

**(Re)locating New Zealand school principals as  
leaders in school networks: Leadership in  
Communities of Learning**

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## Abstract

Since 2014, Ministry of Education (MoE) policy in New Zealand has encouraged schools to work collaboratively together in formalised networks known as Communities of Learning (CoLs). The Investing in Educational Success (IES) initiative signals a new direction for New Zealand schools, placing school principals as leaders across a network, with the key aim of lifting student achievement through improved teacher effectiveness. Network leadership is relatively new to educational discourse and requires understanding of the complexities involved in leading across multiple sites. This study explores the experiences of three CoL leaders as they navigate the space between policy expectations and the reality of network practice.

The research methodology focused on a collective case study design so that similarities and differences could be extrapolated from cross-case analysis to explore the lived experiences of CoL leaders in their network contexts. Following semi-structured interviews with each CoL leader, the principal members of each CoL were invited to complete a questionnaire to gain their perceptions of the role of CoL leader. Throughout the research process, document review and analysis supported and complemented exploration of the key themes arising from literature review and case study findings, and highlighted the challenges encountered through network activity.

The findings of this study identified the leadership approaches, and network practices, necessary for effective CoL partnerships. The leadership approaches included: system leadership, relational leadership, and collaborative leadership. Consideration of the following constituted the network practices relevant to engaging and sustaining collective enterprise: establishing collaborative cultures, fostering the development of social capital, and facilitating opportunities for the emergence of hybrid configurations of leadership. Aligning policy with practice provided the greatest challenge, particularly in respect of operating within two systems – self-managing schools (a product of *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms) and networked structures (a result of the IES initiative). Despite recent MoE policy decisions preventing the formation of new CoLs, this study still has implications for school leaders as they work in partnerships with others beyond their own school site.

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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 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 learning.

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# **Chapter One: Introduction**

In recent years, the constructs of networking and collaboration have become popular educational discourse. Collaboration in and between schools has been central to many improvement reforms in a bid to raise educational standards within the education system. Consequently, in New Zealand, a new expectation of school leaders has emerged positioning school principals as a partner within a network of schools. Facilitating collaboration to strengthen collective capacity is promoted as contributing to the building of social capital, a key aim of network leadership.

The first part of this chapter gives a contextual overview of the reforms that provide the foundations for this educational discourse. The New Zealand context of historical educational partnerships is also included to position this study within the current policy framework and emerging practice. New Zealand educational policy history is unpacked, in more detail, in Chapter Two in order to trace the important developments leading to the inception of the Investing in Educational Success (IES) initiative that informs the context of this thesis. Next, the rationale for this study discusses the key points leading to the formation of the research aim and questions. Finally, the chapter ends with a brief overview of the research design and the structure of the thesis manuscript.

## **Investing in Educational Success (IES)**

The Investing in Educational Success (IES) initiative, introduced as policy in New Zealand in 2014, is a reform that assumes and promotes strength in cross-school collaboration as a means of raising student achievement. This initiative shifts the focus from an insular view of one particular school “to a collective responsibility for equity and excellence” across a number of schools (Education Review Office (ERO), 2017a, p. 6) thereby relocating New Zealand school principals as leaders in school networks.

Central to its purpose is the introduction of Communities of Learning (CoLs), a construct based on the belief that collective responsibility, for equity and excellence, is more effective when professionals see the educational landscape as an interconnected system. Consequently, this challenges educators to move beyond thinking of their school as an island, an isolated silo

accountable only for the students in their immediate local community. Instead, system leadership promotes the release of potential, in boundary spanning ways, which develops collaborative practices and enhances social capital thereby offering the opportunity for improving both teacher and student learning. Chapter Three defines and discusses these concepts, as well as the contentious link to student learning.

A Community of Learning (CoL) consists of a network of schools, usually situated within a specific geographic area, comprising of early learning services, primary, intermediate, secondary institutions and other providers, who have chosen to work together for the benefit of their community of learners. Generally, a network constitutes 8 to 12 schools and, as a result, requires a CoL leader. Primarily, one of the principals within the network of schools undertakes this position. Their role is to facilitate collaborative, professional practices across the CoL in order to address shared achievement challenges. It is a position appointed by the Ministry of Education (MoE), and board of trustee members alongside other principals from within the CoL. The Education Review Office (2017a) states “successful CoL / Kāhui Ako appointees need to be able to demonstrate the capabilities and expertise to frame, support, and lead the work of a collective of leaders, professionals, students, and community members” (p. 17). At the time of writing, the uptake of this voluntary initiative has slowed and many roles remain unallocated, including money set aside to appoint principals into the position of CoL leader. The unspent funding of \$79.5 million has been reprioritised to cover the cost of pay offers under the settlement of collective agreements for primary teachers and principals, secondary teachers and area-school teachers. Currently, 74.5% of state and state integrated schools are members of a CoL but their operational funding entitlements remain unchanged (Ministry of Education, 2019a).

Pivotal to this study therefore is an interest in examining the leadership practices of principals as they execute the role of leader across a network of institutions. Through exploring the experiences of three lead principals and the principal members of their CoLs, the realities of network leadership can be examined, both for its successes and challenges.

## The New Zealand context

Working in local partnerships and networks is not a new phenomenon in New Zealand. In 2012, the New Zealand Council of Educational Research “found that 72% of primary and intermediate schools collaborated in some kind of professional cluster” (Patterson, 2014, p. vi). These networks were generally bottom up approaches relying on voluntary association that responded to specific needs or issues within the community. Contextualisation is crucial to the performance of the network as there is no formula for success – one size does not fit all. In this regard, the accomplishments of the Learning Change Network (LCN)<sup>1</sup> partly influenced the foundation of the IES initiative. Patterson (2014) reported strength in the LCN networking approach through its development of the teaching profession that acknowledged the capacity for lateral reform, particularly suited to a highly devolved education system such as that operating in the country since the *Tomorrow's Schools* reform. The MoE also worked with schools through school improvement clusters. These were, in the main, geographically placed but attracted additional funding and opportunities to tap into expertise outside of an individual school (Wylie, 2012).

New Zealand's education system was reviewed in 2013 by the National-led coalition Government in response to the achievement challenges it faced. New Zealand did not compare favourably to other high performing education systems in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the gap between its lowest achieving and highest achieving students was widening (MoE, 2014c). Maori and Pasifika<sup>2</sup> students, those from low socio-economic groups and students with special educational needs were of particular cause for concern (MoE, 2013). The ensuing IES initiative aims to tackle these achievement challenges by promoting communities of schools as a system through which effective, purposeful transition pathways emerge for learners. The MoE claims that improved student outcomes are central to its design which, when supported by strong leadership and complementary systems and processes, has the capacity to deliver its intent.

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<sup>1</sup> A New Zealand model of cross-school collaboration where a group of schools work together alongside an expert LCN facilitator to grow capability and accelerate student outcomes

<sup>2</sup> A term in formal usage by the Ministry of Education when referring to Pasific peoples in New Zealand. The term refers to those people who have migrated from Pasific nations and territories.

## **Rationale**

During my time as a principal, in the United Kingdom, I was a member of a Networked Learning Community (NLC)<sup>3</sup> and involved in discussions regarding Academy<sup>4</sup> status. In both instances, the divide between the ideal of policy direction and actual practice was evident. In my opinion, neither of the enterprises delivered against outcomes as the motivation, skill-set and commitment of the network leader was questionable. Currently, I am a principal member of our local Community of Learning. Although in its early stages of formation, I can see a genuine commitment by most of the schools involved. There is a shared understanding of the need to improve transition pathways for students across the different sectors and the CoL leader has facilitated opportunities for collaboration between schools. We have collective responsibility for meeting our achievement challenges but securing participation by everyone is an ongoing challenge for our CoL leader. Recognising I hold these views is particularly pertinent to my research of CoL leadership, as I need to ensure that existing bias or preconceptions do not influence the integrity of the study. They need to be made transparent, a problem to be worked upon throughout the research process. However, these experiences and a genuine interest in the perceived gains from networking, provide the basis for my research in this area.

## *Networks*

Research on networks highlight the diverse forms they take and lack consensus regarding definition (Sliwka, 2003). In addition, based on the research studies reviewed as part of this thesis, it is not clear whether networks improve student outcomes. Even so, there is agreement in the literature that networks are a powerful tool for knowledge creation, disseminating innovation and acting as a vehicle through which systemic change can be achieved (Chapman, 2015; Elgie et al., 2008). Other authors contend that networks are generally organic, ecological constructs based on social interactions that require a leader to remain flexible, observant and set the stage for capacity building, exploration, complex problem solving and inquiry (Gilbert, 2015; Hargreaves & Fink, 2008; Townsend, 2015). This implies that networks require some form of organisational

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<sup>3</sup> NLC programme was launched in 2002 by the National College of School Leadership, in the UK, to provide partnership opportunities across schools to improve student outcomes.

<sup>4</sup> Academy schools in England are self-governing, non-profitable charitable trusts independent of local authority control who can access additional resourcing support from personal sponsors or agencies.

leadership to make them effective. Therefore, networks usually have a system of leadership that co-exists alongside existing leadership structures and positions within individual schools (Elgie et al., 2008; Gronn, 2009). Fullan (2004) recognises the tensions that exist in such configurations but acknowledges the importance of system thinking where all parties are empowered to move towards mutual influence for the benefit of all. This resonates with the policy requirements of a CoL whereby one principal assumes the role of CoL leader. The principals of member schools constitute the leadership group, and the across-school leaders and within-school teachers facilitate the work of the CoL through collaborative inquiry. How lead principals navigate this complex space is relatively unknown, but Townsend (2015) suggests that hybrid forms of leadership provide flexible structures through which both participatory and coordinating activities can be realised. Hybrid leadership may be defined as recognising both vertical and horizontal leadership structures as interdependent and co-existing through the influence derived from fluid relationships according to the nature of the work involved (Bolden & Petrov, 2014; Gronn, 2009; Townsend, 2015). This concept is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

### *Research aim and questions*

To this end, the aim of this study is to identify the practices that embody successful network leadership by the principal CoL leader. Its value lies in providing participant CoLs, and their leaders, an opportunity to reflect on their leadership practice and their potential as a network to make a positive difference to student outcomes.

The following questions direct the research:

1. What network leadership practices does policy expect of CoL leaders in Communities of Learning?
2. How do CoL leaders experience the challenge of aligning policy expectations with the reality of practice?
3. How can principals and their schools sustain effective network practices?

### **Overview of research design**

This research identifies and critically examines the practice of leadership within the CoL context. Emphasis is placed on the role of the CoL leader and the attributes and skills needed to effect

successful leadership of a network. The study provides opportunity to examine the extent to which these practices are employed, and the experiences faced by leaders as they navigate the challenges of network leadership. The three Communities of Learning were selected through purposeful sampling based on three selection criteria, namely: composition of network, network maturity, and geographical location. Each network was composed of between 8 to 12 institutions that covered primary, intermediate, and secondary sectors. They are Auckland based and have been working collaboratively for approximately two years.

A qualitative case study approach has been used. Each case draws on principles of phenomenology (lived experience), and the principles of case study research where the 'what and how' questions are addressed. Perceptions have been gathered from document analysis using a range of data sources, CoL leader interviews and the survey response from a member principal of one of the schools. The survey questions were influenced by the data collected from the interviews.

The leader of each of the CoLs participated in a semi-structured interview. This allowed collection of their perceptions of network leadership and the specific practices they used to mobilise and strengthen participation across multiple sites. An on-line questionnaire was circulated to all principals within the three CoLs and was designed to gather opinion about expected theories of action and the theories in use demonstrated through the systems, structures and interactions of those in the CoL. The questions were open-ended allowing participants to freely formulate a response. The document analysis included: MoE guiding documents; Principal Collective Agreements; and documents pertaining to each CoL such as, Memorandums of Agreement and achievement challenge documentation.

Due to the volume of data collected through the qualitative research method, data reduction and analysis were kept within the bounds of the research aim and the research questions. The data pertaining to interviews and questionnaires were manually coded and sorted into themes, clusters and categories using the phenomenology approach in the first instance, followed by reflexive thematic analysis. Documents were then analysed according to reflexive thematic analysis as a means of providing a subjective interpretation rather than a summary of the data set. This approach positions the researcher as a "*storyteller*, actively engaged in interpreting data through

the lens of their own cultural membership and social positioning, their theoretical assumptions and ideological commitments, as well as their scholarly knowledge” (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield & Terry, 2018, p. 6).

## **Structure of thesis**

The thesis is organised into seven chapters.

### **Chapter One**

This chapter outlines the context and rationale for interest in the phenomenon of positioning principals as network leaders. This challenges the traditional, hierarchical view of a principal as the leader of a single institution, and introduces the model of networked leadership whereby the CoL leader has opportunity to lead a group of schools, albeit with limited power over their partnership principals. Following this, research aim, questions and research design are summarised as a preface to the content within Chapter Four.

### **Chapter Two**

This chapter examines the political context that has led to the inception of CoLs through the development of the IES initiative and Government policy requirements.

### **Chapter Three**

This chapter presents literature relevant to the key themes identified in the research study. These reflect the following aspects of educational discourse in the field of network leadership; system leadership, distributed forms of leadership – hybrid configurations, development of social capital and collaborative cultures and collaborative practices.

### **Chapter Four**

This chapter provides the methodology underpinning this study. The discussion examines the rationale for choice of method and data analysis approaches, in order to interrogate, compare and contrast the links between policy and practice from the views of CoL leaders in each of the three case studies. The chapter concludes with a critique of the validity and trustworthiness of the study and the ethical considerations undertaken throughout the research process.

### **Chapter Five**

This chapter presents the findings from each case study and compares this to the analysis of school and Government documents. It provides the context for discussion in the following chapter,



as it unearths the successes and challenges of leading a network, with particular reference to the experience of aligning policy with practice.

#### Chapter Six

This chapter focuses on the synthesis of key themes raised from the case studies, namely: engagement with vision, collaborative cultures and practices, and sustainability. These are interpreted and critiqued in response to literature and document analysis, and the current New Zealand educational policy context.

#### Chapter Seven

This chapter draws conclusions from the study and offers a perspective on how it is possible to relocate New Zealand school principals as network leaders within a community of schools. Limitations of this study and implications for future research are also acknowledged.

## Chapter Two: Policy Review

This chapter examines the changing political face of the New Zealand education system as it embarks on possibly one of its greatest challenges since the introduction of *Tomorrow's Schools* (1989) – the inception of Communities of Learning. At the time of writing, the current Labour Government has published the review report of the *Tomorrow's Schools* Independent Taskforce for public consultation (MoE, 2018c). The implications of this review on CoLs will be outlined later in the chapter.

### Tomorrow's Schools

Worldwide, market-based educational reforms of choice and competition have historically been implemented by policy makers to promote school-wide improvement. For instance, the introduction of Charter schools in the United States is an example of choice. An example of competition is the emergence of federations and academy chains in England, which gained momentum through the early part of this century and were heralded as the panacea to raising standards (Chapman, 2015; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2001). Many commentators claim New Zealand's reforms of the 1980s were no exception (Court & O'Neill, 2011; Dale & Jesson, 1993; Smyth, 2011). This decade saw a rise in market managerialism and education became viewed as a commodity, a free market of choice and competition dependent on results and accountability. Dale and Jesson (1993) attribute this to 'Rogermonics'<sup>5</sup>, a neo-liberal economic theory centred on "a programme of widespread economic deregulation and the curtailment and/or commercialisation of state activities" (p. 7). Although these neo-liberal ideologies played a role, Openshaw (2013) argues that radical reform of the education system could no longer be ignored due to "longstanding and deep-seated cultural, economic and political currents that had come to be expressed as a common discourse" (p. 16). He refers to the following forces as being equally instrumental in setting the course for change: Government and opposition demands for accountability and efficiency, advocates for Maori equality, feminist, liberal and neo-Marxist educators and community calls for more democratic participation in educational decision-making.

