimes, like today, I was putting out a few fires. But I think for me as well, as a person, because I'm always kind of going "right well, what's next?", I'm sort of mentally prepared for the things that are coming up because you're having to be flexible all of the time, and you might - you know – you might come in the morning and go, "right I've got this non-contact to get these jobs done" - but it can take that one phone call, those six emails that have something that you don't expect. Example being - I was running a bit late today and you have to be flexible. You can't be regimented or say "Nope, no, no" – It's having that open door policy - unless I've literally shut it and locked it and gone home…. I've actually got a sign on my door that says "My door is always open unless it's closed". Literally – if it's locked, I've locked it for a good reason. They still find a key to come in but – it's just being flexible – you've got to be.

When challenged to delineate the two concepts of leadership and management, Jenny uses the analogy of *coaching* and *mentoring* which she says are similar, yet different and like *leadership* and *management*, she suggests that they overlap. She says:

> I know some colleagues feel that I'm chasing them because I have an agenda. Actually, this is a schoolwide job that needs to be done. We've all got to do this together so it's not a personal thing on my end. And then I guess that's management perhaps?

However, it is evident that regardless of semantics, Jenny feels strongly obligated in her role, to provide a support mechanism for the people around her in the pursuit of their own development and goals. She states:

> Just to see when people are really passionate about teaching …. and it's a journey together. And it's just that's what it is for me. That's why I'm here. And if I can help my colleagues to do that in their spaces for them to be courageous enough, to take risks and know that it's OK to make mistakes that no-one's here judging them - we've all got a job to do, and it's caring for our young people.

Professional Development and Support

Fortnightly meetings with a DP provide a significant means of professional development and support for Jenny. She appreciates the opportunity to "*offload what's on top*" and to have her workload reaffirmed for the coming weeks. However other less formal situations also afford her an equally valuable pathway to grow and learn in her leadership role. Jenny willingly attributes part of her development as a leader to ad-hoc opportunities where she has been able to observe leadership practice in action by an SMT member. She notes:

> It was actually really positive because I was able to see how (she) guided that conversation, which wasn't pleasant, but it needed to happen. But it meant that we could move forward- so that I can take that on board when those things happen with my team to guide and support them - because I feel like - you know, I've been teaching, I've worked out, for at least 17 years, so I'm nearly hitting the big 20 and I don't know everything and I'm still learning and growing and it's reminding my team it's OK to make mistakes cause I make them daily. And I'd think anybody that can say that they're perfect in this job would be not. "

Although the College are reportedly encouraging of their staff pursuing further leadership development through tertiary studies, Jenny is not ready to commit to this. Aside from having personal commitments to a young family, she feels she is lacking in confidence in her own ability to juggle her various roles while undertaking academic study. She maintains that the Ministry of Education work is particularly valuable in terms of her curriculum professional development, but finds it difficult to isolate or identify her professional development needs to enhance her leadership role:

> With people that I don't work with every day and just the leadership style and how things are constructed, and it's just those observations - and going (breath in) and what you take from that, not copy, but you sort of – you see different leadership styles so that when things don't work with individuals – oh well if I trial that – it's that constantly, I think, not being afraid to try things to find what works. So that those relationships, that connection, it's going to improve and strengthen, I think for me, it's that ongoing …. I think it's just that ongoing – all of it … actually, yeah - I don't know.

Aware of the existence of recently published government literature designed to support and guide leadership in schools, Jenny says she refers to it on occasion, particularly when she is reflecting on her own practice and professional growth. However, she admits that this is a relatively new habit, proposed by the AP when he introduced new appraisal initiatives into the College.

Roger

Leadership Background and Current Role

Roger is a very experienced teaching practitioner with twenty-two years of teaching experience in New Zealand. He accepted a role teaching science in his first year of teaching, covering a maternity leave position in a regional secondary school. This in turn became permanent, and at the end of his second year he moved into an "unofficial deputy HOLA" role. A year later he moved to a position in a larger urban secondary school as a science teacher which also saw him take on a number of responsibilities, including promotion to the Head of Chemistry towards the end of his first decade of teaching. After nine years at this school Roger accepted a similar role at a nearby secondary school, also as Head of Chemistry which eventually led to an opportunity to assume the responsibility for Acting HOLA of Science. After five years at that school, Roger moved to take up his current position, also as HOLA Science, a role he has held for the past five years. He is responsible for a team of twenty teachers and support staff, including three HODs and another staff member whom he says does a similar job but does not receive Management Units (MU) or an official title. Included in his team is also a TIC of General Science and two science technicians who work four days each week. His teaching load is consistent with the other HOLAs in the school but less, he believes, than staff holding similar positions of responsibility at other schools.

When asked whether he felt his job description accurately reflected the work he does, he replied:

> The best line in the job description is the one "and other duties". You could never fill a job description with everything you do so often it's deliberately vague. I understand we work in a profession where you can't anticipate everything so you just (have to) act on the fly - but it describes what I do.

Leadership Characteristics

Roger considers that it is his strong understanding of the curriculum, in combination with an easy-going nature, that have been two of the main factors behind his appointment into middle leadership positions:

> I think it was because I represented a good strong knowledge in the science department the ability to teach multiple subject areas, good communication skills, (I'm) fairly well organized and mostly knew what I was able to do. I (also) think I had the personality that was a relaxed leader, that someone could come to me if they had issues - approachable. I look back at who I am now, and I wonder, do I have the pedagogical expertise? Here a lot of people talk about some of the pedagogy - and they've got some big words in their vocabulary that I don't have - I know they're just tossing them around.

Roger presents as a highly practical person, who values efficiency and economy of time and resources in his support and leadership of his department. Despite the fact that his ability to lead discussions around pedagogy does not rank so highly in Roger's self-evaluation, he has been careful to create a common space where these can take place, and believes it is important for Science teaching staff to have informal conversations and share teaching experiences and ideas. He says "I organized our office so that it wasn't a storage office it was a staff room office, so we've got pretty much all of them now sitting in there - so it's quite collegial."

Responsibilities and Challenges

Roger works hard to minimise administrative work for his teaching team and to provide any practical support he can, to ease the pressure on their timetable and to facilitate their classroom teaching. This includes creating resources and assessment

materials, organizing equipment, managing student behaviour, responding to parental enquiries, organizing timetabling, tracking student achievement data and conducting staff appraisals:

> I do take on a fair bit of work to try and stop teachers having to deal with administrative tasks that they don't need to. Sometimes I'll upload data on behalf of the teachers because if it was just a simple file that existed in Excel you can easily upload it and I make sure that all the things were photocopied ready for tests, so teachers didn't have to do that themselves. If I knew that a teacher (was) having to go in – it would take them say 15 minutes of dicking around to get what they needed multiplied by 20 teachers, then if I did that in half an hour then that's an advantage too.

These observations are consistent with similar studies, including that of Bassett (2016) in his research into middle leadership expectations and challenges, who found that although "curriculum leadership was identified as the main expectation of middle leaders" (p. 105), many middle leaders also carried a significant administrative load as well as being expected to develop staff.

Roger has the welfare of his teaching team at the forefront of everything that he does in his middle leader role. He contrasts new staff who start at the beginning of the school year and undergo a formal induction programme, with those who arrive mid-year.

> Teachers (who) have arrived in the middle of the year - just have to pick it up and hit the ground running most of the time which I often think is really difficult. Especially when you've got different computer systems and software, but you know - when you've got all that stuff to deal with it's quite daunting. That's got to be fit into those magic moments of just conversation in the office.

When it comes to tracking student assessment data, Roger views this as a useful tool not only to inform student learning, but also to monitor teaching practice and efficacy within the department.

> We use the exam data so we can get an idea of who's within reach and who's not, and so you get information about a particular cohort or class of kids that are not performing the way that you think they should be - and (if) they don't measure up to the of the rest of the cohort - you're really looking at (it) being a staff issue. You have to tackle that - that's another part of your job. Some teachers just haven't

had the chance to get the experience in that content so we often pull up data that shows that "oh this teacher was quite strong in teaching of that content why don't you find out from them what sort of thing can help.

Roger also prefers direct forms of communication:

Email is just frustrating, and I wish teachers could figure out how to use them better - or not use it at all. "I will just come and see you - just come see me - just use your legs please!" And then you get tagged into carbon copy emails and then someone replies 'all' and then you lose complete track of the thread, so emails occupy my time.

Although Roger clearly views his support of his teaching team as an important element of leadership, he admits he often resents the fact that this intrudes on his own teaching practice:

I'm often feeling that my own lessons are getting more and more devalued and so you try finding that time to plan a sequence of lessons. Again here - you're clearly not your own priority, it's external.

When challenged to consider the management and leadership aspects of his role, he responded thus:

I would say I'm part leader, but more manager of the department. I think I'm shuffling papers, I'm doing jobs, so that other people don't have to. I see a lot of it is under my job description, even though it's not specifically mentioned - so I look after Year 9, Year 10 and Year 11 sciences, as well as managing the department, the staff, and the appraisals - most of the appraisals. Not all of it is leadership. To me, I provide leadership by role modeling best practice and hopefully happiness, and hopefully the way I interact with the kids would be my leadership style, but as I said, you know I think sometimes I don't feel the full package of pedagogical leadership. I mean, I kind of think that what I teach in class works but as I said when you start doing management, your time in your classroom gets worse. I suppose I've been doing it a long time (so) you can pull it out and use it on the fly, but it's not your best work.

Roger particularly resents demands on his time that he feels are not warranted.

Bureaucracy is something I'm always up against. (When it) seems to be completely pointless or half of it's pointless - (for example) trying to figure out what our leadership hierarchical structure might look like if we were to change. I

sometimes go to meetings - you go "why am I here? I've got so many other things I could be doing" - so yeah those challenges are there.

He admits that to some degree, many of the management-type tasks have diminished his enjoyment of his teaching and of his role generally:

I was in what I would call a 'mental health trench' recently, (thinking) why am I in this job? It's just … I used to so much enjoy teaching and now I just feel like I'm meeting all of the bad kids because I'm a manager - and you know, I don't enjoy myself.

Professional Development and Support

An experienced teacher and middle level leader, Roger is cautious in his assessment of the professional development opportunities available to him. He admits to feeling as if he should be more proactive in seeking literature and PD that would enhance his instructional leadership, but finds conflict in the fact that doing so would take him away from what he sees as his core business – teaching and learning:

You know it's funny because we're often so damn busy - that feeling like you're coming out of the classroom to do PD just seems like a waste of time. I need to be in there for those kids. I mean - realistically I would love to be able to read a bit more.

On conversations with his line manager and other senior leaders:

I found value in their knowledge in some aspects, but at the same time, in many cases, they're no different to me - they're just one level above me. I imagine if I was in their job, I'd be trying my way through the conversation just as much as on those of us who've been in middle leadership for a long time. And it's very difficult to imagine that they could offer you any development at all. In some cases, my line manager has clearly done some higher education papers so presumably is more read than I am - I really don't read a huge amount.

He is appreciative of the fact that he can request additional administration time for strategic planning and departmental organization but clearly tries to keep himself in the classroom as much as possible.

If you want to spend a day to organize the annual plan or organize the department or something, we can do that - but I haven't specifically used it. I kind of knuckle

into those things in the holidays - I think holidays aren't holidays - they're time away from the students and the distractions and stuff.