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<sup>5</sup> Roger Douglas, Minister of Finance (1984-1987) – 'Rogermonics' is the name given to his economic reforms as a Labour Minister

In 1984, the fourth Labour Government in New Zealand yielded to the pressure for reform and a task force was commissioned to review the education system. The resulting Picot Report (1988), *Administering for Excellence: Effective Administration in Education*, identified failings in the existing over-centralised system of control. There was dissatisfaction from both Government and the profession around the balance of central and local control. The main source of frustration appeared to focus on staffing, property, and resources, yet little thought was given to the importance of knowledge sharing across the education system (Wylie, 2012).

In response to the Picot Report, the Government published *Tomorrow's Schools* (1989) which became the basis for educational reform. The same year, the Education Act (1989) decentralised administration, placing responsibility in the hands of schools governed by Boards of Trustees. The Department of Education and Education Boards were replaced with a much smaller Ministry of Education (MoE) charged with the responsibility for policy. The Education Review Office (ERO), New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and the New Zealand Teachers' Council were also established. However, these reforms, as critiqued by Court and O'Neill (2011), have engendered 'centralised decentralisation'. Standards, National Administrative Guidelines, appraisal processes, and ERO school reviews were still centrally mandated thereby enabling Government to direct from a distance. In addition, they argue, "the principal's role as a collaborative professional leader was narrowed to management responsibilities" (Court & O'Neill, 2011, p. 131). Wylie (2012) concurs and adds that steering from a distance, through compliance and accountability measures did little to support a school's ability to exercise self-management in line with the original intentions of policy.

This new policy direction ushered a sea change in the management of schools. On the one hand, there was a belief that self-management would improve the quality of education by placing decision making at the point of implementation leading to greater responsiveness to local community needs. On the other hand, the ideal lacked understanding "of the importance of system-wide relationships and linkages for developing educational capability and capacity" (Wylie, 2009, p. 7). Schools saw themselves as individual entities through the absence of interconnectedness. Wylie (2012) comments this was never an intention of the Picot Report, but pressures of operating within a self-managing system restricted opportunities for cross-school collaboration. Marsh (2012) concurs and further suggests that standards-based reforms lead to schools focusing on narrow

economic objectives rather than actively engaging in activities that strengthen relationships, interactions, and influence to improve learning. Consequently, the role of principal, as instructional leader with ultimate responsibility for teaching and learning has “slipped into the background” (Court & O’Neil, 2011, p. 132). Without coherence between policy and regulatory frameworks, particularly those implemented to restrict knowledge transfer, sustained improvement has been difficult to achieve. Wylie (2012) suggests the outcomes of *Tomorrow’s Schools* (1989) is the cost of incoherence in policy, as the quality of the New Zealand education system is only as good as the quality of its education policies.

### **Investing in Educational Success (IES)**

In 2013, the MoE raised concern about how well New Zealand students were performing compared to other countries across the world. International studies such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) highlighted the fact that New Zealand’s disparity gap was widening and student achievement was not keeping pace with other high performing nations such as Singapore and Finland. The current system was consistently struggling to support Maori and Pasifika students, those from low socio-economic families and those with special education needs. Indeed, there was very little evidence to suggest that devolution had contributed to more equitable educational opportunities and improved outcomes for Maori students, a key aim of *Tomorrow’s Schools* (Wylie, 2009). The range of policies, aimed to mitigate the worst effects of market policy had, in fact, disadvantaged those it was meant to serve which had led to “the worst of both worlds: inequality and inefficiency” (Gordon, 2003, p. 31). Wylie (2012) agrees and states that the New Zealand education system has not been able to make the most out of what self-managing schools had to offer.

In acknowledgement of the longstanding achievement challenge in New Zealand, the MoE conducted a review of evidence in 2013 to ascertain the factors that made the biggest difference to student outcomes. Findings showed that high performing education systems build the quality of their teaching workforce as a priority (Ministry of Education, 2013). Although the review recognised there was sufficient capacity within New Zealand’s teaching profession, this capacity was inconsistent and barriers were preventing best practice becoming universal practice. Wylie

(2012) argues that educators work in good faith, but without access to new thinking and knowledge they may continue to employ less effective practice.

In January 2014, Joint Ministers of the National-led coalition Government agreed that system change was needed to significantly and substantially strengthen the profession's teaching practice and educational leadership, both within and between schools, in order to address the educational achievement challenges before them and so began joint work with the sector. Subsequently, a Working Group Report (June, 2014), *Investing in Educational Success* (IES), provided recommendations on the design and implementation of the IES initiative with self-identified Communities of Schools (CoS) as the key element. The proposed changes introduced new career pathways with strong incentives for collaboration and teacher-led innovation. The report proposed that self-identified Communities of Schools would be able to access resources to support newly created teaching and leadership roles, and inquiry time, to support collaboration focused on improved student outcomes. It argued "promoting collaboration that is purposeful and evidence driven is a feature of education systems that show sustained improvement" (MoE, 2014c, p. 31). To illustrate this point the report drew on Finland's reforms that supported district principals to work within their own schools, and across schools, thereby addressing broader community needs and allowing for distributed leadership within their own institution. Therefore, they claim leadership capacity is developed and boundaries become permeable. The report also references Fullan (2011) who advocates for strengthening social capital for system wide improvement through creating a culture of collaboration and collective responsibility. The Working Group Report (2014) states "within a culture of collaboration, effective school leaders see themselves as leaders of education, not just their own school" (p. 32). The report also suggested that "while culture is reflected in all areas of human endeavour, building strong professional cultures across Communities of Schools can support ongoing improvement in the performance of the education system" (p. 106).

At this point, it is worth noting other research underpinning the policy directives relevant to the IES initiative in consideration of its application to the New Zealand context. The New Zealand Ministry of Education's *Best Evidence Synthesis Iterations* (BES, 2009) illustrate practice-based evidence to focus educators on what works to improve educational outcomes (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009). They are intended to highlight the systemic improvements needed to enhance

professional learning and development for greater impact on pedagogical practice. The findings from the case studies are organised into categories spanning professional learning and quality teaching and leadership, and provide contextual evidence for system-wide improvement in New Zealand. The MoE (2016b) *Guide for Schools and Kura* refer to 'resourcing strategically', one of the five dimensions derived from *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why – Best Evidence Synthesis* (Robinson et al., 2009). The other four dimensions consist of establishing goals and expectations, planning, co-ordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum, promoting and participating in teacher learning and development, and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment. These dimensions are woven throughout MoE guiding documents and feature in the National Criteria for appointing principals to the role of CoL leader.

System-wide educational reforms, related to countries other than New Zealand, also contribute to the research base considered by the Working Group Report (2014). The McKinsey Report (2010) analysed findings of twenty school systems, from across the world, which had shown sustained gains in student achievement. They searched for patterns of performance that would have both universal relevance but recognised specific elements were relevant to individual school system contexts. They concluded that different activities were prevalent at different points of effective school improvement journeys. For instance, the early stages involved shaping the systems to support improved teaching and learning; this morphed into shaping the teaching profession – its teachers and leaders, and finally, balancing school autonomy with consistent teaching practice achieved sustained improvements. The Working Group Report (2014) recommendations drew on the McKinsey Report (2010), however, it is important to focus attention on the impact of arbitrary policy transfer from one educational system to another. Various contextual features challenge the New Zealand system. The Finnish system, as mentioned previously, promotes the development of leadership opportunities but does not focus on across school collaborative practices. New Zealand teachers have thirty hours face-to-face contact with students compared to twenty hours for Finnish teachers. It would appear therefore that, despite more opportunities for collaboration, Finland's success is dependent on other factors. Inequities such as these highlight the need to appraise the system beyond education. Inquiring into all elements that influence Government educational policy mandates requires a wider lens. Even with an allocated fund of \$359 million over four years to support the IES initiative, there was

sizeable opposition from the education sector who questioned the adoption of overseas policies, and felt the money could be more effectively prioritised.

### *Union opposition to establishment of IES initiative*

Although the essence of this new approach “has the potential to strengthen a professional culture that demands and accepts responsibility for ensuring every student achieves educational success” (MoE, 2014b) the initiative was met with scepticism from the profession. At this point, the Post Primary Teachers’ Association (PPTA) and the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) had the opportunity to place statements in the Working Group Report (2014). Both unions had reservations about the original model, and although they supported the broad aims of the initiative, they did not feel it was workable in its current form. The NZEI claimed that the evidence was not robust enough, had little or no logical connection to the IES initiative, and was lacking in its application to the New Zealand context. They held the view that the Government was intent on using this system development to restructure substantially the schooling sector. In response, the Working Group Report (2014) assured that IES was not a replica of existing models but a new approach that acknowledged lessons learnt from international models and, in its final form, would be designed to meet the specific needs of the New Zealand education system. They argued that, a system with relatively weak accountability, where schools have a high level of autonomy, increased the risk for ineffective practices to persist, as effective practices were not being universally applied.

The PPTA were less forceful in their opposition and felt two aspects of the IES initiative were worth pursuing. For instance, new career pathways and greater collaboration between schools, with a particular focus on student outcomes and shared achievement challenges, were already established PPTA policy (PPTA, 2017). As an association, they had opposed the competitive, institution-focussed behaviours encouraged by the *Tomorrow’s Schools* environment and welcomed the commitment of Government to negotiate the design of the new roles prior to inclusion in collective agreements. They also recognised that both vertical and horizontal forms of collaboration would be vital and that, although principal driven, genuine consultation and collaboration required adequate resourcing to support the principal. Expectations regarding trust

were also raised as educators need to feel confident in the abilities of those holding the CoS roles. The PPTA felt the appointment process would address this issue.

After consultation, the Working Group identified notable areas of change to the policy. Firstly, they proposed refinement of title names. For example, the title of 'Executive Principal', to be given to the Community of Schools leader, "was considered to infer a managerial hierarchy over other principals when the function [was] intended to deliver collaborative leadership and shared action across schools and between principals" (MoE, 2014b, p. 2). Secondly, they suggested a rebalancing of funding between these new roles and inquiry time with a link to annual staffing adjustments. This proposal supported NZEI concerns regarding IES funding being consumed by salaries rather than investing in the teachers' ability to engage in collaborative work or engage external expertise. Finally, they proposed the phasing of a Teacher-led Innovation Fund over three years rather than two. This fund invested in providing professional learning opportunities for teachers through the development of collaborative inquiry as a discipline for innovation. They claimed these changes would ensure maintenance of the system shift needed to enable availability of enough expertise across all communities to support improvement.

Despite this reframing of policy, and with variations to the Secondary Teachers' Collective Agreement already discussed, a majority of NZEI members voted no confidence in the model in August 2014. The New Zealand Principal Federation members and Te Akatea New Zealand Maori Principals also expressed concern (Wylie, 2016). Nevertheless, the MoE continued to advance work in partnership with the sector and through collective agreement bargaining to complete the design and implementation of IES. The commission of three work streams finalised the design, namely: Communities of Schools; developing professional standards for the new roles; and selection, appointment, and appraisal processes. Some changes to accommodate concerns related to the Secondary Principals and Secondary Teachers' collective agreements were required to reach agreement with New Zealand's Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) and the Secondary Principals' Association of New Zealand (SPANZ). However, according to an update to joint ministers they "enhance[d] rather than compromise[d] the integrity of the initiative" (Education Report, 2014, p. 4).



At this stage, the primary sector union NZEI voted to withdraw support from IES but negotiations continued to enable sector participation in IES, including having access to resources on a case-by-case basis where primary and area schools were willing to participate. By the end of 2014, a joint initiative between the NZEI and the MoE reached agreement to conduct further research into effective collaboration and the conditions supporting it (Wylie, 2016). This resulted in flexibility of funds allocated to lead principals thus providing more investment in collaborative work, attention given to support “educators to work more communally than most had been use[d] to” and, of particular significance, an inclusion of early childhood education - although educators in this sector were unable to access the new roles (Wylie, 2016, p. 3). As a result, Communities of Schools became known as Communities of Learning (CoLs) all of which “was readily accepted signals that this system-wide change involve[d] new learning for all” (Wylie, 2006, p. 3).

### **Communities of Learning – The leadership role**

In April 2015, the MoE released three guiding documents to support the formation of CoLs: an overall guide explaining the purpose, gains, and process involved; tips to support development of achievement challenges and operating structures; and role selection and appointment information. However, only 19 CoL leaders had been appointed by mid-2016 due to a principal’s ineligibility to be appointed until after their achievement challenges had been signed off by the MoE. Schools understandably took time to establish their relationships and form a consensus on the focus of their aims, goals and achievement challenges (Wylie, 2016). A year later, a further policy change enabled CoLs to appoint their leader prior to finalisation of their achievement challenges. As a result, a further 25 principals had assumed their role as CoL leader by November 2016, and updated guidelines from the MoE were circulated. Inclusion of the CoL leadership role was included in the Primary and Secondary Principals’ collective agreements in May 2016 and a month later in the Area School Principals’ collective agreement.

The purpose of the Community of Learning Leadership role (originally titled – Executive Principal) is fivefold, namely: to offer leadership in building productive collaboration within communities of schools; to build relationships to strengthen transition of students through the sectors; to facilitate the agreement of shared achievement objectives; to support the professional growth of leaders and teachers through facilitation and liaison of professional learning and management of inquiry

time; and finally to offer leadership in the use of professional expertise across schools to meet shared achievement challenges in collaboration with other principals. It provides additional and complementary support rather than being a replacement of existing arrangements or positions (MoE, 2014c). Furthermore, the CoL leader under these arrangements does not have authority over their member principals nor would schools be expected to compromise their individual identities (Wylie, 2016).

Eligibility criteria for the role agreed between the MoE, PPTA, New Zealand School Trustees' Association (NZSTA), SPANZ and the NZEI remains applicable at the time of writing. Before consideration, applicants need to meet the following criteria: current employment within the CoL; a current practising certificate; recent experience as a senior leader; and having met professional standards relevant to their current position. Nationally agreed criteria for selection also include standards relating to professional knowledge in practice and professional relationships, values and engagement. The role, a fixed term position for up to two years, is appointed by a panel consisting of external, independent experts from the national panel as well as representatives from the boards of trustees and member principals. Regardless of clear policy direction that constitutes the 'why' and the 'what' elements relating to the formation of a CoL and the appointment of its leader, the 'how' of leading a network is a complex change process. This raises as many challenges as it does solutions when attempting to align policy expectations with the reality of practice.

## **Where to next?**

The system, according to the PPTA (2017), is still embryonic and the MoE is signalling expectations that CoLs will become responsible for a myriad of other responsibilities that were never part of the original agreement by the sector, and therefore a vehicle for other policies. Political pressure has been felt regarding implementation of time-lines, ideological constraints within the model, resourcing issues, and too close an involvement of the MoE in operational matters (PPTA, 2017). Principals involved in communities of learning also highlighted pressure from the MoE as a challenge (NZEI, 2017). The NZEI (2017) survey of CoL principals, identified opportunities for increased collaboration and collegiality as benefits for working in a CoL, but

changing MoE rules and requirements challenged them further. Of equal concern was the lack of leadership professional development.

In January 2017, ERO stated the following:

We know a lot about the evidence base for effective network leadership but we don't know much yet about how this will play out in the unique New Zealand CoL I Kāhui Ako environment. There is a lot to be done to enhance the capabilities of the people appointed to leadership roles because their effectiveness in leading collective change and driving improvement will underpin the success of CoL I Kāhui Ako. (p. 17).

The New Zealand Council for Educational Research National Report (NZCER, 2017) provides a picture of teaching, school practices, and principal leadership, and finds considerable variations between schools. They conclude that, although there are schools that have much to share, there are also those that have much to learn, particularly concerning working collaboratively. In the early stages of Kāhui Ako implementation, their findings show an increased opportunity for collaboration across schools which is yet to have an impact on their capacity for inquiry and strengthening of teaching practice. Gains for participation were higher for those that had taken on the key CoL roles but there was also recognition that within school collaborative practices and across school collaboration were mutually supportive.

In response to such concerns, the Education Council began a consultation and research process in 2017 to determine a future focused direction for educational leadership in New Zealand. Feedback was used to inform the *Leadership Strategy for the Teaching Profession* (2018b) and the *Educational Leadership Capability Framework* (2018a) which has been supported by the profession, and was released on 28 August 2018. One key aim of the strategy is to provide a system-level approach to growing and developing leadership in education. The Education Council identified the new leaders of communities as a priority.

However, in October 2017 a new labour-coalition Government was appointed whose education mandate included a review of *Tomorrow's Schools*. Chris Hipkins, Minister for Education, proposed that the Government would be undertaking work with the IES Advisory Group "to make the current Communities of Learning/Kāhui Ako model more collaborative, responsive and empowering" (MoE, 2018b, p. 3). To this end, an Education Workforce Strategy has been proposed but is yet to be released. It suggests early initiatives to lift the status of the profession including establishment of an Education Advisory Service and a College of Educational

Leadership. Due to the collective bargaining agreements in June 2019, however, no new Col / Kāhui Ako will be approved as underspent funding allocated to the IES initiative has been reprioritised to cover increases in teachers and principals' salaries. Current arrangements remain in place for existing CoLs, therefore it remains to be seen how these new services will support those principals as leaders of networks.

In the meantime, there are a variety of tools and advisory documents to support the work of the CoL. The development of CoLs is more than structural change, it requires behavioural change to be effective (PPTA, 2017). In addition to the previously mentioned policy requirements, ERO has produced two publications to support the development of collaborative cultures. The first, entitled *Collaboration to Improve Learner Outcomes* (MoE, 2016a) synthesised research findings pertaining to effective collaborative practice in educational communities. The second, *Communities of Learning/Kāhui Ako: Working towards collaborative practice* (ERO, 2017b), provides a reflective tool to support CoLs develop their collaborative network and enhance thinking and practice. This particular tool complements the MoE (2018a) document *A Guide to Support the Development of Collaborative Practice in Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako* – a development map to support the CoL through its evolving stages as they transform from independent education providers to network practice for improved and sustained educational outcomes. Together these documents provide support to CoL leaders regarding the behavioural change needed to lead across a community of schools.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has offered an examination of the policy developments that have influenced New Zealand education over the last thirty years. It began by outlining the drive towards a self-managing school system determined by the *Tomorrow's School* review. Neo-liberal policies of competition and choice may have acted as a catalyst for change but the New Zealand education system was beginning to reveal inequalities, particularly in respect to Maori achievement. Decentralisation was seen as the remedy to problems inherent in a system lacking balance between central and local control. However well-intentioned the new reforms were, by 2015 the disparity gap between the highest and lowest achieving students was the fourth largest in the OECD and the Government was compelled to act. An account tracing policy developments

leading to the acceptance of the IES initiative followed. In this review of policy, it became apparent that interdependence rather than independence, and a challenge of traditional hierarchical school structures had the potential to reduce isolation thus increasing professional interaction and collaboration. It was considered insufficient to focus exclusively on innovations on a school-by-school basis as “problems of education transcend the capacity of one school working alone” (Smith & Wohlstetter, 2001, p. 400). Extending beyond traditional school boundaries moves attention away from a preoccupation with micro-level innovation, in an individual school, and grows collective capacity, transformation and knowledge building across a whole community (Bolam et al., 2005; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Glasswell, Singh & McNaughton, 2016). However, educational professionals were not convinced by the constraints imposed by IES and extensive bargaining with unions was necessary to implement the policy in its final form. Eventually, Communities of Learning were adopted and, despite a slow take up, has gained momentum with over 214 CoLs spread across New Zealand at the time of writing. Finally, attention turned to the role of the principal leader in a Community of Learning. It will be interesting to see how this role is affected by the Government’s current review of the education system. However, system-wide leadership and development of collaborative practices, that cross sector boundaries, appear to be concepts that are too important to ignore.

## Chapter Three: Literature Review

Developments in New Zealand educational policy over the last decade show a gradual shift towards the need for system-wide change, and networking as the basis for this system transformation. This requires a new calibre of leader who can “extend their arenas of leadership from within a school or organisation to interschool or wider networks” (Boylan, 2016, p. 57). The new CoL leadership role offers a challenge to the traditional paradigm of a principal leader (Robertson, 2015). When a principal becomes a leader of a CoL, they become part of a broader educational system that recognises the power of the network in simultaneously transforming outcomes for communities of learners. However, McKibben (2014) asserts that, even if a principal is considered highly proficient at leading their own school, this expertise may not translate to network expertise where, facilitation and influence, not positional power and authority, is crucial to organisational success. In response to this assumption, this literature review will identify and critically examine the practice of principal leadership in the context of network relationships amongst schools. Emphasis will be placed on the role of the CoL leader, and the attributes and skills needed to effect successful “leadership among leaders” as they address challenges in this complex environment (Education Review Office, 2017, p. 17).

Emerging from the literature review are three key themes that constitute the body of this chapter. Firstly, exploration of the concept of system leadership provides a context for the complexities involved in leading within a network. Secondly, examination of distributed forms of leadership provide an insight into the co-existence of flatter leadership structures and hybrid configurations, as well as the importance of developing social capital. Finally, as “transformation depends crucially on the capacity of the system to manage transferred innovation” (Hatcher, 2008, p. 26) the opportunities and challenges of creating collaborative cultures and practices are reviewed.

### System Leadership

System leadership refers to a form of leadership that extends beyond a single institution (Boylan, 2016; Cousin, 2018; Simon, 2015), and as a tool to enact sustainable change within the educational landscape as a whole (Boylan, 2016). Durie (2015) suggests that the emerging vision for leadership transcends that of one school working in isolation but also embraces the

notion of 'leaders for learning'. Therefore, this brief addresses whole community needs and aspirations, viewed through a network lens of alliances to improve outcomes for a community of schools. Some authors broaden the scope of educational system leadership beyond that of identified school leaders. For example, Simon (2015) recognises the need to see the 'system' as extending beyond cross-school boundaries to incorporate a wider network of children's services, giving the potential for other providers outside of school leaders to be the 'system leader'. It is also possible that teacher leaders can exercise system leadership and thereby influence system-wide change (Boylan, 2016). This author recognises that "the increasing importance of educational collaborations and networks that blur organisational boundaries requires conceptual developments in leadership theory" (p. 57). However, system leadership is relatively new to network educational discourse (Boylan, 2016), particularly in respect to external school partnerships (Simon, 2015). In addition, both 'leadership' and 'system' have a multitude of meanings. Therefore, it is important to contextualise the term 'system leadership', in reference to this study, as the work of the CoL leader and their role across a network of schools.

Educational literature suggests that highly capable, adaptable, and innovative school leaders are needed to transform the system (McKibben, 2014) with the ability to "discern and describe network activity, structure and context" (Wenmoth, 2015, p. 23). Simon (2015) claims that system leadership has largely emerged in response to the need for sustainable school improvement. Therefore, system leaders need to see education and the emerging network landscape as a complex system (Hatcher, 2008) "whose elements and interactions need maximising for greater effect" (Gilbert, 2015, p. 9). This complexity arises from the systems and processes needed to nurture vertical and lateral collaborative relationships whilst managing competing agendas, a product of co-dependency. Senge (2000) suggests, "the discipline of systems thinking provides a different way of looking at problems and goals – not as isolated events but as components of a larger structure" (p. 78). This holistic view is supported by Shaked and Schechter's (2014) study of 28 Israeli principals. They found that 'outstanding' leaders displayed similar characteristics related to systems thinking. Besides their ability to see how different elements or parts related to the whole, they were also able to adopt a multi-dimensional view when dealing with issues, and could evaluate and prioritise according to importance or significance. Although this study focussed on the behaviours of principals within

their own schools, the fourth characteristic is particularly relevant to the CoL context. The principals were aware of the countless mutual influences at play within their school and they adopted an indirect way of influencing the system. System leadership in this context is an adaptive leadership style or disposition best explained by complexity leadership theory (Boylan, 2016).

Although it is outside the scope of this study to examine, in depth, the literature base related to this emerging focus in school leadership research, it is worthy of inclusion at this point in relation to the model it proposes for leading within the complex interplay of network forces, and its possible application to assertions made throughout the rest of this review. Complexity leadership theory is concerned with the role of a leader within the context of a knowledge-producing organisation (Uhl-Bien, Marion & McKelvey, 2007). It focuses on the relational and systemic perspectives of leadership in recognition of the collective, social process that shifts attention from human capital to social capital (Clarke, 2013). Organisational success is dependent on the ability to enable 'adaptive space' for emergence of innovation, learning, and growth. Uhl-Bien and Arena (2017) refer to two systems - the operational and the entrepreneurial as key leadership functions. The operational focuses on planning and co-ordination activities and is synonymous with bureaucratic control activities such as efficiency, results, resources, and crisis resolution. The entrepreneurial aligns more closely with informal structures that push for change. The role of the leader is to enable the conditions for both to work in tandem facilitating the flow of knowledge from adaptive structures to administrative structures (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). These authors also assert caution when trying to co-ordinate a balanced approach. The entrepreneurial can rebel against the operational if too much control is exerted, alternatively each could act independently of the other. Therefore, leaders need to accommodate rather than stifle the filtering of new ideas and resist the push for order. They argue that an over reliance on the operational at the expense of idea generation limits organisational success.

In addition to viewing leadership from a role perspective, it is worth exploring leadership development practice. Clarke (2013) offers an alternative model for complexity leadership development viewed at both system and individual level. He claims three conditions are necessary for enhancing social capital: network conditions for connectivity and social



exchanges; shared leadership throughout the organisation to capitalise on available intelligence; and organisational learning involving the identity of problems and resolving tensions in the system to break down silos. The leadership skills and knowledge relate to seven major areas: supporting autocatalysis (facilitating interactions), supporting shared leadership, developing systems network, supporting shared meaning-making, identifying barriers to information flow, fostering the positive value of tension, and building social capital. Leaders need the ability to shape their context and environment and Clarke (2013) argues, “complexity leadership offers an alternative systemic perspective on the nature of leadership that can help social systems organise themselves more effectively to promote adaption and change” (p. 142). Mendes, Gomes, Marques-Quinteiro, Lind, and Curral (2016) concur and propose, “learning and innovation can be better achieved in organisations if the complexity leadership theory is applied as an alternative to centralised forms of influence and control” (p. 301).

Marsh (2012) also argues that system wide leadership goes beyond maintaining status quo and preservation of traditional, authoritarian ideals of leadership. The success of educational reform requires innovative models of leadership that require leaders to “connect and contribute, not command and control” and be equipped with the skills to “distribute leadership across traditional boundaries to release the potential of those within the network” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2008, p. 232). In recognising the capacity of system leadership to transform outcomes for students through networking, Hatcher (2008) expresses caution. He argues that networks “offer the potential of new participatory relationships among teachers across schools, but also the potential of simply being vehicles for the transmission and implementation of Government agendas” (p. 29). If system leadership is seen through the lens of social regulation and “orchestrated top-down policy to address an issue of Government concern” then how is the status quo being challenged to bring about “radical, organic, grass-roots innovative action” (Simon, 2015, p. 548). Any organisation or individual, with an agenda, has the potential to impact on the work of a network. This is particularly relevant to the context of CoLs, as existing school leadership structures are traditionally hierarchical, with positional power associated most closely with formal roles.

The notion of positional power and authority is developed by Bolman and Deal (2003) who offer a four-frame model through which to understand organisations. Their political frame discusses organisations as living, political arenas serving both individual and group interests. They argue

power is the most important asset, but not in negative terms. When organisations are viewed as coalitions rather than hierarchies, multi-directional power relationships exist. Over dominance of authority and positional power is replaced by coalitions with the tools for exercising power. These authors argue that “positions confer certain levels of formal authority.... positions also place incumbents in more or less powerful locations in communications and power networks” therefore positional authority “often stands in the way of organisational effectiveness” (pp. 192-194). Edwards (2011) discusses the notion of individualism that, rather than being detrimental to the functioning of the organisation, is a core element of building communities and group identity. CoLs can be viewed as coalitions, individual organisations that have come together with a common interest in pursuit of strengthening collective agency. This being the case, it would be prudent for CoL leaders to understand the difference between a structural theorist approach which emphasises the link between authority and power, and human resource theorists who “focus on influence that enhances mutuality and collaboration” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 192). Individual schools still perpetuate the traditional view of legitimised authority through which positional power exists. When working with their principal colleagues, CoL leaders could experience tension between the views of shared identity and an individual’s self-identity.

Therefore, of significant importance will be a leader’s understanding of the dispositions needed to exert influence, rather than control (Wenmoth, 2015) particularly relevant when connecting the meso, micro and macro aspects of system leadership (Boylan, 2016). However, the meaning of influence is a contentious term when viewed through a leadership lens. Manz and Sims (1991) state “when most of us think about leadership we think of one person doing something to another person. This is ‘influence’, and a leader is someone who has the capacity to influence another” (p. 18). However, influence should be seen through multiple perspectives, as it is in the social exchanges between actors that influence is exerted. Marsh (2012) argues for alternative designs of lateral leadership that create opportunities to extend influence beyond that of a formal leader. In this respect, influence transcends traditional views of role and responsibility and is dispersed and expansive, not narrowed to positions of authority. In the context of CoLs, the Education Review Office (2017a) advocates for a more ‘flat structure’ of leadership which exploits the mutually beneficial aspects of influence, but also recognises the need for a ‘formal’ leader within a network of schools. This role, however, requires a new frame of reference, and professional development, to effect the complex skill set required. Leadership skills in this context need to be

more than a replication of the demands at individual school level. An educational network survey conducted by Elgie et al. (2008), in British Columbia, tested a particular theory of action based on network expertise and the cultivation of innovative knowledge communities. They found that formal leadership was necessary “in facilitating the school connection to the network, though it does not directly influence changes in thinking and practice” (p. 131). However, formal leadership did set the conditions for effective collaboration that traversed boundaries for productive knowledge creation and sharing. With this in mind, it may also be the case that different leadership expertise is needed at different stages of a network’s development.