Helen

Leadership Background and Current Role

In the absence of a HOLA of Languages, Helen is the TIC of French and Spanish and reports to the HOLA of English. She was first employed as a teacher in New Zealand, fifteen years ago and as she points out, was always in middle leadership by virtue of the fact that when you are the sole teacher of your subject in a school, you are also usually the TIC. Helen has four teaching staff reporting to her in her current TIC role but has held other leadership roles in addition to this. She is involved also in a research project undertaken across three different sites in the Soloman Islands and is a leader in her church. Prior to this she worked for Alliance Francais and was a private languages tutor.

Leadership Characteristics

Helen feels that she was a good fit for this TIC position because of the "self-taught" nature of her curriculum knowledge over fifteen years which she says has led to a holistic and deep understanding of language learning and teaching programmes. Knowledge and competency in her leadership role is very important to her, evidenced by her stated opinion of leadership in general:

> I cannot have a leader who doesn't know their job. Competency in their job is very important to me. If someone from SLT says something about languages and it's completely erroneous - I say that unfortunately for that person they are going a little bit lower on my list because they're not specialist.

However even before competency in her leadership practice, Helen recognizes the importance of establishing professional relationships based on trust. She says:

> If I don't get that trust feeling – I'm not going to be open to share things. And it takes time before you get to that - so some people are going to get (there) faster than others. I look for someone who is doing mistakes and says they do mistakes. OK? Yeah, and that goes with trust I suppose.

In this way she considers herself to be a "people person", saying:

I'm a person that is looking after my team very well and so this is very important for me that their well-being is as priority number one before anything else. So, knowing to be flexible was, you know, understanding the person where I come from - establishing trust and good relationship as well. This is something that I feel that I'm good at.

Helen maintains that it is this flexibility and open communication with her team that are fundamental aspects in leading her department. Citing an example where she has worked hard to settle a new member into the school, she says she has endeavored to establish a level of trust and confidence between them as this team member integrates into the new environment which has made for a more successful relationship than that which existed at the start. Helen says she also works hard to inject enthusiasm and creativity into their teaching programmes, organizing events and trips to stimulate and maintain the interest and improve the educational outcomes for students.

Responsibilities and Challenges

Helen laments a lack of time as being a barrier to leading the team the way she would like to. This is a sentiment commonly expressed by those in 'lower' middle leadership and creates a significant challenge, especially for middle leaders who have little or no time allowance to devote to either administration or leadership / management duties. Unlike the HOLAs, Helen is on a full teaching load and does not have any non-contact time for her TIC role built into her timetable. However, they meet after-school as a department three times each term where Helen tries to ensure they work on practical learning and teaching matters, such as the development of units of work, rather than administrative tasks that can be emailed to them. Helen also meets with each team member for a half an hour, meeting twice a term. At these meetings she tries to offer support and guidance as required:

And we talk about how's it going, what is the progress, are there any problems, are there any students – you know – and this kind of thing – do they need any support with resources – you know, practical things.

When challenged to differentiate between the leadership and management aspects of her role, Helen reflects that she feels leadership is about sharing:

Management for me is more about all the daily stuff, you know. Administration tasks - that's the management. The leadership is more about developing abilities

in people and seeing them grow and supporting them in that growth. And to somehow be in front when you need to be in the front and to be on the back when you need to be on the back - and to realize how much the different abilities the people on your team have and use those abilities when you need that, because you don't know everything.

Helen admits that for her, "mentally the priority is leadership" and, as she becomes more able to complete administrative tasks quickly, she wants to concentrate more upon the leadership side of her role because she enjoys supporting teachers to develop in their practice. However administrative tasks such as Board of Trustee reports and department budgets still fall within the domain of her TIC role and for now, she is obliged to find the time for both.

Professional Development and Support

Helen strives to develop a collegial management approach but would like to receive more support in terms of leadership styles and function. She continues to find her own way, saying, "I found the balance for me is the one thing I'm learning at the moment – this year is to still be a supervisor without a supervisor? You know still being in charge without being in charge."

Helen feels there is currently an imbalance in terms of securing the recognition and permanent MUs that she feels should be accorded, working as a middle level leader with her teaching load and departmental leadership responsibilities. She hopes that once this is addressed, it might include the opportunity to be formally offered support and professional development to enhance her leadership. Currently, she says, TICs are viewed as teaching staff and are not automatically included in internal leadership workshops, although she confirms that when she put herself forward for a leadership workshop she was included. Helen is keen to acquire a better understanding of fundamental leadership styles and practice. She says:

I think it will be more understanding what our role is - because I think we are just – OK this is what you need to do - but we don't actually understand…. But maybe some mistakes could be avoided if we actually had a better understanding of how to approach some of the situations. I think that if I had those kind of discussions or workshops or something about how to deal with difficult situations, how to

approach them … somehow it is kind of having psychology and understanding of the nature of the people.

In this way, Helen feels frustrated by the blurred boundaries that exist around her role, she says "because I do everything like an HOD but I'm not. So, there is kind of communication that stops at the HOLA that doesn't get to me."

Tracey

Leadership Background and Current Role

Tracey has a career spanning more than twenty-five years teaching, in both secondary schools in New Zealand and in International schools overseas. Although employed as a DP in this college, Tracey has recently been appointed to an Acting Associate Principal role and readily acknowledges that it was her desire to be in leadership that led her to pursue a vast range of middle and senior leadership roles during her journey towards her current position.

Very early in her career, she was made a Dean (a leader of a pastoral care team), then a Head of English, closely followed by a 'semi-senior' leadership role as curriculum coordinator. Tracey identifies that it was during this period that she became interested in the concept of leadership and what it entailed. Following an extended period teaching the International Baccalaureate in International Schools, as a 'grade-level coordinator' and again Head of English, Tracey decided to return to New Zealand where she was employed first as an Assistant Head of English, followed by a full Head of English. Next, Tracey was appointed to a DP position in a number of secondary schools, before being awarded DP in her current school. Now enjoying the challenge of acting AP, Tracey attributes her understanding of middle level leadership to this journey. She says:

> ... being given the opportunity of being an Associate Principal is really good because that really gives me an idea of what a principalship looks like. So, I guess in my career, I know about middle leadership, whether it's pastoral or whether it's curriculum, and now coming into being a senior leader, I guess (I'm) starting to flex and become comfortable with you know, what a leader is.

The senior leadership team is headed by a Principal and an AP, who command a team of five DPs, each acting as a line manager for curriculum leaders (HOLAs) and pastoral leaders (Deans). In her role as a DP, Tracey has numerous instructional

leadership responsibilities, including being in charge of professional learning. In this role she mentors a group of teachers who act as coaches for their colleagues to help and facilitate their work on their *Inquiries* aimed at their professional growth.

Leadership Characteristics

Tracey attributes her rapid rise through middle leadership and into senior leadership to her friendly personality and an ability to relate to others.

> I worked hard. And I was organized - I think that helps. But I think it was probably more about people and how I got on with people (and) how I worked with them. As I think about me as a leader and thinking about what my leaders saw in me, probably – somebody young, keen, but actually at the heart - I had people at the heart. And they probably saw that – I really cared deeply about my kids – you know my students and my surroundings.

However, innate tendencies aside, Tracey advocates strongly for academic study around leadership and says that her own studies have made her reflect upon her own practice from the "outside" and has made her more aware strategically of "the big picture". She says:

> In my leadership journey I've always looked at my study. It's sort of affirming and it grounds me and in research, where I can see them running a department, or see them doing things in leadership - I say to them if you're interested then you should be looking at some sort of a study because it actually helps you to take that perspective from in yourself and in your school, outside. And (look at) where you sit.

Tracey admits to relying on an instinctive 'vibe' when considering candidates for leadership roles. She says;

> I want a good person. And I personally like somebody who's straight-up and who's honest. I can feel that from them. So, it's not even really about your leadership. I want to see that this person cares about their staff and about their people and about their kids. Afterwards, you know, are you a good organizer? But in essence (it's) that connection that I can feel from that other person to me."

She adds:

Can they communicate well with others? Can I see them being able to send an email or understand or know how the beast of a school works so that they can do things in a way that is respectful to and of, each other? So, practically speaking, I'd want to see somebody who's a little bit more, people savvy, so that if they have to send an email about the blown pipe in their classroom, it's going to be done with etiquette and that they're not going to ruin people along the way, that they'll be able to manage the people that they have to manage. Curriculum - yes, of course they need to know what they're talking about. Have they got a sound pedagogy? Sometimes when people are interviewing, I can tell, by the way that they're talking, that the pedagogy that they're talking about is not fitting or is not in alignment with where the direction of our school is going.

Responsibilities and Challenges

Tracey is quick to establish the importance of the positional relativity of the middle leaders to their teaching staff and students and sees their influence on teaching and learning as fundamentally the most important aspect of their role. She likens a secondary school to a machine and identifies the middle leader position as "the big cogs in the wheel that make things happen*"* and as being "absolutely integral to the machine working". Tracey sees her own role as facilitating the ability of the middle leaders to be able to do their jobs. She does allow that the centrality of the middle leader position is not without its challenges, particularly in terms of balancing their instructional leadership role with the administrative obligation to their department. Referring to these administrative duties as "*ticky-box stuff*", Tracey maintains that the leadership of teaching and learning is intrinsically more important than management-type tasks such as tracking results, reporting and appraisal. In this way she posits that the ability to discern between the two responsibilities is paramount to the successful enactment of their role. She comments thus:

(They are) totally entwined always. But (it is important) to be mindful of what leadership is, as opposed to management. And, to discern that there is a difference between the two is really important for our leaders. That the leadership, the professionality, and the role you play as a leader is really important and to be mindful - because if you're not, then you can you know …. clunk up the system. You need to be strategic (about your) leadership. What does it look like? It is very

different from your management role, you know. It's really important for you to be mindful as a leader in your profession.

Tracey is very clear however that she sees successful leadership practice as a holistic concept, where one element cannot be divorced from the whole.

At the end of the day, it's about good practice. I want to make sure that I've got high standards in terms of my people in front of the students. (This is the) stuff that I really care about - the compliance stuff is almost like a ticky- box thing over there. It's about helping my teachers be the best that they can be in the classroom – and what I can do as a senior leader to help them (middle leaders) do their job.

Similarly, Tracey sees pastoral and curriculum middle leadership as equal; separate, yet inextricably entwined entities. She aligns herself more naturally with the pastoral side of leadership and is adamant that even curriculum leaders have an element of pastoral care and responsibility in their role. She says "I think even if you're in a curriculum role, you have that pastoral role underneath that sits alongside what you do."

Overall, Tracey acknowledges that the responsibilities and obligations of middle level leaders can create a situation where the workload is too heavy. When asked to identify the biggest challenge facing her middle level leaders she replied thus:

Workload! Without a doubt! I just remember coming from senior leadership, back into middle leadership, and as I've segued backwards and forwards between them, I would say our middle leaders are the hardest working people in the school. They have teachers, they have students, they have parents, they are working really hard and I vowed that I would never forget that. As I sit down with them in meetings, I think 'Holy hell, how are you doing this? How are you holding it together?". Mental health - I think is another thing as well. You know, making them feel valued and making them feel like we get it - acknowledging their hard work. I have to remember how much pressure they are under and I have to give them that time and space.

Moreover, Tracey also is of the opinion that middle level leaders are often their own harshest taskmasters. In terms of pressure in the middle level leadership position, she comments;

As well as a total lack of time, I think (they put it on) themselves as well, because they want to do a good job and they want to help their people and they want to do the best that they can. If they're a really good HOLA, they'll do that.

Professional Development and Support

In discussing opportunities for professional growth, Tracey confirms that one of the goals in this school's Strategic Plan is to grow leadership in the school. As such, the senior leadership and Board of Trustees are committed to professional development and creating leadership pathways and opportunities, not only to benefit the school itself, but also for the individual.