In a Flemish school network study, Feys and Devos (2015) found that successful network leadership was best developed over two phases. In the first, they contend that the network leader should maintain a low profile to enable all participants to be represented in the decision making process. In the second phase, with increased trust and collaboration, visibility, authority and power to influence become essential to create a more dynamic system with focused collaboration between schools. Smith and Wohlstetter (2001) also recognise the benefits of a phased approach to network leadership. Their article focuses on three stages. The first they describe as ‘emergent’ which outlines the role of the ‘architect’ as bringing about a shared vision, collective action, acquisition of resources and developing collaborative structures. The second term, ‘boundary spanners’, positions the role as one of strengthening the ongoing performance of the network. The final phase is termed as ‘broker’. In this phase, the formal leader influences sustainability by nurturing, supporting, and embedding ongoing improvements.

It is relevant then to explore a systemic perspective of leadership, a hybrid approach, which goes beyond the concept of distributed leadership in recognition of the existence of leadership configurations that operate within and alongside distributed forms.

### **Distributed Forms of Leadership – Hybrid configurations**

The term hybrid leadership characterises situations where hierarchical and laterally anchored leadership blends and co-exists to provide adaptive arrangements that evolve in boundary spanning ways. This creates an interdependence between the two that requires action from all actors (Gronn, 2009). Since the work of CoLs occur alongside the existing work of schools, a form

of strategic hybridity is present (Townsend, 2015). Leadership roles and responsibilities in a single institution remain unchanged. The formal network leader becomes an addition to, not a replacement of existing leadership structures. This structure could be interpreted as facilitating the promotion of a political agenda through centralised reform due to the creation of its roles. In this regard, Gronn's (2009) suggestion of a hybrid approach to distributed forms of leadership is worthy of consideration. Bolden (2011) agrees and, in his review of literature and research of distributed leadership, concludes that more critical accounts of distributed leadership are needed to understand the balance between individual, collective and situational aspects of practice – a hybrid approach. He contends that leaders need to be aware of “when and why particular configurations are more effective and/or desirable than others” (p. 264).

Therefore, the CoL construct questions traditional theories of leadership based on hierarchical structures and the image of a ‘heroic’ leader, and requires focus on distributive forms of leadership. Lumby (2013) suggests, “the effect of distributed leadership theory is to maintain the power status quo” (p. 581). However, there is little agreement as to the meaning of the term ‘distributed leadership’ to make such an assertion. She believes it has become the leadership ideal as constructions of distributed leadership, seen to reject heroic models of leadership, appear to value and promote as necessary the positional power of a principal in the implicit or explicit facilitation of empowering others. On the other hand, other authors challenge such a narrow view and call for the development of a more context-rich approach (Edwards, 2011). For instance, they contend that distributed leadership is a collective, social process (Uhl-Bien, 2006) working within and through relationships (Bennet, Wise, Woods & Harvey, 2003), as analysis of practice (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004), and spread across traditional boundaries to release the potential of those in the network (Hargreaves & Fink, 2008).

Research suggests that distributed forms of leadership and hybrid configurations promote alternative arrangements to maximise collaboration and development of social capital for greater innovation and impact (Bolden & Petrov, 2014; Townsend, 2015; Youngs, 2014). Consequently, flatter leadership structures require deliberate, strategic implementation to utilise differing forms of capital (Bolden, 2011; Friedrich, Vessey, Schuelke, Ruark & Mumford 2009; Tian, Risku & Collin, 2016). Viewing leadership through the contextual and socio-cultural lens of a community of schools requires high quality leadership with formal leaders seen as gatekeepers empowering

others through both formal and informal processes (Anderson & Sun, 2015; Chapman, 2015; Tian et al., 2016). Marsh (2012), whilst agreeing that leadership is about enabling and empowering, questions its purpose as a means of directing and gatekeeping when seen from an individualistic point of view. He perceives leadership as a resource whereby anyone in the educational community can engage in leadership actions, not just those with positional authority. Although he does not dispute the need for distributed leadership structures, he holds the view that “school leadership positively influences student learning”, and his article proposes the exploration of leadership for learning as a community activity (p. 107). He suggests the need for a shared language of leadership to explore the diverse leadership conceptions inherent in a community of learning. Bolden (2011) agrees and suggests that when distributed leadership is seen within the confines of formal positions or within organisational boundaries, opportunities for “recognising the contribution of informal leaders and the manner in which situational factors (physical, social and cultural) impact upon leadership, is severely limited (p. 261). On the other hand, Townsend (2015) recognises that distributed inquiry practices can be problematic when there is a perceived lack of formal leadership. Initiatives can lose momentum, fold, or create tensions and challenges for participants in areas such as conflict resolution and competing agendas.

Therefore, understanding the complexity involved in a hybrid configuration of leadership is crucial to its success and places demands on a leader due to the tensions that exist when accessing knowledge diversity for innovation (Edmondson & Harvey, 2018). Peurach, Glazer, and Winchell Lenhoff (2016) conducted a developmental evaluation of school improvement networks in the United States of America and suggested two problems to producing, using and managing intellectual capital. Firstly, the networks they researched lacked the necessary systems and processes to support the continuous improvement of intellectual capital. Secondly, there was a lack of support from other stakeholders in working collaboratively to improve intellectual capital in these emerging systems. This issue reinforces the findings of Townsend (2015) whose study focused on the networking initiative in the United Kingdom – The Networked Learning Programme (NCSL, 2002). He reports “the chances of maintaining and systemising change is directly proportional to the investment made in those changes, both in terms of financial resources and investment of time” (p. 721). A case study of leadership theory and practice in tertiary education by Bolden and Petrov (2014) concludes that, although a hybrid perspective of leadership provides an “appreciation of the micro-politics of organisational life”, it is “unlikely to resolve inequalities of

power and influence” due to political agendas and educational policy that support positional power structures (p. 416). This becomes particularly relevant when promoting team learning and group process skills that span boundaries between schools, especially for a team with responsibility for overseeing the network (Smith & Wohlstetter, 2001).

It appears then that there are many contrasts in the notion of hybrid leadership within a network. Townsend (2015) summarises these as follows: combining collective and individualistic activity; promoting knowledge generation and knowledge transfer; flexibility in architecture that is both centralised and distributed; and combining emergent and designed features. Gronn (2009) affirms this position and contends that hybridity is not synonymous with heterogeneity. It co-exists with distributive forms. Therefore, leadership, as characterised by both intentionality and emergence, requires recognition of the critique of distributed leadership alongside retention of the distributive perspective of leadership (Woods & Roberts, 2018). CoLs will therefore require a formal leader with collaborative skills. Such a role demands the ability to “identify and harness other people’s skills and knowledge” (Patterson, 2014, p. 31) through inquiry that transverses boundaries extending beyond their own school site (Elgie et al., 2008) and facilitates the balance of different hybrid configurations of practice (Bolden, 2011). Underpinning this ideal is the assumption that by enabling the development of social capital the conditions for sustainable and simultaneous improvement across a community of schools is possible. Therefore, it is relevant to explore this perception in more depth.

## **Development of social capital**

There are a multitude of definitions within educational and sociology literature for social capital but all encapsulate the importance of relationships, and the value of collective knowledge building, for the purpose of coordinating and improving educational performance and outcomes. Leaders, amongst others, play a significant role in building social networks to generate knowledge building and transfer (Anderson & Sun, 2015). Social capital is defined as a relational activity fostering co-operation and commitment where actors are able to gain access to resources possessed by others in a flow of information and influence (McCallum & O’Connell, 2009; Portes, 1998; Spillane, Hallet & Diamond, 2003). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) suggest that when social capital exists in the relationships among people, networks of influence and opportunity expand. These

relationships create “a capacity to act for mutual benefit or a greater purpose” (McKibben, 2014, p. 12). This infers that collaborative cultures may increase social capital, leading to greater coherence between actors for the benefit of sustained change (Elgie et al., 2008; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; McKibben, 2014).

Both constructivist organisational theory, and theory that places value on the development of social capital, describe current educational networking activity most closely. Constructivist theory, as described by Muijs, West and Ainscow (2010), relates to organisations<sup>6</sup> interacting as “sense making systems creating shared perceptions and interpretations of reality” (p. 9). Networking, they suggest, overcomes the problem of myopia since working in collaboration with other organisations introduces complementary cognitive capacity in times of uncertainty and complexity. Elgie et al. (2008) concur and suggest cognitive bias derives from the individual’s immersion in the characteristics of their social organisation. They claim that networks “can mediate between the personal and social worlds (and) have the potential to capture the complex and reciprocal relationship between individual and collective competencies” (p. 113). However, there must be “sufficient cognitive distance for new insights to emerge” but at the same time be similar enough for constructive dialogue (Muijs et al., 2010, p. 10). This author also argues that although knowledge exists within the individual actors, if there is an imbalance of skills or structural constraints that perpetuate negative behaviour patterns, then the power of collective knowledge is lost. Therefore, the value in creating social capital lies in its ability to harness the productive knowledge of other actors and disseminate this across a wider audience thus spreading innovation. Such practice elicits both vertical and horizontal approaches where innovators emerge more open to change and challenge. Innovation in this regard is “less likely to ossify than top-down strategies” (Muijs et al., 2010, p. 10). Despite these lofty claims, it would be too simplistic to take them at face value. Capacity building is a theme that permeates social capital research and provides the purpose for developing deep learning competencies. However, inherent in this ideal are both opportunities and challenges that require critique.

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<sup>6</sup> Organisations in this context mean participant schools and the network itself.

### *Networking as an opportunity for growing social capital*

Many authors concur that networks increase teacher agency and efficacy through the knowledge building processes of creation and sharing (Elgie et al., 2008; ERO, 2017a; Hargreaves & Fink, 2008; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Peurach et al., 2016). For example, Hargreaves and Fink (2008) use research examples from England, North America and Finland to illustrate their argument that, as 'living systems', schools, localities, states and nations are inter-connected by mutual influence. They conceptualise networks as a living system, a self-organising network of communication that fosters 'cross-pollination' thereby elevating learning and growth. When human networks are treated as living systems, interconnected by mutual influence, the benefit of lateral collaboration provides the structure and system to support social relationships. They cite Finland's educational system and society as having a "strong and positive culture of trust, cooperation and responsibility" (p. 235) and exhibiting a "pattern of systemic leadership in strong cultures of lateral and vertical teamwork" (p. 236). They conclude that distributed leadership through cohesive networks and diverse communities of practice exemplify democracy. Fullan and Quinn (2016) concur and state that when an organisation values the talent and expertise of its people it has the capacity to "build the collective talent, intelligence, and experience to leverage collaborative culture" (p. 50). This approach takes advantage of the diversity of teachers and school cultures, spreading innovation across a wider sector (Hargreaves & Fink, 2008).. However, whilst there is research identifying the conditions necessary to develop social capital within an institution's professional learning community (PLC), there is little evidence to suggest that these conditions are homogeneous or easily transferable when leading and influencing a network based system (Peurach et al., 2016). Recent literature in the field of education also recognises the strength networks provide in building social capital which they argue is an effective alternative to market type hierarchical approaches to reform, and to creating synergy within the system to enhance and sustain improvement in student learning (Bolam et al., 2005; Feys & Devos, 2015; Hargreaves & Fink, 2008; Stoll & Louis, 2007). However, the impact of networking and collaboration on school effectiveness and improvement is limited (Chapman, 2015).

### *The challenges associated with the growth of social capital in a network system*

The other side of the argument recognises that pressures naturally reside in any 'living system'. Townsend (2015) suggests that tensions can emerge between new network leadership roles and



existing forms of leadership within individual schools. Youngs' (2014) contextual and socio-cultural analysis of two New Zealand secondary schools recognises the challenges and limitations faced in distributed forms of leadership when accepted as a unitary concept. He refers to distributive leadership typologies in two forms: organisational and holistic. Organisational encompasses terms such as authorised, formal alignment and representational. Whereas, the holistic cluster incorporates terms such as "dispersed and democratic; opportunistic and cultural; emergent; spontaneous; and, autonomous" (p. 91). He acknowledges that "different types of capital exist beneath the blending of organisational roles with emergent forms of leadership" (p. 101). He reinforces the importance for leaders to "make sure they draw on the appropriate mix of differing forms of capital whether it is from the authority situated in the role or related to expertise and social relations" as there needs to be an awareness of how much capital is attributed to each other and different groups (p. 101). This is also true of the network leader. If network members perceive their leader as a more beneficial source of social capital, they will endorse the ideas of the leader, influence others in the group and have less incentive to look elsewhere (Anderson & Sun, 2015).

Feys and Devos (2015) also recognise the difficulties implicit in reconciling diverse interests, reaching a consensus and engendering long-term commitment the larger an organisation becomes. Flessa (2009) argues that, rather than seeking strategies to eliminate micro-politics, inquiring into the gains and losses of decision-making can provide better understanding of what motivates people to unite in support or opposition. School leadership literature argues that network leadership is highly inter-relational and most effective when trust already exists between schools through previous networking or collaboration, or when the leader has knowledge of the local area (Bendikson, 2015; Elgie et al., 2008). High level, cognitive-demand environments draw on explicit and tacit knowledge, and when a wider group of stakeholders are involved, further cognitive complexity emanates for individuals as well as the group (Elgie et al., 2008; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2001). Therefore, building capacity, not a 'silver bullet' programme or innovation, through collaboration and knowledge sharing, is seen as a necessity for effective innovation and change, and a fundamental organisational challenge for education (Elgie et al., 2008; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2001).

### *What this means for the network leader*

As previously mentioned, the need to redefine the hierarchical views of organisational features such as leadership structure, power and authority, and accountability are inherent in providing opportunities for collective efficacy and growth of social capital. Smith and Wohlstetter (2001) argue that these organisational features do not reside with one person in a network, but in the interdependent relationships that exist when social capital is enhanced. Context in this situation is important in determining who leads at a given time and places emphasis on expertise as being as important as positional power. Similarly, Patterson (2014) reports that “meaningful change in education happens when educators drive and own change from the ground up” thus setting the conditions for lateral collaboration (p. 1). Recognising the shift from how leadership should be enacted to how leadership should be accomplished is key to ensuring a sense of shared direction, alignment and commitment (Bolden & Petrov, 2014). If whole school communities feel empowered to drive the improvement process then networks are the best way to support equity and excellence (Stoll & Louis, 2007). Elgie et al. (2008) argue, “networks provide an operational construct for educational provision and a new vehicle for achieving change” (p. 112). Therefore, when looking beyond schools as individual sites for change, it is necessary to embrace the imperative of social capital to engage and remain engaged in productive relationships (Elgie et al., 2008; Peurach et al., 2016; Stoll & Louis, 2007). This requires experience and skilful network leadership to drive and sustain the systemic change needed to address priority issues in education such as equity and excellence (Wenmoth, 2015).

Therefore, transitioning from sole school leadership to network leadership is not without its challenges. Interestingly, there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that network initiatives impact positively on learning outcomes (Baker, 2015; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Tian et al., 2016). This being so, it is necessary to consider the role of collaboration and collaborative practice as a vehicle through which across-school networks can advance social and intellectual capital for the benefit of their own organisation as well as the collective.

## **Collaborative cultures and practices**

There are certain conditions, recognised across school leadership literature as being influential in enabling successful cross-school networking. The concepts of trust, common purpose, and collaborative cultures are central to the development and impact of social capital. However, although the concept of collaboration appears to be taken for granted in terms of school leadership practice (Boylan, 2016) it is nevertheless a complex and problematic challenge for those involved. Collaboration can be defined as a group of actors working together to solve a problem, a common goal, where solutions exist outside the limited vision of one individual (Moolenaar, Slegers & Daly, 2012; Prange, Allen & Reiter-Palmon, 2016; Wood & Gray, 1991). Furthermore, collaborative alliances, as a form, explains inter-organisational efforts to solve complex problems that are beyond the capabilities of one organisation alone (Wood & Gray, 1991).

Bolam et al. (2005) concur and extend this argument to assert that collaboration extending beyond a single school has the potential to promote deep learning and innovation for sustained improvement. However, Bolden and Petrov (2014) highlight “the complex relationship between formal and informal leadership and the politics of collaboration between institutions” (p. 414). They discuss the need to balance differing expectations and aspirations of stakeholders through co-ordination and liaison to sustain momentum.

Reframing leadership as collaborative agency is a practice perspective acknowledged by Raelin (2016). He argues that the structure and over reliance on an individual, heroic model of leadership constrains creativity. In understanding leadership as practice, an entitative approach, that is leadership residing in an entity – a person, is rejected. Rather, we release agency through dialogic conditions that connect us to a collective rather than an individualistic model of leadership. This approach considers a distributive perspective, enabling “all to participate in leadership on the basis of capacity alone” (Lumby, 2013, p. 583). Raelin (2016) also dissociates this practice from the hybrid configuration supported by Gronn (2009). He argues that super imposed standards from senior leaders’ embodiment of the mission of the organisation, through distributed forms of leadership, does not adequately encourage ongoing commitment among members of a community where “leadership becomes a consequence of collaborative meaning making in

practice” (p. 134). In order to effect agentic change, Raelin (2016) considers two characteristics as being influential in its success. Firstly, the practice is open ended, and secondly, the results of the interactions “may either reproduce or transform the very structure it shapes” (p. 138). Indeed, removing barriers that obstruct good practice from spreading, such as lack of trust, destructive micro politics, abuse of power etc., unleashes potential and this is a key consideration for network leaders.

Success in collaborative practice varies and does not always generate new knowledge (Kuusisaari, 2014). There is a need to appreciate the demands inherent in the collaborative process so that shared practice informs future shared actions (Dooner, Mandzuk & Clifton, 2008). In a study of 53 Dutch elementary schools, Moolenaar et al. (2012) found that well-connected networks were associated with strong collective efficacy that impacted positively on student outcomes. They define collective efficacy as a group’s ability to achieve collective goals and argue that “collective efficacy is a powerful concept for both leadership and successful implementation of reform” as it is associated with both teacher collaboration and student achievement (p. 260). It generates a form of collegiality and effective social networks where actors build consensus around shared goals and expectations. However, Datnow’s (2011) consideration of the role of teacher collaboration in the age of accountability raises issues of teacher workload, lack of resources to carry through intended plans, barriers related to technology and the micro-politics of schools as potential barriers to collective efficacy. In discussion related to Hargreaves’ (1994) work on contrived collegiality a discrimination is made between collaborative cultures where relationships are “spontaneous, voluntary, development-orientated, pervasive across time and space, and unpredictable”, and contrived collegiality where collaboration is “administratively regulated, compulsory, implementation-orientated, fixed in time and space and predictable” (p. 148). Therefore, successful networks must continually evaluate collaborative efforts to ensure an investment in relationships and a commitment to fostering a common purpose to enhance the educational opportunities for the students that their network serves. A common purpose implies a democratic process, where everyone has a voice, and where “teachers interact knowledgeably and assertively with each other, rather than simply being congenial and complacent” (Datnow, 2011, p. 155). This requires mutual engagement of participants, engaged in actions where meaning is negotiated.

However, a community “is neither a haven of togetherness nor an island of intimacy insulated from political or social relations” (Wenger, 1998, p. 77). In a study by Feys and Devos (2015), schools with a history of common experiences and existing trust were better placed to succeed. This viewpoint is echoed by Patterson (2014), and Elgie et al. (2008) who contend that a common purpose should meet the needs of the participating schools given their particular contexts and histories. These networks have likely developed this common purpose over time and, consequently, are more adaptive to local contexts. Therefore, it can be argued that awareness about the setting, size and composition of a network is critical to establishing collective goals and aims (Bolam et al., 2005; Feys & Devos, 2015). On the other hand, Wenger (1998) suggests engagement is a matter of diversity as much as it is homogeneity, it is “being included in what matters” that defines belonging and “as a form of participation, rebellion often reveals a greater commitment than does passive conformity” (p. 77). This author also cautions against romanticising the notion that a community of practice provides the ultimate context for negotiation of meaning, as it can also “hold us hostages to that experience” (p. 85).

Networks work most effectively when trust is present. However, you cannot assume its existence, it needs to be developed and nurtured (Robinson et al., 2009). Relational trust is a prerequisite and a product of constructive relationships and successful organisational learning and change (McKibben, 2014; Patterson, 2014) where interpersonal and contextual conditions shape relationships to build commitment and cohesion (Robinson et al., 2009). Fullan and Quinn (2016) agree this is vital when trying to maximise the collective capabilities of a number of institutions within a network. However, relational trust is more difficult the larger and more diverse a community becomes (Robinson et al., 2009). Edwards and Martin (2016) support this viewpoint and discuss the notion of a ‘trust radius.’ When you have high levels of trust across schools, your trust radius grows and you are even better placed for success. Robinson et al. (2009) cite an extensive study conducted over seven years, in 400 Chicago elementary schools, which illustrates this point. This study found a strong link between trust and student achievement. Further, the literature suggests the need to construct norms, develop a common language and shared values, and a collective responsibility for sustained improvement, as a means of establishing group behaviours that grow and nurture trust across participants (Bolam, 2005; Elgie et al., 2008; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2001). In the position of a formal leader such as a principal, respect, personal regard, competence in role and integrity are the

attributes that engender trust (Robinson et al., 2009). When networks have high relational trust, ability to challenge others is achievable because interdependence creates risk and vulnerability, and the confidence that others will play their part (Robinson et al., 2009). Confronting opposing viewpoints or notions of good practice, mindful actions and innovation are possible once relational trust is established (Elgie et al., 2008; Patterson, 2014). Without it, conflict is seen as a problem not an opportunity, and professional tensions can permeate the collaborative process (Dooner, et al., 2008). Trust takes time and effort to build and is a long-term process (Simkins, 2005). The biggest obstacle of collaborative work may be the emotional aspect and participants “should expect to remain committed for a considerable period of time, if a successful culture of collaborative inquiry is to be created and maintained” (Emihovich & Battaglia, 2000, p. 236).

When collaborative cultures exist, it is possible to use the group to advance the group and sustained systemic shifts are feasible (Robinson et al., 2009). However, the practice of setting collective goals is challenged in the literature. Decuyper, Dochy and Bossche (2010) contend that positive interdependence exists through the participants’ reliance on each other’s efforts to achieve their individual goals. This interdependence is imperative if leaders are to enable the achievement of organisational goals. However, DeRue (2011) asks us to reconsider whether leadership requires a collective goal, particularly given the association with the hierarchical, individualistic conception of leadership where the leader influences and motivates their followers to achieve a collective goal or shared purpose. He argues that an emergent leading-following process is not aligned to the imposition of goals by an individual but that “over-time, these independent actions may give rise to a shared goal, but this shared goal is conceived in service of preserving the collective structure” (p. 141). However, the impact of collective goal settings requires attention to three areas, namely: the risk of having multiple goals and losing site of the bigger picture; taking credit for individual actions that distract from the common purpose; and finding ways that individual goals can be tied to the broader organisational goals (Prange et al., 2016).

Trusting relationships, focused direction, and effective teacher pedagogy have the capacity to propel the learning agenda forward. However, structures and systems need to be in place to support the facilitation of collaborative practices. Through intentionally seeking out and creating opportunities for network development, working systems evolve that are more “flexible and

resilient in the face of crisis or misdirected system initiatives” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2008, p. 233). Bolam et al. (2005) hold the view that is important to identify the interrelationships between activities and ways to cultivate and share those with consistency in order to positively influence learning outcomes. Peurach et al. (2016) agrees and states that “the overarching consideration is the replication of practices and understandings that support work differently, more effectively, and in more coordinated ways” (p. 618). To this end, network leadership may provide a platform to facilitate effective transformation through lateral and vertical teamwork and collaboration.

## **Conclusion**

Two key leadership characteristics emerge from this literature review. The first is the notion of influence, rather than positional power, for effective cross-school networking. This requires “engaging with leadership as a phenomenon that is not within individuals or in acted by individuals, but that exists between people” (Kennedy, Carroll & Francoeur, 2013, p. 12). It may be helpful therefore for CoL leaders to see their role as one that facilitates and enables, rather than a positional role synonymous with leading their own institution. Distributive forms of leadership can provide opportunities to grow social capital, but establishing collaborative practices that underpin any form of collegial enterprise requires careful consideration of how those social relationships are going to be built and developed over time. The second characteristic focuses on these relationships and the ability to establish effective collective activity in the context of organisational and network structures. As suggested earlier, those schools who have already established relational trust with other schools due to shared experiences or histories are more likely to be effective when formulating common goals, direction, and outcomes. However, it would be naïve to disregard the literature that recognises the inherent tensions of collaborative work. The need to manage competing agendas and maintaining and sustaining commitment to the network, whilst working towards improved student outcomes, requires leaders who are both relational and motivated by the ideal of system leadership. The following chapter outlines the methodology employed to examine how systems and practices have evolved to address the challenges needed to support high levels of participation and ownership across the network through the role of the CoL leader.

# Chapter Four: Methodology

## Introduction

This chapter outlines the research undertaken to explore perceptions of CoL leadership through gathering data using an interpretive approach. Adopting an interpretivist epistemological orientation allowed meaning and knowledge about principal network leadership practice to be constructed through the collection of qualitative data using a collective case study approach. Explanation and justification of research design are described and critiqued in recognition of the alignment with chosen methodology and, ultimately, the research questions guiding this study. Next limitations are explored to ensure the research findings can be considered by others to inform practice within their CoL context. Finally, ethical implications are discussed and their importance acknowledged in each stage of the research process.

The aim of this study is to:

- identify the practices that embody successful network leadership by the principal CoL leader.

The following questions direct the research:

1. What network leadership practices does policy expect of CoL leaders in Communities of Learning?
2. How do CoL leaders experience the challenge of aligning policy expectations with the reality of practice?
3. How can principals and their schools sustain effective network practices?

## Positioning

Before considering methodology, it is important, for the integrity of the research, “to examine personal beliefs, perspectives, ideologies, and assumptions that form our own subjectivity” (O’Toole & Beckett, 2013, p. 28). Hammond and Wellington (2013) suggest that “our understanding of what knowledge is and how we acquire it” dictates the questions, methodology and methods we choose (p. 58). O’Toole and Beckett (2013) agree and suggest that we all hold



ontological and epistemological views, both of which “are intimately intertwined in human experience” (p. 37).

This research involved the exploration of social reality through studying leadership relationships and interactions. This gives importance to my own meanings around leadership - not something to cast aside (a bias to be rid of) but as a problem to consider in light of the new knowledge I will acquire through my research. Indeed, the ontological position informing this research design is a belief that the world is socially constructed and, as a participant in this world, a subjective approach is vital. Briggs, Coleman and Morrison (2012) contend “interpretivists subscribe to a realist ontology exerting themselves into a continual process of meaning construction in order to understand it” (p. 20). O’Toole and Beckett (2013) concur stating “a constructivist philosophical paradigm believes that humans construct their understanding of reality and scaffold their learning as they go along” (p. 26). Therefore, an interpretivist epistemological orientation is required in this study to provide the understanding. This involves identifying internal motivation and human agency when assessing the effect of leadership actions, systems and processes (Hammond & Wellington, 2013). Consequently, this will be accomplished through “exploring the meaning of events and phenomena” from the perspectives of both the CoL leader and the principal members (Briggs et al., 2012, p. 20).

The interpretivist approach, as outlined above, is in contrast to a positivist approach whereby social scientists “come to know the world by following the procedures established in natural science” (Hammond & Wellington, 2013, p. 57). Davidson and Tolich (2003) summarise the differences between the two research assumptions and conclude that positivism emphasises deduction and causal laws to predict human activity rather than “an inductive understanding of how people create meaning in their social worlds” (p. 26). However, Hammond and Wellington (2013) discuss how distinctions can be blurred, particularly when “interpretative research follows positivism in treating some concepts as objective categories in order to focus on other categories that are more problematic” (p. 58). Further, they explain that postmodernism, in its critique of social research, questions whether “agreement can ever be reached as to the nature of physical and social reality” (p. 59). Alternative paradigms also offer insight into how others see the world through a collection of ontological and epistemological assumptions. For instance, critical theory,

action research and feminist methodology believe that understanding the world comes from seeking to change it. In pursuance of understanding these paradigms, it is evident, in the context of my research aims and questions, that an interpretivist perspective needed to be employed. In assuming such a position it was possible to establish “how people create and maintain their social worlds” to arrive at understandings (Davidson & Tolich, 2003, p. 26) and to enable knowledge creation that is reflective of participants’ reality (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011).

Developing insights into situations generally requires a qualitative approach to research design (Wellington, 2015). However, it is also important to explore critically the elected methodological approach in order to recognise any “blurred edges” that may conflict with ontological and epistemological choices.

## **Methodology**

In recognition of the social and conceptual aspects requiring analysis in this study, a collective case study approach was used to apply a detailed examination of CoL leadership practice. In the field of educational research, a case study approach has the potential to provide rich contextualised understanding rather than decontextualized evidence (Hamilton, Corbett-Whittier & Fowler, 2012). However, application of a collective case study approach enables exploration of similar or dissimilar characteristics between the different cases (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, a hermeneutic phenomenological stance has been selected to provide a context for “describing the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). In addition to description, this method allowed the researcher to follow an interpretive process to make meaning of these lived experiences. In doing so, it provides confirmation of the known, the discovery of new meaning and extends the reader’s experience (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, three aspects have been considered when determining methodology, namely: the research questions guiding this study; understanding of concepts to develop policy and practice; and the importance of design methods.

Firstly, the research questions in this study are open-ended, and action and process orientated. They have been written to generate discussion around the expectations, experiences,

opportunities and challenges associated with relocating New Zealand school principals as leaders in school networks. Creswell (2007) contends that exploratory type questions lend themselves readily to phenomenological research as they highlight the common experiences of participants. The questions directing this study require the researcher to establish meaning of a phenomenon—network leadership – from the views of participants. For this reason, the tight structure of quantitative research was dismissed. Taking a positivist view in pursuance of a quantitative approach would lead to polarising themes rather than forming a basis for further analysis and interpretation. Since the case study approach falls within the interpretivist paradigm, I was able to take a constructivist standpoint and look for “complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings” (Creswell, 2014, p. 8).

Secondly, qualitative research supports the generation of concepts and themes as it is a means of capturing observations of phenomena that may be used in the future to develop policy and practice as it “is both determined by and a determinant of data collection”, a posteriori (Wellington, 2015, p. 156). Critiques of this approach suggest that educational research should rely on existing theories to provide cumulative knowledge for furthering professional understanding, a priori (Anderson, 1990, as cited in Wellington, 2015). However, only tentative links to existing theory occur within the context of this study. Therefore, in the absence of a predetermined conceptual framework, value lies in exploring an emerging leadership context that challenges traditional hierarchical perspectives of authority and positional power by reason of a qualitative study, “especially useful when the researcher does not know the important variables to examine” (Creswell, 2014, p. 20).