One of their in-house programmes involves a group of twelve teachers, who have been trained to lead their colleague teaching staff in their own professional 'inquiries' – as a part of the Professional Growth Cycle and appraisal process required of all registered teachers in New Zealand. These inquiries can be aligned to the school goals or more inwardly directed towards enhancing one's own teaching practice. This reduces the requirement for the HOLA to be at the center of the appraisal process in their respective faculties, thereby providing a practical level of support that means their own involvement with their team members, can become a simple conversation, in Tracey's words, one of the "ticky-box" requirements.

Tracey is a huge advocate for leaders to undergo formal tertiary study through an external provider, to support their leadership development and confirms that their Board of Trustees are very supportive of middle leaders who wish to study in this way. She says, "as you know, if you've got that woke stuff behind you can be really deliberate in the decisions that you make, as a leader."

However, the school also has designated "Professional Learning" time built into the school timetable which provides regular time for staff to reflect upon their practice and undertake professional development 'in-house'. Partly in response to a demand from the middle level leaders for further leadership development and support, Tracey runs a session called the *Middle Leaders Workshop* during this time, which is an optional workshop aimed specifically at developing management and leadership skills. She maintains that this type of opportunity is representative of the ongoing strategic thinking and commitment to developing leadership capabilities in the school. She also references the fact that material published by the MOE and the NZEC both

underpins and is consciously embedded in their school strategic planning and in the documentation available to the HOLAs when planning and executing their own professional growth cycle and self-evaluating their leadership competencies.

With the introduction and growth of the Innovation Stream, the structure of this school has been under recent review and the leadership team are considering ways to integrate this programme more fully into the school, both in terms of curriculum and pastoral care. Tracey reports that it has been a very collaborative process involving every level of leadership in the school and says the process of working closely with the senior leadership team has empowered their HOLAs team and strengthened relationships between the two groups.

Philip

Leadership Background and Current Role

Philip is currently Acting Principal of Beachview College. Originally from the United Kingdom, Philip was an English / Drama specialist teacher who emigrated to New Zealand in the early 2000s. He was employed as a classroom teacher and quickly became interested in the (then) emerging programmes directed at guiding teachers to coach other teachers to become better practitioners, which led eventually to ten years of Doctoral study. He was appointed to an AP role, a position he held for four years followed by a DP position in another secondary school and finally to his current role as an Associate Principal, a position he has held for the past three years.

Leadership Characteristics

Philip credits his rapid ascent from teacher to school leader to the fact that he sees himself as "systematic", quite good at collecting and working through information to achieve a purpose. He willingly admits that the study undertaken towards his doctoral degree considerably enhanced his leadership skills, giving him a "toolkit" of strategies and a depth of understanding towards how to be more "relational" in his practice, flexing his leadership to create high-performing teams.

In terms of his views on the characteristics essential for effective leadership in the school, he looks for people who have proven leadership experience (particularly pastoral), and people who have led projects and led teams. He says:

I want them to be able to lead a team and understand that probably the biggest influence on the team is how the team leader is going to be - and act and react and have an understanding of that. But it's not like," oh, I've got a nutter on my team, it's their fault." It's about them and how they deal with the nutter.

Philip concedes that he looks for leadership characteristics and traits that indicate the candidate already possesses innate leadership strengths,

I don't think anybody's born with these things, but (I look for) strengths that people have grown up with. That are - maybe more useful for leadership. What I would call *character characteristics*, but that tends to be more about people who can hold their head. They're not getting really stressed - so people who have learned to manage their emotional well-being. And very efficient. I think that's something that is not talked about in leadership at all - or very little.

Responsibilities and Challenges

He has been instrumental in changing the leadership structure in the school to include the HOLA team and is at the head of that team as well as leading the DPs. He is a strong advocate for using leadership 'Inquiry' as a strategic tool to effect change within an organisation and uses his coaching skills to guide his leaders (HOLAs and DPs) towards identifying areas requiring improvement and towards formulating plans to effect that change. He is also at the forefront of helping both groups work through any issues that arise.

And the stuff they bring to me is everything. So, it's just problems. That might be problems of extreme cases of students, parents and it might be problems of timetable or so on. There's just a lot of every day organisational, but typically the problems will be people related.

Professional Development and Support

Despite his adherence to a 'open-door' policy, Philip observes that there are also good structures and systems in place, like weekly strategic meetings, to support school policies and to empower his middle leaders to manage their day-to-day practice without his direct involvement.

One of his initiatives since starting at this school has been to update and implement job descriptions throughout the organization. Co-constructed through negotiation between the staff member and their line manager, Philip describes these as a broad document, incorporating elements from the previous professional growth cycle and a basic list of job functions. For middle level leaders this also incorporates accountability in their role as leaders, although Philip does not see this as particularly cumbersome:

> We basically said, effectively manage your budget, manage your team - and to be honest, the only time we would use the job description (was) if we felt they weren't doing the job. We would put it in front of you (them) and it would be part of the support and guidance.

Although government and Teaching Council publications were formerly used as a reflective document in the school's middle level leadership appraisal process, under the new 'teacher/coach' initiative, they are used more commonly as a resource in conversations between the middle leader and their DP coach, or between the DP and their AP. In addition, Philip confirms that middle and senior leaders have recourse to external leadership courses – especially in teacher / coaching, where they can bring back information and share their knowledge and expertise within the school. In this way, Philip considers that they can provide explicit leadership development 'in-house' as well as by sending staff to external providers. Furthermore, while he admits that the historical leadership structure within their school has been a little haphazard, he outlines the potential for the school to grow leadership opportunities and develop leadership skills for their middle leaders within their current roles, by challenging the middle leaders' ability to plan strategically and manage their own departments.

> (It's) a historic mishmash. There are Teachers in Charge - so you might have a teacher in charge of a subject, like dance. Almost comparable to that is an HOD. A small department like geography has an HOD and then you then have 2ICs (second in charge) in departments and then you have Heads of Learning Area. I've picked away at that a little bit, in terms of I've tried to get people to look at things more as leadership in the department. So, like in ******** - "your numbers over time (have) historically gone down. I'm happy (for) you to keep your MUs, but actually you need to be a leader in the #### now" – and it's just leadership. Because you do get the odd teacher, not many, but who will sort hang on to that "I'm the HOD of this. On my job description you know this is just what I do". But

it's like - you've only got 30 kids in your department now, and you're still on two MUs. So, there's been the odd person, that has said "No" – so then I've done a restructure and said, "well actually we're going to take the MUs away - or we're going to give you a different role".

Philip also champions tertiary study as an excellent means of developing and consolidating leadership skills, although he allows that not all his middle leaders have the time to allocate to formal study.

I think some of them don't realize that by doing the Masters (degree), it gives them a whole load of strengths and understanding of leadership. And some of them need that. You know – being a teacher is a completely different set of skills, so I think we all need to be really explicit that the skills of leadership and the development of leadership sits over here. And the teaching sits here. And of course, there is crossover but not as many as people think – and I think we need to be very cognizant of that and make sure that we train our leaders in an ongoing way - that's not just piecemeal - we send them off to coaching courses and have the fortnightly meetings and the coaching and the support. But you know, the people stepping into the roles need to be aware of that. It took me quite a long time to realise – I started to reflect upon "who am I as a leader – what influence is that having, (how am I pissing people off) – because the more that I understood that – the more I understood I could make my team more effective – more positive.

Philip is equally cognizant of the load carried by middle leaders and the school's obligation to support them in their role.

It's the wider area I guess, things like well-being. How we support them in that way. Just making sure that they've got the space and the and the know-how and the support as leaders, so they don't crash and burn. Typically, a lot of leaders are quite organised and so they tend to be quite a perfectionist, quite 'control-freaky' some of them. And as they move into leadership positions, they go from spinning five plates to fifty plates, they can really quickly crash and burn. Because they try and make everything perfect - so it's also that side of working with people to ask how they are going to manage the portfolios and things like that.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Analysis

Introduction

The key findings from this study form the basis for discussion and analysis in this chapter. It considers the extent to which the lived experiences, as recounted by the research participants, reflect or are consistent with current professional discourse surrounding curriculum leadership in New Zealand secondary schools. In doing so, the research findings from the participant narratives are compared with the academic literature presented in Chapter Two. As a basis for analysis of these, this study incorporates the work of Clandenin and Connelly (1995,1996), to discuss and illustrate the different conceptualisations and competing ideas around curriculum leadership in terms of what it entails, both in theory and in actual practice. As introduced in Chapter Two, Clandenin and Connelly (1996), use the concepts of three types of stories: the *sacred*, the *secret* and the *cover* story, to describe the tensions which manifest as teachers metaphorically navigate the different professional locations of their work, namely in-the-classroom and out-of-classroom, experiencing a "split existence" as their knowledge, experiences and skills come into (at times) conflict with one another. In the case of curriculum leadership, these stories assist in locating and identifying the extent of accord or disparity in the understandings of the various stakeholders with vested interests in curriculum leadership, which lies directly at the heart of this study.

The first part of this chapter addresses the first of the sub-questions in this study;

> *What are perceived to be the primary responsibilities of a curriculum leader within a secondary school organisation and how are they determined?*

Responsibilities in this case describes the range of tasks required to be performed by a curriculum leader in the daily enactment of their role in a secondary school. The question of *how* they are determined, also brings into focus the expectations of curriculum leadership held by government-led educational organisations and agencies, as well as those of the community and senior leadership within the secondary school environment. These elements comprise the rhetorical or sacred story of curriculum leadership in that they represent the official, dominant version of what curriculum leadership encompasses. These are compared with the participant narratives which expose their reality, the secret and cover versions of the same stories from the perspective of those who work within the curriculum leadership space. Their narratives describe how they view their responsibilities as leaders and what they see

as being their leading focus and main duties in the enactment of curriculum leadership in their respective learning areas. These narratives also reveal their understanding or interpretation of the concepts of leadership and management and raise issues that become a focus in the second part of this chapter in terms of the aspects that they perceive as facilitating or constraining their ability to perform their role.

The second sub-question is thus;

> *What are perceived to be the key factors that influence, support and guide the professional practice of a curriculum leader?*

This question is multi-layered in that it brings into question both the interactive nature of the curriculum leader's professional skill set and leadership capabilities that determine their ability to lead a curriculum team, and the contextual environment within which they work towards interpreting and enacting the policies of their organisation and educational government agencies. The reference to professional skill set encompasses the level of pedagogical experience and expertise brought to the role, which provides the basis for effective leadership, underpinned by the level of support available, and access or desire to engage with leadership support and professional development. The concept of leadership capability incorporates both leadership characteristics and the meta-cognitive capacity of the curriculum leader to motivate and lead a team of colleagues in the business (and busyness) of teaching and learning in a New Zealand secondary school.

The contextual environment describes the main external elements that impact or influence policy enactment in terms of curriculum leadership. With reference to the contextual dimensions described in Chapter Three (Braun et al, 2011), categorised as situated, material, professional and external, this chapter recognises and explores how the various discourses of the curriculum leader's environment in the case study school, interact to create or determine the circumstances within which leadership policy enactment occurs. Ball et al (2012) lament the lack of research that considers the contextualised nature of policy enactment in education. They point out that there are enormous differences in school contexts which means that policy enactment is 'intimately shaped and influenced by school-specific factors" (p. 19). This chapter uses their research as a basis for comparing and contrasting the findings from the different stories of curriculum leadership practice in this case study to determine the extent to which the contextual elements modify their capacity or ability to enact leadership in their particular school environment.