Finally, consideration was given to the need for gaining understanding, interpretations and values rather than facts, measurements and information through design methods (Briggs et al., 2012). Therefore, an inductive process was applied to gather data that extracted concepts rather than tested hypotheses (Merriam, 2009). Hammond and Wellington (2013) explain that inductive methods require clarification of relationships between generated categories to describe the data collected. On the one hand, this allows concepts to emerge and may allow for theories to develop. On the other hand, it raises questions of validity and trustworthiness. Therefore, acknowledging that tensions exist during the coding process, based on personal judgements informed by experience and background, is key to ensuring rigorous, constant comparison of themes. Even

from the outset of data collection, judgements are being made as to what to include and what to leave out – there is involvement in a process of analysis (Briggs et al., 2012).

Therefore, the methods used in this study do not determine what constitutes experience, rather, they examined the meaning that people attribute to their experiences. This context supports an ontological view that reality cannot be reduced to component parts but needs to be understood as a whole. For this reason, more than one method was chosen to gather data including interviews, questionnaires and documentary analysis providing “confirming, complementary and contrasting sources of data” thus enabling a “strategy of triangulation” (Hammond & Wellington, 2013, p. 108).

## **Sampling**

The study population – principals who belong to Communities of Learning - is clearly defined in the research aims and questions. However, in accordance with the researcher’s time constraints and resource availability, it was necessary to narrow the scope of the study. Guest, Namey and Mitchell (2013) define sampling as “the process of selecting a subset of items from a defined population for inclusion into a study” (p. 41). Nevertheless, as sampling involves compromise you can never be sure it is truly representative (Wellington, 2015). Therefore, to maximise the validity of findings, a non-probability sampling approach was employed in order to meet the needs of the questions driving this study. However, deliberate choices needed to be made in respect of inclusion criteria.

Considering the sample in this qualitative study needed to provide “rich, contextually laden, explanatory data” (Guest et al., 2013, p. 47), three CoLs were selected through purposive sampling. Although there are many approaches within purposive sampling, a homogeneous sampling type was used to refine the inclusion criteria. This comprised of: composition of network, network maturity, and demography. Reducing variables in this way provided an opportunity to gather data from CoLs that have similar experiences and think in similar ways. Many CoLs are only in an emergent stage, therefore, their leadership experiences will be very different to CoLs operating for two years or more (Ministry of Education, 2017). Therefore, CoLs, whose achievement challenge had been signed off in 2015, were chosen to participate in the study. Data

collected from participants who have experienced the same phenomenon is in line with conducting phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007) and provides for a holistic perspective for comparative purposes (Guest et al., 2013). Therefore, three CoL leaders and the principal members of those CoLs constituted the sampling units. Sampling the principal members offered an opportunity to support exploration and comparison of common themes from different perspectives, and a comparison to the findings from the document research.

## **Data collection and analysis**

Three methods were chosen to gather evidence and data for analysis, namely: semi-structured interviews with CoL leaders, questionnaires for principal members of the CoL, and document research.

### *Semi-structured interviews*

The aim was to examine CoL leader perceptions of networked leadership and the specific actions they took to mobilise and strengthen participation across multiple sites. This method enabled greater flexibility, detail, and depth of responses, and “gives insight into what the interviewee sees as relevant and important” (Bryman, 2012, p. 470). Wellington (2015) agrees and suggests that probing an “interviewee’s thoughts, values, prejudices, preconceptions, views, feelings and perspectives” allows their story and world-view to emerge (p. 137). Therefore, during the course of the semi-structured interview the researcher was able to explore answers with rigour, encouraging nuances to emerge and tangents to be examined. The three interviews in this study were supported by the interview guide and schedule recommended by Wellington (2015) to ensure distinct connections to the research questions, but also coverage of the themes that had emerged from the literature review (see appendix A). For instance, the CoL leaders’ perspectives were crucial to extrapolating the challenges faced in effectuating change across a cluster of schools. Therefore, the questions guiding the interviews were open ended and probing, allowing opportunity for clarification and/or elaboration, without leading or prompting. As participants were very open in sharing their experiences, I was able to ask follow up questions that pursued a line of inquiry or interest relevant to the research.

Both note taking and audio recording techniques were used to assure accuracy and quality of the evidence captured. The ethical implications of these methods are discussed later. Importantly, the evidence gathered from a semi-structured interview needs to be interpreted by the researcher and is therefore influenced by perception. Stenhouse (1978) explains that “meaning is ascribed to information by critical interpretation: its reliability or status is assessed by critical verification”, hence, “contextualisation is necessary if an adequate critique is to be mounted” (as cited in Wellington, 2015, pp. 150-151). During the recorded interviews, I was able to make notes on significant or interesting details that was a precursor to the actual analysis process (see appendix B). Only central issues, emergent themes, or interesting facts were recorded to minimise distraction for the interviewee but were used to assure accuracy and quality of the evidence captured.

### *Questionnaires*

A questionnaire is a suitable method to canvas opinion and perceptions about particular issues (Briggs et al., 2012). As this study intended to examine how closely the experiences and challenges of a CoL leader reflected in responses expressed by principal members of the CoL, the anonymity of the questionnaire encouraged respondents to divulge views that may not be expressed in a face to face situation. Therefore, “the potential of a suitably designed questionnaire for allowing free, honest and articulate expression should not be underestimated” (Wellington, 2015, p. 198).

The questionnaire was piloted with the principal members of the CoL associated with my school. This was crucial as “the printed word raises problems unforeseen in spoken, human contact” (Wellington, 2015, p.196). Conducting a pilot reduced the risk of writing ambiguous, confusing and leading questions that could compromise the integrity of the research. It also allowed the quality of the instrument to be tested in terms of relevance to the research questions (Briggs et al., 2012). No alterations to the questions were made.

In the context of this study, an online questionnaire, completed by principal members was used to canvass opinions (see appendix C). As one of three methods of data collection, it offered a

form of triangulation to add validity to the research. (The invitation email sent to network principals, and the participant information sheet can be found in appendix D).

### *Data analysis*

Phenomenological data analysis requires “highlighting significant statements, sentences or quotes that provide an understanding of how participants experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). This is based on Moustaka’s (1994) systematic steps for accessing and capturing text descriptions and is named ‘horizontalisation’. These statements are then clustered to generate themes that can be interrogated to understand the essence or basic structure of a phenomenon. This allows the narrative to be analysed as a whole. This approach constituted step one of my data analysis. Following this, I used coding and reflexive thematic analysis techniques to reduce the data, a reductionist approach (see appendix E). These two approaches can be viewed as in opposition to each other but use of a multi-analysis approach enables more rigorous sense making of the data so that nuances in meaning are captured. Braun et al. (2018) contend that reflexive thematic analysis works well with a phenomenological framework as its approach enables themes to be “contextualised as meaning-based patterns, evident in explicit (semantic) or conceptual (latent) ways, and as the output of coding” (p. 6). Therefore, once transcripts were completed, open coding techniques were applied as fundamental to qualitative data analysis (Fielding, 2002, as cited in Briggs et al., 2012). This approach addressed concerns relating to researcher interpretation. Firstly, it reduced the “tendency to ignore information conflicting with hypotheses already held and to emphasise information that confirms them” (Robson, 2011, p. 469). Secondly, it reduced the danger of observing connections only and, far from being reductionist, it ensure(d) the value of the ‘whole story’ (Briggs et al., 2012). Open coding enabled initial concepts to be systematically extracted from the evidence and recorded by means of a code. These codes were then compared and re-categorised according to their relationship with each other until homogeneous categories were identified (for these categories see appendix F). This was an iterative process involving many stages so that I could better capture the conceptualisation of the data. Braun et al. (2018) acknowledges this process as difficult and requiring considerable analytical work. However, its “aim is to provide a coherent and compelling interpretation of the data, grounded in the data” not merely a summary of the data (p. 6). These authors recognise that, as a “storyteller”, you are actively engaged in the process “through the

lens of (your) own cultural membership and social positionings, (your) theoretical assumptions and ideological commitments, as well as (your) scholarly knowledge” (p. 6).

### *Documentary research and analysis*

Documentary research is interpretative as it requires the researcher to “collect, collate, and analyse empirical data in order to produce a theoretical account that either describes, interprets or explains what has occurred” (Briggs et al., 2012, p. 298). Community of Learning policy documents, ministry guidelines and principal collective agreements provide an insight into the expectations of CoL leadership.

The following documents were analysed:

- Internal CoL documents pertaining to their individual achievement challenges, operating structures and memorandums of agreement.
- MoE guidelines offering advice on what is required to become a Community and how a CoL will work in practice including additional supporting documentation for role selection and appointment, writing a memorandum of agreement, developing achievement challenges and operating structures.
- Collective agreements pertaining to Primary Principals, Secondary Principals and Area School Principals

Although “considerable interpretative skills are required to uncover the meaning of the contents”, these documents provided the context needed to supplement the data from the interviews (Briggs et al., 2012, p. 297). When used as a complementary method, the trustworthiness and validity of the research is increased (Wellington, 2015). Wellington (2015) asserts that documents can be integral to the research process either at the exploratory, complementary or concluding stage of the study. Each of these focal points has been applicable during my study. During the exploratory phase the study of policy documents, past and present, allowed issues to emerge and key questions could be formulated based on problems that were not distinctly addressed in the documents. These questions affirmed the direction taken when designing the method of data collection through semi-structured interviews – complementary stage. Finally, documentary



research has supported and enhanced the articulation of concluding statements at the end of the study.

Documentary analysis required the application of coding techniques in the same way as the other forms of data collection to analyse the systematic identification of underlying themes. However, Wellington (2015) argues that documents cannot be analysed to extrapolate a single meaning. Meaning depends on the intentions of the author and the perspective of the reader and is therefore open to interpretation. Therefore, texts and documents must be studied and analysed as “socially situated products” (Scott, 1990, p. 34). To support my analysis I have created a ‘documentary analysis framework’ (see appendix G). This draws on the frameworks advocated by Fitzgerald (2012), Scott (1990) and Wellington (2015). A list of supporting questions provided a frame of reference allowing mediation between the position of the document and its authors, and my own background, position and theoretical stance. This enabled a critical approach when reflecting on the extent to which policy and practice align in the context of the CoL leadership environment.

### *Cross-case analysis*

Once the coding was completed and sub-themes had been identified across all three data sets, the findings were compared, contrasted, and synthesised to provide the three main findings discussed in Chapter Six. Although the power of case study is in its attention to the local situation, cross-case analysis allowed examination of both commonalities and differences between cases. Stake (2006) refers to the ‘quintain’ of multi-case research. He defines this as “an object or phenomenon or condition to be studied – a target” (p. 6). All three case studies were categorically bound as they shared a common characteristic, CoL leadership. Study of individual cases allowed closer observation of how this manifests in particular contexts, but cross-case analysis provided opportunity to explore the quintain itself “to show how uniformity or disparity characterises the quintain” (Stake, 2006, p. 40).

### **Limitations**

The primary limitation in this study is the question of validity of the research. Only one out of 27 questionnaire responses were received by principal members of the CoL. Therefore, although

triangulation is crucial to augment reliability and validity, there is a need to recognise the limitations placed on accepting the views of one person in relation to forming conclusions and conceptual understandings as those who failed to return questionnaires might have responded differently (Briggs et al., 2012).

### *Internal validity*

Internal validity deals with the extent to which research findings match reality (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, by taking an interpretivist stance, using a small-scale case study approach without substantive data from the questionnaires, my emphasis is related to assessing trustworthiness rather than validity and reliability. Lincoln et al. (2011) discuss the notion of interpretive rigour by asking two questions. Firstly, “can co-created constructions be trusted to provide some purchase on some important human phenomenon?” and secondly, “do our findings point to action that can be taken on the part of research participants to benefit themselves or their particular social contexts?” (p. 120). This study is concerned with internal motivations to appraise cause and effect. Indeed, the research questions demonstrate an interest in the consequences of the phenomenon as much as being able to explain the phenomenon itself. Hammond and Wellington (2013) recognise the challenge involved in claiming validity whilst working from an interpretivist standpoint, as validity has its roots based in positivism that is at odds with those trying to negotiate meaning in a reflexive way. However, the outcomes of this research will go some way to building understanding of the complexities of leading across a network of schools that can be both complimentary and/or supplementary to current practice.

Equally important as a source of invalidity is the consideration of bias. Researcher bias and preconceived theories must be recognised and acknowledged at all stages of the process, particularly when coding and analysing to avoid issues of ‘trustworthiness’. Respondent validation has been used to verify the contents of the transcripts that were returned to the participants after interview. All three CoL leaders confirmed the transcripts as accurate with no amendments made. Participants were also offered an opportunity to comment on the final draft of their findings. All three participants were satisfied with the interpretations made. This was a critical technique for establishing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### *External validity*

Wellington (2015) contends that the reader assesses and judges validity as “people reading case studies can often relate to them, even if they cannot always generalise from them” (p.178). Denscombe (2014) refers to this as “an imaginative process” in which the reader uses the information to judge its application to other instances (p. 299). Bryman (2012) drawing from Lincoln and Guba (1985) puts forward an argument that there are grounds to discuss transferability if a “thick description” is provided for others to make “judgements about the possible transferability of findings to other milieux” (p. 392). This research study provided cross-case analysis of findings to “invite readers to draw inferences from the study after applying the findings to their own situation” (Briggs et al., 2012, p. 202). Rather than extracting generalisations from the case studies, it provided some commonality that may be useful to others in similar situations who have questions of practice (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Wolcott (1995) concur and state “each case study is unique, but not so unique that we cannot learn from it and apply its lessons more generally (p. 175).

### **Ethical considerations**

Educational researchers encounter moral dilemmas and ethical questions at all stages of the research process. Therefore, ethical considerations should be “foremost in the planning, conduct and presentation” of the study (Wellington, 2015, p. 113). Learning is socially constructed throughout this project and, as such, is value-laden. Building respectful, trusting relationships is key to ensuring reciprocal and mutual benefit to all participants (Wellington, 2015). However, it was possible that potential participants could be known to me personally. Although this has the advantage of previously established levels of trust, I am aware that this could lead to a conflict of interest. For this reason, I did not conduct research within my own CoL.

In acknowledging the researcher’s duty of care, and the responsibility to collect authentic and valid data, this study was guided by the ethical principles laid down by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC). The key principles when considering application for ethical approval are: informed and voluntary consent; respect for rights of privacy and confidentiality; minimisation of risk; truthfulness, including limitation of deception; social and

cultural sensitivity, including commitment to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi; research adequacy; and avoidance of conflict of interest.

Once ethics approval was obtained, I approached my three identified CoL leaders, via telephone, to determine an expression of interest. On acceptance of involvement in the study, I followed up with an email with attachments including the initial notification outlining the what, why, who, when and how of the research (see appendix H), and the consent form explaining the process of informed and voluntary consent and their rights of withdrawal at any stage of the process (see appendix I). The potential ethical risks of the study were explained to participants, as were the actions taken to minimise risk. For example, no individual would be identifiable as confidentiality and anonymity are ensured through the consideration of ethical data collection, use of pseudonyms and sensitive data storage.