Leadership Responsibilities

The framework constructed by De Nobile (2019, Fig 1, p. 4) introduced in Chapter Two, illustrates a continuum of middle leadership responsibilities ranging from that of student management and administration, to the leadership of staff development and strategic departmental planning. Constructed through a synthesis of academic literature and commentary around curriculum leadership, it contributes to the sacred stories of curriculum leadership in that it represents a broad range of understandings as to what the curriculum leader role might entail. Clandenin and Connelly (1996) describe this as representative of the metaphorical 'out of classroom' place on the professional knowledge landscape of teachers, "a place littered with imposed prescriptions …. filled with other people's visions …" (p. 25). When asked to discuss the nature of the tasks that are undertaken in their curriculum leader role, the responses from each of the participants correlated with or confirmed the range of tasks spread across the framework and in doing so comprised the cover stories of their curriculum leadership. However, when asked to discuss the distribution of them and how they actually prioritised these tasks on a day-to-day basis, their narratives indicated that paperwork, student management and the bureaucratic responsibilities located at the administrative end of De Nobile's leadership framework occupies a disproportionate amount of their non-contact (non-teaching) time. In their view, their vision of how they enact their leadership differs considerably from that espoused in the published material produced by the MOE, the Teaching Council, educational research or even their own senior leadership team. They maintain that they are focused primarily on tasks associated with department organisation and supervision. That is, in their ability to create timetables, organise and chair meetings, disseminate information, guide curriculum planning and monitor teaching and learning outcomes in their subject. They also report striving to alleviate workload for staff by undertaking administration tasks on their behalf, and supporting them in their pedagogy through student management, modelling and assisting departmental staff to meet their own pedagogical responsibilities. They say activities such as coaching and leading staff development or strategic departmental planning and goal setting are attended to as often as possible but in reality are invariably side-lined for when or if time and resources become available. In this way, it could be concluded that in this case, their view of leadership and management, remains located firmly to the left-hand side of De Nobile's (2019) management / leadership continuum and in effect, continues to be persistently grounded in their leadership *of* management. That is, the requirement to

manage and support staff in their delivery of subject curriculum and to monitor the administrational and organisational tasks that this entails. Clearly therefore, there is a disparity between the secret stories of their practice and the cover version they use to show that they endeavour to meet the expectations of members of the senior leadership and comply with leadership policies prescribed by educational government organisations.

> Mentally the priority is leadership, but the reality is that you get a fair amount of administration to do … but because I know the school better, it's faster to do the management, administrative things, so I can focus on that (leadership). I have a teacher who just started this year and needs a lot of support ... and that's my priority – it's her. (Helen)

> I would say I'm part leader but more manager of the department ... I shuffle papers, I'm doing jobs that other people don't have to do because I'm doing them. I see a lot of it as under my job description even though it's not specifically mentioned. (Roger)

> I usually start at the bottom of my list. If it's important I'll do it … I do a lot of data analysis tracking student learning, so that's quite important. I do most of the actual number crunching, make it pretty and then share it with the team and we will talk about it. (Natasha)

However, many research studies support the fact that the modern middle leader is now expected to fulfil an increasingly complex range of functions, which while still including administration and resource management, now also encompasses strategic planning and instructional leadership of colleagues (Bassett, 2016; Cardno et al, 2018;). This closely reflects the views expressed by the two senior leaders. While they too acknowledged the situatedness of the curriculum leader role as being key to the smooth running of the organisation, their theoretical vision of middle-level leadership is centered around the ability of the curriculum leaders to not only take care of 'pedagogical administration' but also focus on instructional leadership, the inspiration and development of colleagues and lead strategic thinking and innovation in the teaching and learning of their curriculum subject.

> … those (administrational tasks) are the bits and bobs, the sort of ticky-box stuff that needs to be done in a school. To me, the compliance stuff … that just sits to the side. You need to have good pedagogical leaders … they are the closest to teaching and learning as leaders that we have. I can tap-dance all I like as a deputy

principal … it's our middle leaders who are key to that instructional (pedagogy). And, if you're going to be a leader who cares deeply about pedagogy and teaching, your focus should be on that. (Tracey)

(It's important to) have had experience of leading projects and sustaining projects and identifying problems … and strategically exploring the issues. (Philip)

In this case study school, there has been a deliberate focus on leadership development and coaching of staff who hold leadership positions as a part of the organisation's strategic development plan. This has taken many forms, including a 'teacher/coach' program where staff are taught how to formally coach colleagues in their professional development, as well as by promoting tertiary study pertaining to educational leadership. The Acting Principal says:

You know – being a teacher is a completely different set of skills, so I think we all need to be really explicit that the skills of leadership and the development of leadership sits over here. And the teaching sits here. And, of course there is crossover but not as many as people think – and I think we need to be very cognizant of that and make sure that we train our leaders in an ongoing way - that's not just piecemeal - we send them off to coaching courses and have the fortnightly meetings and the coaching and the support. But you know, the people stepping into the roles need to be aware of that (too). It took me quite a long time to realise – I started to reflect upon "who am I as a leader – what influence is that having, how am I pissing people off – because the more that I understood that – the more I understood I could make my team more effective – more positive. (Philip)

Thus, it seems that in the case study school senior leadership team, there is an awareness of the need to shift the focus of the professional development of their middle leaders towards supporting and providing subject leaders with the skills they need to enact instructional leadership of their learning areas. However, even while espousing the value of leadership development and initiating a leadership development programme within their own school, to some degree this represents and has become their own leadership cover story in order to align their school values and expectations with those of the sacred rhetoric of those government ministries and agencies to whom they are directly accountable. Because conversely, in practice, according to the narrative of the curriculum leader participants in this study, the reality is that regardless of how much formal leadership training and development they are

offered and undertake, the majority of their curriculum leadership focus and time continues to be spent on compliance-based, student-centered administrative tasks. Furthermore, although HOLAs are aware of the mandate to appraise, guide and mentor staff in their team and implement a strategic direction for their department, in practical terms they report this as often beyond their ability to formally enact in terms of time, resources and knowledge. Instead, they report often assuming a more informal mode of staff development by mentoring and providing impromptu coaching opportunities (especially for those involved in the Innovation Stream), or by modelling 'good' practice in their own teaching, providing encouragement and support where required. De Nobile (2019) describes staff development as "building the capacity and competence of staff members so that they can do their jobs more effectively" (p. 5) and it seems that the practice of this at the subject department level in Beachview College is necessarily haphazard, and as needed, due to conflicting priorities upon the time and resources available. Therefore, although the prioritisation of instructional leadership over management and administrative tasks forms part of both the curriculum leader and organisational cover stories, in effect, where practical constraints such as timetabling, bureaucratic compliance tasks and lack of funding exist, this becomes difficult to support or enact in practice. An example of this is the fact that the TIC role in this case study, is executed in addition to a full teaching load and carries no formal permanent management unit or non-contact time to devote to leadership activities, despite this leader supervising four staff and having responsibility for an entire subject area within the New Zealand Curriculum.

> Because in my role as TIC – I don't have enough hours (to offer classroom support), but instead of going to classrooms, which next term I will be doing, I actually have a meeting maybe twice a term, one-on-one which takes half an hour. (It's a) catch-22, they (the school) cannot employ another person (because) it's not enough hours …. But it is important for me to know what's happening and we talk about how it's going, what is the progress, are there any problems, do they need resources – you know – practical things. (Helen)

The newly reviewed job description attached to the HOLA position also shapes part of the organisational sacred story and is intended to provide an outline of performative expectations for the curriculum leaders. However, each of the participants acknowledge the inherent difficulties of making this document too prescriptive or in trying to formalise what is largely a collective document.

I think it covers all the core foundations of what we do and I think if we listed every single thing that we did it would be constantly changing and evolving, so we've kept it relatively fluid. But (it) covers the basics you probably expect to see on any job description in any school for those particular roles. (Jenny)

It accurately describes some parts of my role – definitely the management parts, and some of the leadership as well. I just think it's really challenging to put into words. And they do have at the bottom a little thing that says "... and anything else as required", so that part I think perfectly nails it I think that could be the whole job description – just 'anything as required'. (Natasha)

We made them broad enough. We basically said, 'manage your budget, manage your team, and to be honest, the only time we would use the job description (would be) if we felt they weren't doing the job. (Philip)

Therefore, except to fulfil employment contract conditions or unless required for performance-management purposes, its physical relevance to the enactment of curriculum leadership is negligible. Ironically, it is the one document that is in fact intended to legally outline the performative requirements for each of the HOLA leaders and that could be assumed to be reliable in the categorisation and description of the curriculum leader role. Instead, it is deliberately imprecise and generic by design, which epitomises the current situation around curriculum leadership in New Zealand secondary schools. In fact, frustration at the range and vagarious nature of the document was expressed by one participant;

I mean I see my own job description as an absolute fantasy - there's just no way that I could cover all of that. I'd love to see what my line manager's job description looks like - because I bet it's not as comprehensive as mine. (Roger)

This further highlights the potential for a critical difference in perception or characterisation of curriculum leadership responsibilities across all parties and even within a single organisation. The expectations held by senior leadership, by the Teaching Council and by MOE have a firm focus on instructional leadership and strategic planning. These constitute the current sacred stories of curriculum leadership in New Zealand schools and form the theoretical benchmark for practice. There is a clear disconnect however, between these sacred stories and the narratives of curriculum leaders. Their stories show that although they are aware of what they should be doing at a philosophical level and what they actually do on a day-to-day basis is markedly different. Evidence from the narratives in this case study show that

most of the time and energy expended in the curriculum leader role is spent in leadership *of* management. They report managing the administrative tasks necessary to keep the department running effectively, find ways to reduce workload for colleagues as a means of support, attend to curriculum and assessment changes and developments, and as much as possible monitor the teaching and learning in their department for positive student outcomes. In addition to this, as classroom teachers, they also plan, prepare, deliver, assess and report on their own classes, as well as contribute to tasks that accompany any other teaching role in a New Zealand secondary school such as ground duties, pastoral care and co-curricular activities. The three HOLA's and the TIC each reported feeling that although they were able to execute the management and administrative aspects of their role, their biggest challenge in terms of meeting the instructional leadership expectations, lay in having insufficient time to reflect on their own professional leadership development and getting a better understanding of what they needed to do to improve their own leadership skill set. In fact, their secret stories revealed that they were all too keenly aware that there was more to learn in terms of motivating and managing colleagues and providing strategic guidance towards achieving organisational goals and visions. Each of the HOLAs and TIC said they found it difficult to navigate the duality of the management/leadership roles in their daily practice, as well as achieve a healthy balance between their professional and personal commitments. Sacred stories do not account for the 'messiness', the disparate nature or the immediacy of the demands upon curriculum leadership, in school, in the moment, and all results would indicate that for these participants in this study, the rhetoric does not match the reality.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the elements that influence, support, and guide the professional practice of a curriculum leader. This includes examining intrinsic factors such as innate leadership capabilities and professional knowledge that interact with extrinsic contextual dimensions to determine the way in which curriculum leaders interpret, navigate and decode policy within a secondary school environment. Factors such as access to professional development, leadership support, challenges and constraints are also brought into focus during this part of the discussion.