Indeed, social and cultural sensitivity are of paramount importance to ensure authenticity and credibility of the data collected. Briggs et al. (2012) discuss the need to develop “successful collaborative interpersonal relationships between members to achieve identified purposes” (p. 92). However, this can be problematic in interview situations where social or power differentials become apparent to either researcher or participant. This has the potential to influence and affect the outcomes of conversations. In order to negate such problems I gave consideration to the context and site chosen for the CoL leader interviews. Providing a safe environment for participants involves offering to conduct the interview at a time and place of their choice. I observed the correct protocols for each context visited. They all chose to hold the interviews at their own schools. Of equal importance is the right of participants to have ownership of the research through an understanding of how their findings will be used, and for what purposes during and at the conclusion of the research (Briggs et al., 2012). Therefore, consideration was given to the recording of conversations on two counts. Firstly, the use of a recorder was negotiated with the participants and transcripts were sent back for approval after completion. Secondly, privacy and dignity was actively observed at all times.

Information gathered through literature review and documentary analysis were treated ethically. This involved acknowledging authorship and avoiding plagiarism. Correct in-text citations and referencing conventions were used according to AUT guidelines. In addition, official documents

available within the public domain were guided by the ethics of analysis. These resources, in contrast to personal artefacts such as diaries, are considered 'fair game' and therefore more open to critical analysis (Wellington, 2015). Use of these documents throughout the research phases provided another level of analysis and supplemented the data collected through the interview process.

## **Summary**

This chapter has offered critique of my chosen methodology, research design and data analysis approaches. In doing so, an explanation of qualitative methodology has provided justification for extracting meaning from CoL leader accounts in order to make sense of their experiences as they navigate the complex environment of leading across a network of schools. Limitations relevant to the data collection methods are discussed to provide an understanding of the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Themes have emerged through the coding process that have generated patterns but also given rise to anomalies in responses. This allows accounts from each CoL leader to be compared and contrasted in Chapter Six. Finally, ethical implications were considered and have been applied across all phases of the research. My overall methodological approach has provided rich, contextualised, explanatory data that will be explored in subsequent chapters.

# Chapter Five: Findings

## Introduction

This chapter is organised into three parts. Firstly, documentation analysis at national level, offers an evaluation of policy and practice expectations thereby clarifying the operating context within the CoL environment. After this, a narrative for each of the three case studies, alongside internal documentation, provides the context through which each CoL leader experiences their role. The interviews were analysed according to the following criteria: prerequisites for the role; skills and attributes needed for successful networking practice; and the opportunities and challenges faced in leading across a community of schools. Finally, questionnaire evidence from a CoL principal gave an interpretation of the effectiveness of the CoL leader in their context.

## Ministry of Education Documents

The documents analysed in this part of the chapter form the guidelines for establishment of CoLs, with particular reference to the position of CoL leader. It begins with a focus on the Principals' Collective Agreements. The following interpretations should be read alongside the documentary analysis framework in appendix G.

### *Collective Agreements*

New Zealand's current collective agreements set out the terms and conditions of employment for principals. Despite the Primary Principals' Collective Agreement (2016e) expiry date of 16 May 2018, the agreement is enforceable for a further twelve months providing the union or employer has initiated bargaining to replace the agreement (Clause 53 – Employment Relations Act, 2000). At the time of writing, negotiations are proceeding.

Each of the agreements stipulate the allowances paid to the CoL leader and the period of appointment to the role – up to two years (MoE, 2016a, e & f). Two of the case study participants have entered into a second term. This complies with the agreement, as they are able to hold the

position for a further two years depending on progress of their achievement plan<sup>7</sup>. The CoL's achievement plan must also define the purpose of their role, and each employing board receives an additional two days staffing for the period of the appointment to enable fulfilment of the CoL leader's functions. This has created an opportunity for reallocation of duties for Deputy Principals to 'act in a higher position', and they receive remuneration according to the terms and conditions of their Teachers' Collective Agreements. Appointment to the Community Leadership Role is subject to an agreed selection process and having met applicable criteria or professional standards. Affirmation by an external professional advisor is required.

### *Role Selection and Appointment Information*

This document provides the link between collective agreements and the process for appointing the CoL leader (MoE, 2016d). It suggests understanding of both before initiating an appointment process. The document asserts this process as one of the most important to the success of the CoL due to its identification of the expertise, skills, and knowledge necessary to develop the practice of others in pursuit of improved student outcomes. To this end, the CoL leader "will be working to build effective professional relationships that enable collaboration, problem solving and shared commitment" (p. 3). With this in mind, it acknowledges the importance of the concerted efforts of all schools, principals, teachers, parents, and whanau to support the work of the Community of Learning.

Composition of the selection panel requires representatives from the schools involved including principal(s) and board member(s) of different schools, and an Independent Advisor from the New Appointments National Panel. Initial tasks include both mandatory processes, such as the engagement of the Independent Advisor to ensure those appointed to the role have met the relevant National Criteria, and flexibility of approach in agreeing to local criteria for applicants appropriate to the particular context of their CoL. The MoE and NZSTA provide support to the CoL in terms of its selection processes and local criteria. Although the process must adhere to the Community of Learning Privacy Protocol, as in *Guide for Schools and Kura Appendix 1*, the community have choice over how the process will operate in terms of the information provided to

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<sup>7</sup> An achievement plan guides organisation of the Community's resources to meet the objectives and goals of the agreed achievement challenges.

prospective candidates, and short listing and interview procedures. Transparency of process is addressed through ensuring both potential and actual conflicts of interest are effectively managed. For instance, a prospective candidate cannot be on the selection panel for another principal. In addition, the panel need to be conversant with the purpose and functions of the role, as “this information will underpin the judgements they make about applicants and will be the reference points for their evaluation of the evidence presented by each applicant” (p. 4).

The Independent Advisors provide expertise in evaluation of leadership practice and can provide guidance and support in the process of assessing applications. They have knowledge of the National Criteria as presented by the ‘Writing Group’ (a group commissioned by the IES Working Group to identify the knowledge skills and understanding needed to undertake the role). These criteria are based on the intent of the IES initiative, the Best Evidence Synthesis (BES, 2009) work on the key influences for positive change, and the registered teacher criteria and associated documents (e.g. *Tataiako*, MoE, 2011). As a result, role descriptions agreed with the MoE and its sector partners, provide the purpose and function of the CoL leader role.

Collaboration, facilitation and a commitment to a shared direction are key themes emerging from analysis of CoL leader responsibilities. Therefore, according to purpose and function, the CoL leader role is one that facilitates agreement between the member schools in terms of structures and processes to meet and report on shared achievement objectives. They provide clarity through developing cohesion and a sense of collective responsibility for student achievement and well-being of all children across the CoL. Finally, they support professional growth in others through internal and external consultation, and the management and co-ordination of resources and activities.

Supportive of this summary is the analysis of the National Criteria’s two domains of practice incorporating professional knowledge in practice (Ako) and professional relationships, values and engagement (Mahi Tahī). The focus areas within each specify broad standards related to the role of CoL leader and the evidence needed to support application to the position. Working collaboratively and responsively to develop expertise and evidence-based inquiry processes, ability to lead strategic change within the context of the CoL goals, and a focus on bi-cultural knowledge and practice to meet the needs of diverse learners, provide the context for professional



knowledge in practice. The second domain focuses on the attributes required for effective CoL leadership practice. These include: the ability to be open-minded; see the potential in others; maintain trust, respect and challenge; “develop educationally powerful connections”; and take agency for their own personal development – all with the aim of realising shared goals that lead to improved student outcomes (p. 8).

Once appointed to the role, a signed Memorandum of Agreement by all participating schools confirms how they will work together.

### *Memorandum of Agreement*

Two clauses must be included in the Agreement. These relate to privacy and variation, and the wording needs to be consistent with that specified by the MoE. This is to ensure that the MoE is notified of changes to the composition of the CoL to enable changes to roles, resources, and allowance allocations. However, there is flexibility in the way that the rest of the Agreement is constructed. The document provides guidance and gives examples to support CoLs as they outline how they will work together. All three case study participants provided Memorandum of Agreements that follow, quite closely, the illustrated examples in this document (MoE, 2016c).

### *Guide for Schools and Kura*

This document provides an overview for those schools considering forming a CoL (MoE, 2016b). Initially, the MoE has focused on explaining the intentions of the IES initiative that they express as: encouraging collaboration, recognising expertise across the system, enhancing teacher-led innovation, and building collective capacity:

The evidence shows that when kaiako/teachers engage in collaborative professional problem solving, focused on the impact of teaching and learning (ako) for students, they can deliver significant and sustained improvement in students’ educational outcomes. (Ministry of Education, 2016c, p. 2).

Gains from participating in a Community of Learning are explained at some length with bold statements such as “Communities of Learning will drive the spread of effective teaching and leadership practice across the system to make a more positive difference...more quickly” (p. 2). The MoE support their position by regarding this initiative as a new opportunity to harness collective expertise thus enabling effective practice to become common practice across all

education sectors. If the conditions advocated through the selection and appointment procedures, signing of the Memorandum of Agreement and the achievement plan process are satisfied this, they suggest, will create the foundations for collective responsibility and accountability. However, they are also mindful that productive joint action depends on the effective use of evidence “so you can grow a shared culture of effective inquiry and evaluation” (p. 3).

The MoE claim that the impact of being in a CoL will be visible over time through solid evidence driving goals, accelerated progress for ‘at risk’ students, seamless transition pathways, growing professional capability and strategic use of resources. The creation of “new roles working well alongside existing roles” will assist in the achievement of collective goals (p. 3). The purpose of these new roles, as described in the document, align with the National Criteria and domains. In addition, the MoE provide clarity over the evidence base used to validate their claim of ‘added value’. They refer to the publication *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why – Best Evidence Synthesis*, (Robertson et al., 2009) and one of the five leadership dimensions, ‘resourcing strategically’, to explain the importance of identifying and obtaining resources to align to pedagogical and philosophical purposes. They suggest CoLs should consider the new roles as complementary to existing positions to appreciate fully their purpose in assisting collaboration for improvement.

The rest of the document details the process of forming a CoL. It discusses involvement as voluntary membership but explains that an existing cluster or network could easily translate into a Community of Learning. Detailed steps provide information to move from an expression of interest to approval by the MoE. At this point in the document, the meaning of ‘working together effectively’ is defined as:

Working together effectively means finding deliberate ways of building collaboration as well as developing systems and processes to make it work. Good collaboration practices will assist you in setting out how to operate in a way that will support in progressing towards your collective goals. (p. 8).

Next, questions provide support for CoLs to identify their achievement challenges and formulate an achievement plan in order to realise “the outcomes expected by the education system” and to meet the needs of the New Zealand Curriculum (p. 8). A ‘life cycle’ diagram determines the stages involved with implementing, monitoring and sharing, and reviewing and refining the achievement

plan. The accompanying explanations advise checkpoints along the way. However, the MoE states it is equally important that individual member schools use the information generated to “assess how well the Community of Learning is working for their individual school” (p. 19).

Finally, there is a section outlining an approach for the appraisal of the new roles. The responsibility for appraising the CoL leader resides with the employing board. On appointment to the role, their performance agreement should be amended to reflect the additional responsibilities and National Criteria, as well as reflecting existing registered teaching criteria and professional standards. Therefore, the CoL leader’s performance objectives need aligning to the Achievement Plan but the evidence provided needs to relate to the appraisal of the individual, not the CoLs’ collective progress towards meeting its achievement challenges.

Whilst this guide provides the ‘why’ and ‘what’ related to Communities of Learning, it does not explain the ‘how’. Throughout the document, reference to *Tips and Starters: Working Together* implies additional advice is accessible within this supplementary publication.

### *Tips and Starters: Working Together*

This document focuses on the development of processes and operating structures to support the attainment of achievement challenges (MoE, 2015). The emergent themes include: collaboration, relationships and systems.

Collaboration is defined as coming together for a purpose with shared understanding of collective strength. The MoE describe it as working towards achievable goals identified through inquiry and with the commitment of all participants. Collaborative practices ensures the sharing of information, experience and expertise. Relationships and mutual trust develop through a range of strategies to accommodate different ways of thinking and working. They also recognise differentials of power and status within the group and propose sharing leadership so that everyone’s strengths are utilised.

MoE advice in relation to collaborative practices acknowledges the importance of taking time to build relationships to gain an understanding of the ‘uniqueness’ of individual schools in recognition

of their strengths and successes. Focus on CoL-wide student achievement rather than the achievement of individual schools requires openness, respect and mutual trust. Therefore, they assert that processes and events need to ensure all voices are heard. Agreeing ways of working such as communication, addressing problems and issues, and protocols for visiting other schools are considered helpful in assisting the development of collaborative practices.

Discussion starters provide prompts to illustrate how an achievement challenge may be developed, and recognises the importance of involving parents, students, teachers and the wider community in establishing goals and an achievement plan. Questions and considerations provide a script to follow through every stage of the process.

This format is replicated in the next section of the document that provides prompts for developing operating structures and systems. It deals with issues such as: maintaining stewardship of the CoL's processes and progress; the role of individual schools in decision-making; community involvement; implementation of the Achievement Plan; equitable and collaborative use of resources; and community feedback to all stakeholders. To guide evidence collection, the final appendix 'basket of evidence' identifies the different forms data collection may take to measure progress towards shared objectives.

## **Community of Learning Leader - Case Study A**

### *Internal Documentation*

Two documents were analysed (as summarised in appendix G), both of which were in their second iteration. Although their vision for learners remained the same, they claimed they "now have a deeper understanding of what (they) need to do as a community to make this happen" (p. 4). This is reflected in the layout of the achievement challenge and plan, where each focus area is prefaced by a relevant whakatauki<sup>8</sup>, the vision for that element, their theory of improvement and the broad strategic goal (later broken down into specific achievement challenges and associated targets).

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<sup>8</sup> Maori proverb

The achievement challenges and supporting implementation plan focused on three important areas, namely: culturally responsive pedagogies; collaborative inquiry in literacy, mathematics and National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA)<sup>9</sup> Level 2+; and retention and transition processes. Evaluation of progress against each of these elements has been ongoing since 2016 with 'building a collaborative community' forming the focal point through which collaborative practices derive. They presented evidence to support the impact of changes made, and concluded that collaborative relationships with all stakeholders had deepened over the last two years. They attributed this to purposeful collaboration that was "systemic, sustainable, self-improving and connected with the world beyond our own community .... a canoe which we are all in with no exception" (p.6). According to their achievement plan, inclusion of Assistant Principals and Deputy Principals in leadership meetings, and at the level of implementation, has been an important development. So has the evolution of a common language and understanding of different learning areas across the sector resulting in strong relational trust. They recognised they were at an early stage of exploring partnerships with parents and whanau but drew on successful initiatives from member schools to illustrate work in progress. In addition, they saw potential in extending opportunities for students to become more involved in cross-school events.

The achievement plan detailed the work with external agencies, research based programmes and targeted professional learning opportunities to support relations based pedagogies, and literacy and mathematics knowledge building. The CoL were clear that they "will not achieve (their) other goals of accelerating achievement in literacy and mathematics unless (they) create a climate where learners are comfortable in their cultural identities" (p. 10). This was particularly pertinent to their focus on Maori retention. Strategies related to student engagement, attendance and whanau involvement were in place to support them understand the reasons for students leaving school prior to completion of NCEA Level 2+. In addition, they were beginning to "see increasing alignment amongst teachers around effective research based approaches to the teaching of reading, writing, and mathematics" (p. 16). They attributed this to their collaborative work on developing a writing assessment tool and the emerging mathematics progression profile. They claimed these initiatives had provided the foundations for supporting all teachers across schools to understand the stages of learning students need to go through. Their ultimate goal was to

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<sup>9</sup> NCEA are national qualifications for senior school secondary students in New Zealand.

provide smoother transitions between schools. Importantly, with the end to National Standards<sup>10</sup>, they asserted such tools and comparative data across schools would assist their development of a coherent system for collecting, storing and analysing data across the CoL.