Curriculum Leadership: Capabilities and Role Expectations

Becoming a Middle Leader

In the absence of a national, formally certified and accredited educational leadership framework, the appointment of teaching staff into leadership positions invariably occurs on an ad-hoc basis, based upon any number of subjective variables, but mostly dependent upon whether or not the candidate is considered a good 'fit' to meet the needs and the situation of the school organisation at the time. This has considerable implications for the consistency of quality of curriculum leadership within and across school organisations, as well as for the capacity of appointees to perform a leadership role. This is an important point when considering a range of perceptions about curriculum leadership, because despite the divergent nature of pathways into curriculum leadership, once appointed, irrespective of their qualifications and regardless of their personal and professional capabilities, they are obliged to outwardly comply with and conform to standardised public and popular expectations of practice. Once in the role, their actual capacity to enact policy and leadership in their organisation provides the subtext for the secret stories of their curriculum leadership. It is especially so for those whose leadership capabilities and knowledge base are underdeveloped or who do not have the knowledge or means to conform to these expectations. They are obliged to construct cover stories to outwardly protect and justify their performance in their role. These stories in turn provide 'evidence' that they comply with and fulfil their leadership requirements as outlined in the sacred stories of curriculum leadership as defined in the professional discourse of government, professional educational groups and senior leadership within secondary school organisations

Curriculum Leadership in Beachview College

Four of the participants in this study began their secondary teaching careers outside of New Zealand, although in largely similar educational environments and were promoted into middle or senior leadership positions within their first three years of teaching. As discussed in an earlier chapter, the promotion of classroom teachers into middle-level leadership positions is commonly attributable to their high level of subject knowledge and classroom teaching proficiency. While not all the participants in this study explicitly accredited their curriculum leader appointments to their curriculum knowledge, their responses indicated that they too consider that their

expertise in their subject area and their pedagogical skill was a significant reason for their identification as having leadership capability and continues to fundamentally guide and justify their leadership practice. They comment thus;

I represented a good strong knowledge in the science department, the ability to teach multiple subject areas, good communications skills, fairly well organised and mostly knew what I was able to do. (Roger)

It's been amazing. I absolutely love it – I think part of it is because of my interests and strengths. (Natasha)

I have quite an in-depth understanding of the program of learning and the curriculum … so my knowledge is quite deep. (Helen)

I appreciate all of the arts. I've always been involved with painting and drawing because at my first school I was a teacher of art, drama and music from Year 7 to Year 13. So I appreciate what it's like, bringing things together in the performance space … the actors, the musicians, the design, everything – my degree was theatre design. (Jenny)

Senior leadership comments reflected this also;

Curriculum, yes, they need to know what they are talking about… have they got a sound pedagogy? (Tracey)

The fact that subject expertise lies at the core of effective curriculum leadership appears to be generally understood across the profession. This is highlighted in the ELCF, where the notion of subject knowledge and pedagogical competence in curriculum leadership are qualities assumed and embedded in the leadership capabilities described therein. The prescribed competencies characterised in the sacred stories of this and other professional documents referencing educational leadership, emphasise not the *having* of knowledge, but in the espoused *outcomes of using* pedagogical skills and knowledge in the enactment of instructional leadership without attempting to address, explain or account for how this is achieved. However, while the participants also see their level of expertise as an endorsement of their leadership appointment and as giving credibility to their leadership, further discussion reveals that they see the link between their subject competence and their ability to manage a team as tenuous at best. They recognise instead that enactment of leadership requires further skills and characteristics beyond subject competency that are not described, addressed, nor explicitly accounted for in any of the literature available to

them. Therefore, while they feel the weight of expectation from the sacred stories of leadership (framed by research and government policy), their reality is that they are constantly navigating and recontextualising their practice to meet the demands of the role according to the context within which they lead.

Leadership and Personal Capacity

Other than the level of their subject and pedagogical competence, when the study participants were challenged to identify why they thought they had received leadership roles so early in their career and why they thought they were a good 'fit' for curriculum leadership, they attributed their promotion into leadership to their personal characteristics or attitudes (personal qualities) which they felt enabled them to sustain effective relationships with their colleagues and students. Similarly, when asked to comment on what they looked for in appointing a curriculum leader, both the DP and the AP responses, while although also briefly acknowledging the requirement for subject expertise, clearly highlighted the need for the candidate to also demonstrate personal integrity in their leadership and a commitment to establishing effective relationships with their teams

> I want a good person. I like someone who's straight-up and honest … so it's not even really about your leadership … (someone) who actually cares about their staff and about their people and about their kids. After that … are you a good organiser, can you communicate well with others … be respectful … people-savvy? (Tracey)

> We tend to look for people who have had proven leadership experience, in leading (particularly) pastoral teams and driving projects. (And we need) people who can hold their head, they don't get really stressed – so people who have learnt to manage their emotional well-being … and very efficient. I think that is something that is not talked about in leadership at all – or very little. (Philip)

Recent studies observe that genuinely effective leadership is known to be the result of a far more complicated web of personal and interpersonal qualities and professional capacity than that of simply subject and pedagogical proficiency. Robinson (2010) identified three key leadership capabilities, 'knowledge, skills and personal qualities' and argues that they must be used together, otherwise "an immediate disjunct is created between the leadership specification and the integrated reality of leadership practice" (p. 3). The interdependence of these also becomes a focus when considering the nine capabilities listed in the ELCF outlined in Chapter Two. They are referenced

in this chapter both as illustrative of the professional discourse around contemporary curriculum leadership and as a basis for discussion and comparison with participant narratives.

The assertion that being able to establish and sustain relationships is a core leadership capability, is supported by much of the research and commentary concerning leading a department team. In fact, one of the arguably key functions of a curriculum leader, to facilitate educational change in schools, relies heavily on the capacity of the middle leader to consciously establish relational trust (Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2021). Thus, the ability to create and use relationships is at the heart of many of the core capabilities outlined in the ELCF. Particularly so in the first capability explicitly entitled *Building and sustaining high trust relationships*, in which it claims relationships are "based on credibility relating to deep educational expertise, treating others respectfully, and openness, and good self-awareness" (p. 8). However, although this capability espouses the need to have *deep educational expertise* to effect *high trust relationships*, beyond an oblique reference to credibility, there is no explicit connection made to link how they might be interdependent. Once more, this is open to individual interpretation and wholly reliant upon the ability of the curriculum leader to draw upon the elements of their knowledge and experience to validate and create trusting relationships. Furthermore, the terms *deep knowledge* or *deep expertise* is not explained. The assumption is therefore made that it is referencing subject knowledge and curriculum content, or pedagogical proficiency (or both).

This capability also underpins each of the other leadership capabilities in the *ELCF* including the ability of a leader to mindfully ensure cultural practice and understanding of New Zealand's cultural heritage; build and sustain collective leadership and professional community; think strategically and plan to engage the school community in a meaningful way; use a variety of data to evaluate practices in relation to outcome; manage resources to achieve vision and goals; and attend to their own leadership learning and well-being (2018, p. 5). Both senior leaders as well as the HOLA's in this study also identified having personal integrity and the ability to lead through maintaining relationships as vital for effective leadership.

However, recent work by Lipscombe, Grice, Tindall-Ford & De-Nobile (2020) in a documentary analysis of "significant texts" (p. 406) in the field of middle leadership in Australian schools, asserts that there is still little understanding and even less professional development available to support and facilitate leadership capacity in this

aspect of their practice. "The flexibility, discipline and social and emotional capabilities required for such a position in a school are not well captured … (and) we argue that this has led to a lack of understanding and acknowledgement of the challenges implicit in middle leading, resulting in a lack of professional development for middle leaders' social and emotional capabilities. These qualities are central to managing, leading and inspiring colleagues." (Lipscombe et al, 2020, p. 419). This observation is reflected in several comments made by the participants.

> I think (I need help with) better understanding of my role. Maybe some mistakes could be avoided if we actually had a better understanding of how to approach some of the situations. I think if we had those kinds of discussions or workshops (on) how to deal with difficult situations, how to approach them, having psychology and understanding of the nature of the people. (Helen)

And on explaining a preference for *hands-on* leadership development over tertiary study:

> It's tricky because you don't know what you don't know. So, on the one hand I know there's a lot I don't know about leadership … and I feel like I have so much to learn just from being here, but that time is very valuable. Hands-on stuff would be more useful for me because this job consumes so much of my time, to spend a lot of time on theory is not the best use of my time – whereas things that I can apply and try, see how they work, adjust – that's how I think I grow. (Natasha)

Described as "a social practice" (Grootenboer et al, 2019, p. 253), it is widely agreed that the ability of the modern secondary school middle level leader to consciously establish trusting relationships, to navigate vertically between senior leadership and teaching staff, to work collegially and collaboratively with teachers in their teams, and to motivate, support and monitor pedagogical practice, will determine the capacity for organisational change and educational development in a secondary school (Cardno et al., 2018). In their analysis of instructional leadership in New Zealand schools, Cardno et al (2018) emphasise the importance of "interpersonal relationships" (p. 44) between the departmental leader and the teaching team in their curriculum leadership capacity and in subsequent implications for student learning outcomes. The responses from the study participants also confirm this point, that their capacity to initiate and maintain productive working relationships is key to their ability to lead curriculum, learning and teaching in their departments. When asked to

identify what the concept of leadership meant to them, the responses were varied, but each participant identified it as a relational activity.

> I think there is an overlap with management and leadership … of people. If you've got everybody understanding what the vision is or what the job entails and that we're all in it together … (Jenny)

> Leadership is the part where I get to develop the program … it's the vision and it's moving people towards that vision. If they're willing to try and move in that direction with me then I would consider that a success in terms of leadership. (Natasha)

> Leadership for me is about being in the front when you need to be in the front and to be on the back when you need to be on the back – and to realise how much the different abilities the people on your team have and use those abilities when you need to, because you don't know everything. (Helen)

Three of the participants (HoLAs) cited an altruistic desire to enthuse, support and enable the pedagogical practice of their team as a motivating factor for them in their leadership.

> Just to see when people are really passionate about teaching and when you make a difference to that individual (student) … and they've become the best version of themselves… and that's what it is for me, that's why I'm here. And if I can help my colleagues to do that in their spaces, for them to be courageous enough, to take risks and know that it's OK to make mistakes, that noone's here judging them – we've all got a job to do and it's caring for our young people. (Jenny)

> (My second major focus is on) supporting and developing teachers in the philosophy and pedagogy of the Innovation stream. (Natasha)

> Leadership is more about sharing …developing abilities in people and seeing them grow and support(ing) them in that growth. (Helen)

However, others took a more pragmatic approach towards their leadership and admitted that bureaucracy and the management of administration provided them with other, more practical ways to support their teams.

> I try to minimize workload for my other staff. So, I do take on a fair bit of work to try and stop teachers having to deal with administrative tasks that they don't need to. (But) not all of it is leadership. To me, I provide leadership (by) role

modeling of best practice and hopefully happiness, and hopefully the way I interact with the kids, … (that) would be my leadership style. (Roger)

In this way, the participant responses illustrate that they each have their own interpretation of leadership in a practical sense in the way they effect change and support and motivate staff.

Cardno et al (2018) also noted much of the current research literature consistently cited "a lack of confidence in the ability (of the middle leader) to perform demanding tasks requiring interpersonal skills" (p. 45), as being a major challenge for the middle-level practitioner, particularly in terms of discussions around curriculum, appraisal and addressing complex issues. However, the issue of confidence in their ability to forge relationships with their teams was not identified as a barrier in their own leadership, by any in this study. In fact, participants admitted to deliberately being 'themselves', being humble and having a readiness to admit making mistakes in their practice as important factors in maintaining authenticity in their leadership and building trust within their teams.

I did a lot of listening and a lot of learning … and just being really open and admitting every time I made a mistake. (Natasha)

I don't know everything and I'm still learning and growing … and it's reminding my team it's OK to make mistakes because I make them daily. And I'd think anybody that can say they're perfect in this job would not be. (Jenny)

(It's about) doing the job well, keeping happy – you know, I don't demand, I'm not a grumpy ogre. I usually do a lot of venting at my computer and let other people listen so they know what it's all about. I don't corner staff members and go through any heavy-handed approaches. (Roger)

Another participant advocates for adopting a lower profile, less hierarchical position in her management / leadership style to foster collegiality in her team.

I found the balance for me is the one thing I am learning at the moment – to be a supervisor without being a supervisor. You know – being in charge without being in charge. (Helen)

However, while professional humanity in one's leadership practice is requisite for influencing and leading successful learning and teaching, they are not necessarily attributes employed consciously by leaders in the enactment of their practice, nor are they professionally developed through specifically targeted programmes. Rather, the

successful application and use of interpersonal skills is more indicative of the innate attitudes and characteristics of the leader themselves. Others argue that leadership characteristics, while grounded in the personal integrity and attitudes of the individual leader, can be consciously developed and employed to useful effect. Dinham (2006) concludes, "While their (HOD) actions are an expression of who they are as people, there was evidence that these leaders of successful departments and teams have grown into the role, often under the influence of others and were thus both born and made as leaders. (The) implication here is that while not everyone is cut out to be a leader, those with potential can develop and be mentored into the role." (p. 77) Regardless, whether these are skills that are intrinsically innate, or are those that can be taught and developed, middle leaders clearly need an increased level of support to advance their capabilities in leading and managing (Cardno & Bassett, 2015). In acknowledging this however, it is also important to consider that if leadership can be shaped and influenced through mentoring and coaching from senior leadership, then the quality and level of leadership development they can provide will inevitably be contingent on their own level of proficiency as leaders.

Leadership in Context

Ball et al. (2012) in their work on educational policy enactment in secondary schools in England, argue that viewing policy as simply text-based legislation or prescriptive documents that dictate procedures and behaviours, ignores or marginalises the link between these and the actual act of policy enactment. They state that instead, policy should be seen as a process, subject to contestation and interpretation in its enactment, as teachers and students find ways to comply, respond and work within their individual organisations. They say, "Policy is done by and done to teachers; they are actors and subjects, subject to and objects of policy." (Ball et al, 2012, p. 3) In terms of curriculum leadership, curriculum leaders as subjects must translate and integrate the legislative policies of central government and educational agencies into their departmental practices, as well as those of the organisation (Boards of Trustees and senior leadership). But, in doing so, they must also reconcile these regulatory requirements with actual practice, and it is this process of reconciliation and negotiation that lies at the heart of the discussion in this section. Ball et al (2012) say "Policies rarely tell you exactly what to do, they rarely dictate or determine practice, but some more than others narrow the range of creative responses" (p. 3) and it is

therefore the job of the curriculum leader to co-construct policies to ensure compliance with legislative and organisational requirements, as well as meet with the realities of enactment in daily life.

The fact that the curriculum leader's role still contains an endemic administrative and managerial function as well as a requirement to enact pedagogical leadership does present challenges in the enactment of the role. Gurr and Drysdale (2020) posit that middle level leaders continue to be "trapped in expected and augmented role expectations (management focused) and need to push the boundaries of their work by exploring augmented and potential roles (leadership focused)" (p. 58). However, in practical terms, when asked to identify areas of tension or challenges in their work, most of the participant responses replied that for them, meeting the demands of administration meant that they lack sufficient time and opportunities to spend time on their own teaching, with their teaching staff or undertaking specific professional leadership development to grow their leadership capabilities.

> ... emails occupy my time (and) I often feel that my own lessons are getting more and more devalued and so you try finding that time to plan a sequence of lessons … you're clearly not your own priority, it's external. Bureaucracy is something I'm always up against, that seems to be completely pointless or half of it's pointless - I sometimes go to meetings - you go, why am I here? I've got so many other things I could be doing so those challenges are there. We're often so busy that feeling like you're coming out of the classroom to do PD just seems like a waste of time. I need to be in there for those kids. I mean, realistically, I would love to be able to read a bit more about pedagogical learning, about culturally (responsive) pedagogy. (There's also) no down time to reflect maybe on your leadership. (Roger)

This sentiment appears repeatedly in the collective secret stories of curriculum leadership in Beachview College and supports a key finding in this study. That is, that curriculum leaders are constrained and challenged by the professional and external dimensions within which they work; compelled to reframe their leadership priorities and obligations to comply with organisational expectations; interpreting and negotiating conflicting demands upon their time to accommodate a range of pedagogical, administrative, management and professional development commitments. This means, that educational policy is not seen as absolute by those who must enact it but is subject to the ability of the curriculum leader to reconcile and

determine the level of engagement required to meet and fulfil these expectations, imposed upon them by the environment or context within which they and others must work.

Yet although acknowledged by senior leadership as a valid concern, there seems to be little done to practically address the issue. The DP said;

> Workload – without a doubt … our middle leaders are the hardest working people in the school. (Also) totally a lack of time - I have to remember how much pressure they are under and I have to give them time and space. I think themselves as well – because they want to do a good job and they want to help their people and they want to do the best they can and they'll go to the 'nth' degree to do it. (Tracey)

> Typically, a lot of leaders are quite organised and so they tend to be quite perfectionist, quite 'control-freaky' some of them. And as they move into leadership positions, they go from spinning five plates to fifty plates, (so) they can really quickly crash and burn, because they try and make everything perfect – so it's that side of working with people to see how they are going to manage their portfolios. (Philip)

Fitzgerald (2009) argues that the hierarchical structure of schools means that the work of middle-level leaders is compartmentalized in a bureaucratic way, connected to performative standards within the organisation and compounded by government policy. The sorts of comments above acknowledge the existing tension caused by the bureaucratic workload of middle level leaders but exposes a level of, if not exactly disregard, *incapacity* to address the lack of time to manage it, neither from the curriculum leaders themselves nor their senior line managers. Their responses during the interviews also do not consider the fact that all four of the curriculum leaders carry a significant teaching load, with the preparation and planning that this entails. Responses from study participants, indicated that they simply work harder to accommodate their responsibilities and to complete tasks as required.

> We can (apply for) a day to organise the annual plan or the department but I haven't specifically used it. I kind of knuckle into those things in the holidays. I think holidays aren't holidays – they're time away from the students and the distractions. (Roger)

However, these same respondents reported working long hours and expressed a reluctance to commit to further formal tertiary leadership development in their own

time as a result. While recognising that there are leadership opportunities "out there" for her, Jenny confesses that with a young child at home and a range of commitments, "my job consumes me", she lacks the time and the confidence to take on further formal leadership studies.

> I've thought about it. I don't think I'm ever going to get that balance … I think part of it is confidence as well when you are suddenly doing education again. It's fear… it's 'am I good enough'? (Jenny)

Summary

In essence and to recapture the key points discussed in this chapter, it is first of all apparent that there are a wide range of understandings about the function and responsibilities of the curriculum leader role in secondary schools. Furthermore, that the perception of the dimensions of this role also varies significantly and depends upon the level of contextual or practical investment in the daily enactment of the leadership role. In other words, the theoretical leadership framework and curriculum leadership obligations endorsed by policy makers at the political or government level are considerably removed from the practical needs of the school organisation and the demands felt by those who support, influence or actually enact leadership in schools. This chapter highlights that in fact, the key factors influencing the professional practice of curriculum leaders are more localised and primarily driven by the needs of the organisation, the learning and teaching programmes, the teaching staff and the students themselves. In this way, the successful enactment of the curriculum leadership role rests upon their level of perceived leadership credibility as a result of subject knowledge and pedagogical efficacy; upon the innate characteristics and capacity of the leaders to establish and build relationships that support collegiality and trust; and in their ability to navigate the constraints and challenges that exist in prioritising and negotiating the range of expectations and demands made of them in their everyday professional environment.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The intent of this research project is to investigate different understandings of the curriculum leader role in New Zealand secondary schools and establish the extent to which these understandings shape actual practice and lived experiences in the everyday context. Using semi-structured interviews this study explores the following:

- *what the primary responsibilities of a curriculum leader are perceived to be and how they are determined.*
- *the key factors that influence, support and guide professional practice in the enactment of the middle-level leadership role.*

This chapter outlines four new, key insights that have emerged from this research and considers the impact of each on the practice of those who enact curriculum leadership in a typical New Zealand secondary school environment.

The first of these confirms a significant variance in understanding and in the expectations held by government organisations, senior leadership and the curriculum leaders themselves, in terms of what constitutes curriculum leadership. This includes their place and function within the organisation, the responsibilities they carry, and the main duties to be performed in their enactment of this role. Secondly, and due to this lack of cohesion in the perception of the role itself, there is an equally inconsistent understanding of the capabilities and professional qualities needed to effect enactment of curriculum leadership, as well as a lack of clarity (or opportunity) about how to develop and advance these capabilities. Since appointment into curriculum leadership persists in being discretionary rather than based upon a set of professionally recognised or standardised qualifications, selection for leadership roles is a subjective process, contingent both upon the perception of one's level of subject expertise and pedagogical efficacy, and on assumed innate characteristics and potential leadership capability. The third key insight highlights the challenges created by the first two, in that there is significant tension caused by the complex range of expectations, and the cognitive and physical capacity of the curriculum leader to reconcile them with the experience, time and resources they have available. Finally, the fourth key finding exposes the fact that a lack of any nationally-coordinated professional leadership development programmes or qualifications means that the onus to grow professional leadership capabilities continues to rest with individual organisations and on the

curriculum leaders themselves. In turn, this means that the greatest influence upon curriculum leadership style, quality and professional development is determined by the contextual environment within which they practice and the inclination of the leader themselves to engage with the support and guidance available. Consequently, this compounds the inconsistencies nationally, in the quality of appointees, the level of competence of those who practice this role in education and the outcomes of practice upon departmental teams and learning outcomes for students. This chapter concludes by summarising the limitations that constrain or hinder current curriculum leadership and provides suggestions for further research.

The political reforms of the late twentieth century were to change the face of departmental leadership gradually but comprehensively in secondary schools during the next three decades. Traditionally responsible for managing administrative-type tasks such as those related to staffing, distribution of resources, student management and the monitoring of student assessment and reporting, much of the department head role remained largely bureaucratic. It wasn't until as recently as a decade ago, that the real effects of the reforms began to be seen in the political language used around curriculum leadership, such as that published by the MOE (2012) in "*Leading from the Middle*" to reflect changes in the performative expectation of the curriculum head. With the intention of outlining the 'purpose and responsibilities' of middle leaders in New Zealand schools, this document not only references the administrative function of the middle-level leader but highlights the relationship between curriculum (pedagogical and pastoral) leadership and positive educational outcomes for students. This marked the beginning of changes in focus in the discourse and interpretation of curriculum leadership that continue to the present. More recently, strategic documents published by government agencies with an intent to locate and support leadership in schools, have established newer sacred stories, placing a greater emphasis on ideological leadership capabilities in the enactment of instructional leadership. However, they make no suggestions as to how to secure, develop or advance these leadership capabilities, nor how they might be applied in practice. Furthermore, it is difficult to establish the level or frequency at which that these documents are actually referenced across the profession, or whether they have any real impact on leadership practice, given the fact that few of the participants in this study knew of them at all.

Organisational job descriptions that attempt to encapsulate the pedagogical and instructional leadership responsibilities delegated to the curriculum leader role, go

some way towards reconciling strategic government educational policy with the actual practical requirements of managing and leading department teams in schools. However, job descriptions in themselves reflect a contextualised, local interpretation of curriculum leadership policy and effectively can only represent organisational cover stories. Descriptive not prescriptive, they do not encapsulate a definitive schedule of tasks and responsibilities and are therefore a limited source of support in a practical sense. In summary, the first key, new understanding to emerge from this study, indicates there is a wide discrepancy between the principles of curriculum leadership as espoused by the New Zealand government, the understandings of these at the organisational level including the expectations of senior leadership, and the practical, lived experiences of those who enact this role.

The second key discovery to emerge from this study is linked to the first. Due to the diverse range of understandings about the purpose and function of the curriculum leader across the educational sector, there is insufficient recognition of, or attention paid to the leadership knowledge, characteristics, skills and capabilities required of those who enact this role. It was evident when comparing the participant narratives, that their journey into curriculum leadership contained many similar elements. Each of their responses highlighted the fact that they were considered to be proficient teaching practitioners early in their careers, knowledgeable about their respective subjects, highly motivated and able to communicate subject knowledge to students effectively to meet organisational targets and goals. This meant that their appointment into their middle level or curriculum leadership role was principally determined by the fact that they were considered to have an expert knowledge base, pedagogical skill and thus potentially, the ability to share those skills and that knowledge with their team. This is problematic for several reasons. Essentially, basing leadership credibility on one's perceived "deep educational expertise" (ELCF, 2018, p. 8) is a highly subjective practice, particularly so when the parameters for determining this educational expertise are not clearly documented or defined across the education sector. In turn this means that there is no consistent nor explicit understanding or clarity around the professional standards or the performative capability one is required to reach, to move into a curriculum leadership role. Consequently, in a profession practiced in what is currently a highly visible, neo-liberal, competitive environment in New Zealand schools, there is no national professional qualification, regulatory check or accountability attached to the status and/or practice of curriculum leadership. Instead, individual organisations are left to determine for themselves, the qualities

that they believe constitute sufficient educational expertise, to enable them to entrust teachers with the leadership of their respective curriculum teams.

A further implication of basing promotion into leadership upon perceived subject knowledge and pedagogical competence, is that it ignores the social and emotional capacity required to enact leadership of others. Many research studies substantiate the fact that the ability to provide credible instructional leadership in the secondary school environment is far more complex than simply having subject knowledge and being able to convey that knowledge in a classroom. (De Nobile, 2018; Dinham, 2007; Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2021; Robinson, 2010) This was endorsed by each of the participants, who were very clear that they believed their capacity to connect with their colleagues and establish positive relationships to be the essence of their leadership. They affirmed that they worked hard to support and enable their colleagues, especially in terms of pedagogical practice and department administration, mindfully and purposefully building relationships based on high levels of trust and respect. However, there were other elements of their leadership that enabled them to form these connections, less deliberate, not based upon any measure of professional experience or competence, but rather dependent upon innate characteristics and personal integrity. Both senior leaders interviewed also stated a requirement for their curriculum leaders to be "good people" (Tracey), have self-awareness and be emotionally balanced to cope with the workload and responsibilities inherent in this role. Certainly, despite the lack of formal recognition of these traits by policy makers and no clear means suggested by which to develop them, the individual capacity of the curriculum leader to invoke trust, manage people and motivate teams towards a common goal or purpose, and the possession of personal qualities that underpin moral professional behaviour, now underlies many of the leadership capabilities espoused in recent government documentation and forms a significant part of the rhetoric currently in use around curriculum leadership in New Zealand, which in turn provides further evidence of a disconnect between the language, espoused values and beliefs of those who preach and those who practise.

The third new information to become apparent from this study, is that there are significant professional and practical challenges for curriculum leaders in understanding and accommodating an increasingly complex range of expectations, in a singular context, with the experience, time and resources available to them. Complicated by the fact that the parameters of the role are broadly misunderstood,

curriculum leaders are compelled to reconstruct the theoretical boundaries provided by policy makers to suit their own context, comply with the demands and meet the needs of their organisation. The successful enactment of their role is therefore directly contingent upon several factors; the level of practical and professional support they receive from their organisation in terms of time allocation, leadership information, guidance and development opportunities provided by more senior members of staff and the BOT; their own level of credibility as a result of their professional subject knowledge and pedagogical skill; their characteristic ability to form trusting and positive professional relationships in order to motivate and enact instructional leadership of colleagues and advance the vison and goals of the organisation; and their capacity to navigate the dual responsibilities of curriculum leadership and management as well as reconcile this with their own classroom teaching responsibilities. This study reveals that fundamentally, the nature and level of performative expectation surrounding this role, consistently exceeds the personal or professional capacity of curriculum leaders to enact leadership in many respects. Instead, they are obliged to find ways to address and balance the leadership and management components of the role and adopt reactive strategies to cope with the volume of administration, as well as develop the requisite strategies and skills to enact leadership of colleagues.

The final key understanding presented in this chapter is closely related to the issue raised in the third. That is, that the vagarious nature of appointment into curriculum leadership in New Zealand secondary schools is likely a consequence of three distinct issues. The first is that, given the lack of definitive understanding or consensus around the requisite skills, knowledge or capabilities that constitutes effective curriculum leadership, it is difficult to establish criteria against which one's potential for a leadership role, or one's professional performance in the enactment of the role thereof, might be considered or evaluated. In turn, this makes determining the nature of professional development towards building leadership capacity problematic. Moreover, and perhaps because of the first two points, there is not currently a clearly accredited professional pathway from the classroom into leadership in or of New Zealand schools. As a result, professional development is often offered post-appointment and subject to a variety of factors. These could include, but are not restricted to; the financial capacity and inclination of the organisation to release staff and engage professional experts in the field of leadership development; the organisational goals and/or strategic direction determined by the principal and

governing Board; the capacity and quality of senior leaders available to identify potential curriculum leaders, or mentor and support the incumbent leaders in their practice; and the ability or desire of the curriculum leaders to engage with professional development opportunities such as those offered 'in-house', or through post-graduate study. This means that the lived experiences and performative expectations of a curriculum leader are highly contextualised and dependent upon the environment within which they practice. The effect of this is to reinforce the significant degree of variance that already exists in any national collective understanding about effective curriculum leadership and contributes further to the general level of ambiguity in the professional discourse surrounding this role.

Limitations and Possibilities

As discussed in Chapter Three, there are limitations to a study such as this. The fact that it was based on qualitative data collected from a single school means that it would be difficult to definitively conclude that the findings of this study could be generalised across all New Zealand secondary schools. However, one of the new key insights of this study, emphasises the highly contextualised nature of curriculum leadership and so the findings of this study may well reflect the discourse in those schools whose profile and structure closely matches that of the case study school. Furthermore, the information discussed in Chapter Two, drawn from academic research around curriculum leadership, also supports the fact that the lived experiences of the participants in this study are not unique but are reflective of the professional environment in many secondary schools in New Zealand which in turn makes the findings from this study potentially relevant to a wide range of educational organisations.

A second limitation was the random nature of the selection of the research participants. Since the participants in this study are experienced curriculum leaders, their responses to the questions asked in this interview are potentially markedly different than if they had been new to their leadership roles. As discussed earlier, as well as personal integrity, leadership competency is determined by a range of variables, including pedagogical expertise, the ability to reconcile the dual functions of management and leadership, and the capacity to form and maintain strong links with colleagues, qualities that are usually developed over several years in education. However, given the rather inconsistent nature of appointment into curriculum

leadership in New Zealand schools, it is not inconceivable that inexperienced but confident young educators are promoted into leadership positions, well before they have developed the requisite skills for enacting leadership. Responses from an inexperienced curriculum leader may well have supplied data that provided different insights.

A further limitation is the potential for personal bias in my interpretation and analysis of the data collected from the research participants. However, to the best of my ability I have tried to represent the participant narratives as recounted to me in their interviews. The methods and theoretical framework used, were chosen specifically to minimise the potential for misrepresentation. Participants reviewed the transcripts from their interviews to ensure accuracy and to avoid data error, and their responses were organised into themes. These themes were then compared with current research through a synthesis of academic literature to ensure a balance of voice across the themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data" (p. 79) and point out that it is important to acknowledge the theoretical lens of the researcher when conducting qualitative research, as well as being aware of the decisions behind choosing a particular theoretical framework and methodology to support the purpose of the research, and to limit the potential for researcher bias.

As this study shows, the discourse around the role of the curriculum leadership continues to evolve, particularly at the political end of the educational spectrum. However, there is little research evidence to support the fact that the changes in government-driven educational leadership rhetoric during the past two decades has had any real impact on the daily practice of those who enact the leadership role. In fact, this study confirms a growing disconnect between the ideological understandings and performative expectations of curriculum leadership held by government agencies, organisational governing bodies and senior leadership, and those of the curriculum leaders themselves. This means that despite the evidence to show that the role has expanded beyond administrative and management-type responsibilities towards pedagogical or instructional leadership of colleagues, in practical terms curriculum leaders are struggling to understand and assimilate the new parameters of their curriculum leadership role, as well as reconcile the vast range of responsibilities and duties with the time and resources available. Furthermore, this study highlights the fact that with no coordinated, standardised pathway into curriculum leadership and

therefore no targeted professional development opportunities, the greatest influence upon the performance and experiences of curriculum leaders remains contextual, including guidance and support from their senior leader line managers and conditional on their own personal and professional knowledge base, skills and leadership characteristics. It is recommended that further empirical research is conducted across a much bigger sample of New Zealand secondary schools to see whether the new understandings gained in this research are consistent with the stories of curriculum leaders in other schools and different contexts.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Principals Information Sheet

Appendix B: Consent Form

Appendix C: Permission for Researcher to Access Organisation – School/Staff/Students

Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet

Appendix E: Consent Form (for participants)

Appendix A

Appendix A

Principal Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced: 24 / 01 /2021

Project Title

"The Rhetoric and The Reality": Middle Leadership in New Zealand Secondary Schools

An Invitation

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in my research project. I am in my third year at Auckland University of Technology, studying part-time towards a Master of Educational Leadership. I have been in Education for twenty-eight years as a secondary school teacher in New Zealand as well as spending time teaching in Japan during the early 1990s. I am married with three almost-adult children; our two girls are both at university and our son is starting an apprenticeship next year. I have held several middle leadership positions during my teaching career, both curriculum and pastoral and, aside from curriculum delivery and teaching pedagogy, I am passionate about the middle level leadership role; what it is that we do in practice and how we improve learning outcomes for students through the leadership of our departments.

Every teacher in education has a wealth of stories that have come from interactions with our professional environment, the students, our colleagues, our organisation and our school communities. I am keen to hear the stories of those who hold leadership positions in your College, their journeys as instructional or curriculum leaders and use these to support my research in this field.

What is the purpose of this research?

There has been considerable academic research and attention during the past twenty years paid to the fact that principals and senior managers have increasingly had to turn their attention towards the organisational management and administration of their organisations. This has meant the instructional leadership of teachers and departments has been picked up by the middle level leaders.

My own experience working as a middle level leader in a secondary school reflects the fact that there is often a confusion about what this role now entails and a gap between what we recognise as generic management competencies and the actual practices and experiences that middle level leaders are faced with in their daily practice. This research seeks to identify the extent of that gap and learn how the practice of middle level leaders is shaped by context, that is, the perspectives of others and policy documentation published by professional bodies and national associations.

The findings of this research may be used for academic publications and presentations. However, at no time will the college or participants be identified in the research findings either in published material or subsequent publications.

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

I aspire to conduct this research in what could be considered a 'typical' New Zealand secondary school with the intention of my findings informing and being relevant to, the characteristic practice of many other middle level leaders in New Zealand secondary schools. I have framed this as being a school that is representative of any number of colleges in terms of roll number, staffing timetable structure and delivery of the New Zealand curriculum. Additionally, as a full-time Head of Faculty in my own school, time and costs constraints have factored in my decision to locate this case study in an eastern or central Auckland secondary school.

To be eligible to take part in this research, participants must have a current teaching certificate and hold a current leadership position where they are responsible for the instructional leadership of at least two or more teachers in the college.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If, after reading this information sheet, you are willing for staff in your college to participate in this study, you can either send me an email indicating your interest (chris.craig@xtra.co.nz) or by giving me a call on my cell phone 021 449 560. Once you have done this, I will send you a Consent Form to complete.

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

What will happen in this research?

The collection of information (data) for my research involves interviewing between three and seven middle and senior level leaders, one at a time using a 'semi-structured' interview format in order to try and better locate and understand the middle level leader position in a secondary school organisation and examine the elements that influence their performance in this role.

The 'semi-structured' format means that although I will have planned a set of questions, they will be able to share their experiences and thoughts or opinions freely during the interview. This interview will be digitally recorded using a programme called Audacity. After the interview, I will transcribe each conversation and send it back to each participant via email for them to check and verify that there is nothing to correct or add to this data. Their interviews, including the digital recording and transcription will be stored securely in a locked facility at my home until the research is concluded whereupon it will be transferred to AUT to be kept for six years, then destroyed. The data will be kept separately from the Consent forms at all times and the identity of both the College and participants will remain confidential within and from each other.

In order to do this, I will organise for each interview to take place and at a time, in a public venue that mutually suits us and protects the confidentiality of both of us and this research study. If Auckland or New Zealand is put into a Covid Lockdown situation, then with your approval, we could explore conducting the interviews online instead.

The data collected from the participants will be organised into themes and analysed. These findings will be compared with research from similar studies and conclusions drawn and recommendations made. Pseudonyms will be used at all times, from data transcription through to document storage and in the analysis and findings of this study.

What are the discomforts and risks?

The questions to be asked are of a generic nature and designed to give participants the opportunity to share aspects of their practice, their thoughts, opinions and experiences pertaining to the role of middle-level leader. There is a very slim chance that they might feel reluctant to share information that could cause them discomfort or embarrassment. Please be assured that the information they share with me is entirely at their own discretion and their confidentiality is respected and protected. They also have the right to withdraw at any time.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

AUT Health Counselling and Wellbeing is able to offer three free sessions of confidential counselling support for adult participants in an AUT research project. These sessions are only available for issues that have arisen directly as a result of participation in the research and are not for other general counselling needs. To access these services, they will need to:

- drop into our centres at WB219 or AS104 or phone 921 9992 City Campus or 921 9998 North Shore campus to make an appointment. Appointments for South Campus can be made by calling 921 9992

- let the receptionist know that you are a research participant, and provide the title of my research and my name and contact details as given in this Information Sheet

You can find out more information about AUT counsellors and counselling on http://www.aut.ac.nz/being-a-student/current-postgraduates/your-health-and wellbeing/counselling.

What are the benefits?

As advised above, this research contributes to the completion of a thesis towards the degree of Master of Educational Leadership.

How will our privacy be protected?

As stated above, confidentiality pertaining to the identity of the College and staff, and the data collected from them will be respected and protected at all times by the retention of all documentation in a locked facility and the reference to participants as such.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

I anticipate that these interviews will take approximately an hour each. In recognition of the time they are generously sharing with me, I have organised to give each participant a gift card to the value of $50.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

I would welcome confirmation that you consent to your college and staff participating in this research within two weeks of the receipt of this Information sheet either by email (chris.craig@xtra.co.nz) or by phone call: 021 449 560.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

I will write a one – two page summary document of my findings at the conclusion of the research and send this to you and all participants via their preferred email address.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr Stuart Deerness, stuart.deerness@aut.ac.nz, 09 921 9999 ext 7316

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , (+649) 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:

Christine Leishman, chris.craig@xtra.co.nz, 021 449 560

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Stuart Deerness, stuart.deerness@aut.ac.nz, 09 921 9999 ext 7316

Appendix B

Consent Form

Project title: ***"The Rhetoric and The Reality": Middle Leadership in New Zealand Secondary Schools***

Project Supervisor: **Dr Stuart Deerness**

Researcher: **Christine Leishman**

○ 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 taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.

○ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.

○ I agree to take part in this research.

○ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes○   No○

Participant's   signature:
....……………………………………………………

Participant's   name:
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Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):
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Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 19TH February 2021

AUTEC Reference number 20/403

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form

Appendix C

Permission for Researcher to Access Organisation – School / Staff / Students

Project title: **"The Rhetoric and The Reality": Middle Leadership in New Zealand Secondary Schools**

Project Supervisor: **Dr Stuart Deerness**

Researcher: **Christine Leishman**

○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated

○ I give permission for the researcher to undertake research within
_____

○ I give permission for the researcher to access the staff / students / employees of
_____

Principal's signature:

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Principal's name:

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Principal's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 19th February 2021 AUTEC Reference number 20/403

Note: The head of the organisation should retain a copy of this form.

Participant Information Sheet

Interview Participants

Date Information Sheet Produced: 18 / 11 /2020

Project Title: "The Rhetoric and The Reality": Middle Leadership in New Zealand Secondary Schools

An Invitation

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in my research project. I am in my third year at Auckland University of Technology, studying part-time towards a Master of Educational Leadership. I have been in Education for twenty-eight years as a secondary school teacher in New Zealand as well as spending time teaching in Japan during the early 1990's. I am married with three children, our two girls are both at university and our son is starting an apprenticeship next year. I have held several middle leadership positions during my teaching career, both curriculum and pastoral and, aside from curriculum delivery and teaching pedagogy, I am passionate about the middle level leadership role; what it is that we do in practice and how we improve learning outcomes for students through the leadership of our departments.

Every teacher in education, has a wealth of stories that have come from interactions with our professional environment; the students, our colleagues, our organisation and our school community. I am keen to hear the stories of your journey as a middle level curriculum leader and use these to support my research in this field.

What is the purpose of this research?

There has been considerable academic research and attention during the past twenty years paid to the fact that principals and senior managers have increasingly had to turn their attention towards the organisational management and administration of their organisations. This has meant the instructional leadership of teachers and departments has been picked up by the middle level leaders.

My own experience working as a middle level leader in a secondary school reflects the fact that there is often a confusion about what this role now entails and a gap between what we recognise as generic management competencies and the actual practices and experiences that middle level leaders are faced with in their daily practice. This research seeks to identify the extent of that gap and learn how the practice of middle level leaders is shaped by context, that is, the perspectives of others and policy documentation published by professional bodies and national associations.

The findings of this research may be used for academic publications and presentations.

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

I have been granted permission by your principal to invite you to take part in this study. To be eligible to participate you must have a current teaching certificate and hold a current middle level leadership position where you are responsible for at least two or more teachers in your department or faculty.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If, after reading this information sheet, you are willing to participate in this study, you can either send me an email indicating your interest (chris.craig@xtra.co.nz) or by giving me a call on my cell

phone 021 449 560. Once you have done this, I will collect your contact details from you and send you a Consent Form to complete.

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

What will happen in this research?

The collection of information (data) for my research involves interviewing between three and seven middle and senior level leaders, one at a time using a 'semi-structured' interview format in order to try and better locate and understand the middle level leader position in a secondary school organisation and examine the elements that influence your performance in this role.

The 'semi-structured' format means that although I will have planned a set of questions, you will be able to share your experiences and thoughts or opinions freely during the interview. This interview will be digitally recorded using a programme called Audacity. After the interview, I will transcribe our conversation and send it back to you via email for you to check and verify that there is nothing to correct or add to this data. Your interview, including the digital recording and transcription will be stored securely in a locked facility at my home until the research is concluded whereupon it will be transferred to AUT to be kept for six years, then destroyed. The data will be kept separately from your Consent form at all times and your identity will remain confidential.

Between us, we will organise for this interview to take place and at a time, in a venue that mutually suits us and protects the confidentiality of both of us and this research study. If Auckland or New Zealand is put into a Covid Lockdown situation, then with your approval, we could explore conducting the interviews online instead.

The data collected from you will be organised into themes and analysed. These findings will be compared with research from similar studies and conclusions drawn and recommendations made. At all times you will be referred to in the third person as 'the participant'.

What are the discomforts and risks?

The questions you will be asked are of a generic nature and designed to give you the opportunity to share aspects of your practice, your thoughts, opinions and experiences in your role as a middle level leader. There is a very slim chance that you might feel reluctant to share information that could cause you discomfort or embarrassment. Please be assured that the information you share with me is entirely at your discretion and your confidentiality is respected and protected. You also have the right to withdraw at any time.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

AUT Health Counselling and Wellbeing is able to offer three free sessions of confidential counselling support for adult participants in an AUT research project. These sessions are only available for issues that have arisen directly as a result of participation in the research and are not for other general counselling needs. To access these services, you will need to:

- drop into our centres at WB219 or AS104 or phone 921 9992 City Campus or 921 9998 North Shore campus to make an appointment. Appointments for South Campus can be made by calling 921 9992

- let the receptionist know that you are a research participant, and provide the title of my research and my name and contact details as given in this Information Sheet

You can find out more information about AUT counsellors and counselling on http://www.aut.ac.nz/being-a-student/current-postgraduates/your-health-and-wellbeing/counselling.

What are the benefits?

As advised above, this research contributes to the completion of a thesis towards the degree of Master of Educational Leadership.

How will my privacy be protected?

As stated above, confidentiality pertaining to your identity and the data collected from you will be respected and protected at all times by the retention of all documentation in a locked facility and the reference to participants as such.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

I anticipate that your interview will take approximately an hour. In recognition of the time you are generously sharing with me, I have organised to give each participant a gift card to the value of $50.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

I would welcome confirmation that you intend to participate in this research within two weeks of the receipt of this Information sheet either by email (chris.craig@xtra.co.nz) or by phone call: 021 449 560

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

I will write a one – two-page summary document of my findings at the conclusion of the research and send this to you via your preferred email address.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr Stuart Deerness, stuart.deerness@aut.ac.nz, 09 921 9999 ext 7316

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , (+649) 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:

Christine Leishman, chris.craig@xtra.co.nz, 021 449 560

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Stuart Deerness, stuart.deerness@aut.ac.nz, 09 921 9999 ext 7316

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *19th February 2021*, AUTEC Reference number 20/403

Appendix E

Consent Form (for participants)

Project title: "The Rhetoric and The Reality": Middle Leadership in New Zealand Secondary Schools

Project Supervisor: Dr Stuart Deerness

Researcher: Christine Leishman

○ 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 taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.

○ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.

○ I agree to take part in this research.

○ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one):

Yes○ No○

Participant's signature

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Participant's name:

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Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 19TH February 2021 AUTEC Reference number 20/403

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form

Appendix F

Participant Interview Questions

1. What is your current position?

2. Tell me about your teaching journey and the positions you have held.

3. What made you feel that you were a good 'fit' for this role?

4. What are the 'positives' (characteristics, skill set or abilities) that you bring to this position?

5. Describe your current team.

6. What do you see as your main responsibilities in this position?

7. Are you able to prioritize these?

8. How do you define 'leadership' and do you see this as different to 'management'.

9. What do you see as the main challenges in this role and how do you address these?

10. Do you feel that your job description accurately describes what you do? How so?

11. Are you aware of the guidelines for middle level leadership published by the Ministry of Education or the NZ Teachers Council? If so - what do you recall of these?

12. What professional development have you been offered / undertaken in the past two years?

13. What professional development do you feel would enhance your leadership experience?

14. What support network is available to you? How effective is it?

15. How do you make a difference to the teaching and learning outcomes for students in your department / faculty?