The document included a section that detailed the procedures for monitoring and evaluation of the implementation plan and “emerging evidence of changes in pedagogy and school practices of culture” (p. 28). They used the *Effective Internal Evaluation for Improvement* (ERO, 2016b) publication, and MoE resources to evaluate actions and the “robustness of (their) theories of improvement” (p. 28). An appraisal model had been developed but they will look to refine this once new resources from the Education Council are available. Reporting procedures to Boards of Trustees are explained and reference made to the inclusion of achievement challenges in each school’s Charter<sup>11</sup> and the Analysis of Variance<sup>12</sup>.

Finally, a Code of Conduct provided ways of working that allow a shared commitment to goals and management of issues should they arise. This section was supported by their Memorandum of Agreement that formed the formal agreement between parties in their CoL (see appendix G).

## **Interview with Community of Learning Leader A**

CoL A has twelve member schools. They have been working together since 2015 when their achievement challenge was ‘signed off’ by the MoE. Significantly, their CoL leader is a Deputy Principal from one of the schools, not a principal, and has been in the role for two years. At the time of writing, the CoL had appointed a new CoL leader due to the retirement of this participant. There has been time for handover and the participant felt the CoL were “happy” with the appointment. The participant’s commitment to their network, relationships and systems was apparent throughout the interview in the way they engaged the incumbent CoL leader in “cross-over” meetings and discussions that they described as “very good.” A commitment to the

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<sup>10</sup> New Zealand introduced National Standards for primary aged students in reading, writing and mathematics in 2010 to assist schools in assessing and reporting student achievement. Reporting against National Standards officially ended in December 2017.

<sup>11</sup> The school’s Charter is the strategic plan for change and improvement. The Board of Trustees has overall responsibility for development and review.

<sup>12</sup> The Analysis of Variance provides analysis of school-level progress and achievement data, and the difference between targets set and actual outcomes.

networking philosophy is also evident in the support they provide other CoLs and organisations through the speaking engagements they are involved in.

### *Prerequisites of the role*

According to this participant “building the community” by means of a belief in the system you are trying to lead is “essential” to the role of CoL leader. In practice, they described this as “we are all in the waka without exception”. They emphasised the need to engage with the philosophy of networking in a very visible way so that others see the value in what the CoL is trying to achieve. Prior to their position as CoL leader, they played an instrumental role supporting the principal leadership group in an administrative capacity and explained “to a certain extent they trusted me because I got things done and things moved forward”. They suggested that past leadership experience and the endorsement by principal colleagues, through already established trusting relationships, provided recognition of competence and emotional intelligence, and were important prerequisites for the role. They stated “I wouldn’t have been taken on, and I don’t think they would have selected me if they did not believe I could do it”.

### *Principal autonomy – positional power exists*

Since becoming CoL leader, they affirmed that specific professional skills have come to the fore that need exercising to support facilitation of the role. During the interview, it became apparent that a major challenge for this participant was the autonomy of other principals in the CoL context. They recognised that they “can’t make principals do anything they don’t want to do” because as they explained “I do not have the authority over them”. This has raised the issue of equity of resources (e.g. the use of release time for within-school teachers) as principals “very much control which teachers are allowed in and out of the school at which times”. Even though the CoL principals collectively agreed a system to provide professional learning opportunities for their within-school teachers a “particular principal reads the programme and decides whether or not he will let them come and in fact he makes the decision” therefore he ultimately “has the power to say yes or no”.

This positional power is also apparent in the decision to use PAT assessments<sup>13</sup>, agreed upon by ten out of the twelve schools, highlighting the tension between collective agreement and what works within the context of an individual school when one size does not fit all. In recognition of this conflict, the principals have agreed to “respect the position of these two (schools)” and hope in time they will see the benefits of using the same approach - a tool to provide credible and comparable data across schools. As a CoL leader, they facilitated discussions with the two opposing schools and acknowledged the importance of mutual respect as implicit in finding common ground:

If I had forced it to some sort of vote – you can’t do a vote and then make them really, because it’s their own school. If we had said, you’re in or you are out, PATs or nothing, two schools that contain about 600 of the kids in our CoL would have no longer been part of the CoL and that would have been dreadful.

These discussions prompted reflection on the direct change leadership actions needed to facilitate collaborative practice. Providing evidence, compromising, negotiation and transparency for effective communication focused their conversations and are echoed in the statement “we understand and accept that is where you are” however “the rest of us are still going to go forward down this path we hope you will come with us”.

### *Confronting issues*

Both of these examples draw attention to barriers of practice that require “work in progress” and although they are “not completely preventing the event of participation [but] it’s making it a little bit harder”. Therefore, confronting issues to move forward is a key leadership skill recognised by this participant. They referred to the ability to have courageous conversations and recommended leaders at all levels have ‘open to learning’ professional development. Without this ability they argued “you won’t build the relational trust (and) internal commitment” both of which they acknowledged secure shared purpose and direction. However, dealing with “blockers” is a dilemma of practice that needs to be dealt with respectfully. Every time an issue has arisen they have seen the opportunity to front up “to the relevant person, usually the principal, and try and articulate what the issue is and say – can we find a way forward together?” By doing this, they believed they would maintain “good will” and develop inclusive practices.

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<sup>13</sup> The Progressive Achievement Tests (PATs) assess students’ Mathematics, Listening Comprehension, Punctuation and Grammar, Reading Comprehension, and Reading Vocabulary. PATs are a series of standardised tests developed specifically for use in New Zealand schools.



### *Inclusive team building*

Inclusion extends beyond the principals' leadership group to encompass all stakeholders. Overlooked within the CoL leadership structure, Deputy Principals (DPs) are a group that do not feature in IES policy documentation. The participant commented "there was a certain level of resistance or even hostility from some of the APs<sup>14</sup> and DPs who just felt excluded". Addressing this problem required building relationships with this group through active inclusion in "leadership meetings" which were purposefully not called "principal meetings". DPs were asked how they would like to be included and this, according to the participant, gave them a sense of belonging. The success with this group provided an opportunity to "consciously say(ing) to every teacher in the CoL, you belong, this is for all of us – He waka eke noa". Their value of inclusion is evident through the "powerful" systems they advocated for building a strong and effective team. Across-school teachers were appointed before the within school teachers and a conference organised to bring them together to start "building that sense of community and purpose". They felt that CoLs who begin with appointing within-school teachers first, make a "real mistake" because "surely they are all going to be working in isolation and then you're going to have to drag them together". New members to the team also pose a challenge in terms of "catch up" and being "woven into the team". Setting up systems for CoL members to come together for purposeful collaboration requires "hard work and "organisational efficiency". Without these "necessary" skills "whatever the goodwill, if everything to do with the CoL is a hopeless muddle then of course people are not going to be happy with it". They saw "building relational trust and a relentless focus on the goals for raising student achievement" as the "essence" of effective practice that helped to achieve the collective direction needed.

### *Collaborative practices*

Central to their ideology as CoL leader is the notion that developing social capital grows everyone. To illustrate the point they used the example of one of their CoL principals who chooses what his teachers can and cannot access from the programme. The CoL leader asserted, "sometimes I think he has looked at it and thought – my school is a little bit further ahead and so therefore my

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<sup>14</sup> Assistant Principals

teacher wouldn't necessarily learn anything new". This participant believed that teachers should be encouraged to attend, as they are the contributors to other people's learning:

If a resource has been given to your school for the purposes of the CoL, which is collaborative, which involves teachers working together then your teachers sometimes will be more the learners and sometimes they will be more the givers, but in both cases you would like to think they would be able to participate.

Conversations with their CoL principal were ongoing but the participant recognised their role as bridging the divide between the "autonomous being who ultimately won't do things because they are made to" to providing support to "get the best results out of people. They saw "intrinsic motivation (and) internal commitment" as key, and occurred when others' "can do something they themselves see the merit and the worth in."

Although they acknowledged the challenge of working collaboratively within the context of one school "it's a twelve times challenge when working with twelve schools". They appreciated that reciprocal learning occurs when schools come together for benefit of raising student outcomes as, the principles of "relentless focus on student achievement" and building "relational trust" are the same. However, shared language for learning is essential for purposeful discussion to achieve traction across all schools for clearer transition pathways. They recounted two examples that illustrated this as "really powerful stuff." Firstly, they presented their writing profile "which is exciting because ....we found that we couldn't really talk to each other about writing because every school had a different tool.... and now we have this lovely thing". Secondly, they described the new learnings that had occurred for an individual intermediate teacher working alongside secondary teachers. He was able to gain a deeper understanding of the mathematical skills, knowledge and strategies needed for successful transition to secondary school. As a result, he has "rewritten the programmes for intermediate for this year so they get more balance in the coverage of the streams (strands)".

Understanding the potential in creating system-wide tools and opportunities for meaningful cross sector collaboration has prompted a reshaping of their whole achievement model. For instance, their decision to use PATs does not dominate the curriculum or weaken "rich, deep learning". The curriculum and innovative teaching and learning practices have not been narrowed by the data requirements of MoE policy regarding quantifiable achievement levels linked to achievement

challenges and goals. They recognised the constraints of policy in the early stages of their journey describing their first achievement challenge as:

Mechanical, you had to follow the Ministry's formula and you had to express everything in terms of National Standards. You read them all and they all sort of looked the same (now) sitting in the centre of our strategic plan is building a collaborative community (with the) notion of smoother transitions going all the way through and those have been implicit not explicit before.

In addition, the new achievement model was "far more owned by a bigger group". After its initial work by across school leaders and the CoL leader over a two-day period, it went back and forth between the AP/DP and principal groups until they had a "pretty strong sense of shared and collective direction" and an achievement challenge that "tells a story". Despite expressing the initial stages of building a community as "organic it's just how it happened really", they accepted that it did not "just come up from the grass roots". It was a "national decision that communities of learning would happen" requiring appointment of positions linked to policy requirements. There was little support for early adopters as they were the "guinea pigs" and they thought "how do I do this, there is nobody that knows?" They recognised that more support exists now, but at the time there were "Ministry people who were very keen and willing to help but who actually couldn't help much because it was new" and they argued that they "would have had far more leadership experience than any of the Ministry that have tried to help". Professional leadership learning was lacking. They described it as just in time learning:

And the worst bits were when they put us in a room and talked to us at length – the worst pedagogy in the world. So some of the Ministry talkfests I have found quite a pain in the neck.

They considered these sessions "an absolute waste of time - we were just talked at all day by people that knew less than us and were further behind us". The lack of support persisted in their reasoning related to MoE documentation. Initiative was necessary to "figure it all out myself" and some of the work on guidance documents has been "debatable".

### *Transitioning into CoL leadership*

This participant has embraced the role as CoL leader and claimed, "it is all very well to espouse stuff but you actually have to try and live it – be that person." By their own admission, they conceded "none of us are perfect and we don't do it all the time". Throughout the interview, they talked about their role as a facilitator, not the person with positional power or control. Taking part in open to learning leadership training has enabled them to admit that "before, with a person I

wished to influence, I would have probably believed that I was trying to create an environment where they came to the solutions themselves, but in many cases I was probably manipulating them". This is supported by an example that described how, as a department head, they believed that "you can't get a team of teachers to grow the pedagogy in a department without persuasion because, unless the teachers really adopt and believe in the pedagogy that you are trying to encourage it won't happen in their classrooms". They considered their style of leadership had not undergone radical change in transitioning into the role of CoL leader but they had "grown in the process". This is at odds at times with some of the language used to describe how they enact their espoused theories. For instance, they claimed they have to "have a way of exercising leadership that (is) more about persuasion than making people do stuff". They qualified this by suggesting it is predominately:

About creating a climate and being persuasive, and providing evidence and creating contents where people engage with the evidence, and at times are challenged. It's that mixture of challenge and support.

This involved working "alongside rather than just telling". This premise is also illustrated through the example of a change in practice when leading principal meetings. The participant became aware that someone felt unable to speak in those meetings. As a result, they had moved away from "instructional and from the front" organisation to a more inclusive around the table format "where people could interact over something in smaller groups so that all the voices were heard and fed back".

### *Potential of others*

Whilst they acknowledged hierarchical, positional power and the autonomy of principals as a potential barrier to successful cross-school networking, they were also mindful of the challenge involved adjusting to lateral forms of leadership as a system through which greater collaboration and improved student outcomes is possible. Recognising the potential of others, as "drivers" for reform is central to this idea and they showed awareness that leadership growth is imperative for sustainability. Of significance was their focus on the more 'formal' positions receiving recognition of aptitude. The MoE:

Make much of this being an alternative career pathway.....if you look at the qualities these across school leaders need they are at least as challenging as being the head of a big department. So it's alternative in the sense that it is a different job.

Throughout the interview, they appreciated that qualities of leadership can cross formal positions and saw potential in those most closely associated with the work of the CoL to date i.e. deputy principals, associate principals, across school leaders and within- school teachers. They asserted,

You do not have to have the title of principal to be a leader. Likewise, I think some DPs with enough of the right qualities and experience can and should also be considered for the job. I would say the majority of good across schools' people are highly likely to become DPs and many of them would be principals. They essentially are leaders, they've got those qualities.

A staggered appointment process has had a twofold impact on the sustainability of leadership at both CoL leader and across school leader level. Firstly, appointing at different times of the year was "important so that you don't have a whole team brand new at once". Secondly, understanding that capability resides in others other than the principal, they have included, for both roles, across school leaders as representatives on the appointment committees "so they can say yes I think this person will bring something valuable to the team and they will either fill a gap or they will fit in well with us". This places value on growing those people really well .... (which) is absolutely vital".

## **Case Study A Findings**

Case Study A findings concluded that building a collaborative community was an essential component to ensuring sustainable change occurred across their network of schools. Both their documentation and practice, as described by the CoL leader, identified inclusion of all stakeholders, relational trust and a persistent focus on student achievement as key to shaping collective direction and commitment. There was a strong emphasis on team building and an acknowledgement that leadership growth is integral to driving reform.

The CoL leader saw themselves as a facilitator, someone tasked with the role of developing collaborative practices and managing operating systems and resources. They recognised the challenges they faced and demonstrated commitment to personal development in support of their role. Various scenarios presented as potential barriers. These related to principal autonomy, MoE policy restrictions, lack of MoE support in the early stages of development, and finding ways to engage others' internal motivation and commitment.

However, their revised achievement plan acknowledged the gains made over the last two years. They accredited this to purposeful collaboration, a shared language of learning, and teaching and learning practices aligned to effective research based approaches. Their new achievement model was based on collective understandings of 'where to next', originating from self-review, evaluation practices and a consistent articulation of their vision.

## **Community of Learning Leader - Case Study B**

### *Internal Documentation*

The 'Shared Achievement Plan' opened with a demographic description and a statement explaining the purpose of working together as a group – working collaboratively to strengthen student pathways and transition between schools. They saw collaboration and consultation as key to breaking down silos and supporting curiosity. The document detailed their approach to building individual and collective capacity through use of collaborative inquiry, development of community learner agency and an understanding of context, both now and in the future. Subsequently, each of the elements were incorporated into an action plan under the subheadings of: CoL leaders, student agency, teacher agency and community agency. Base-line data and projected targets supported achievement challenges in reading, writing, NCEA Level 2, NCEA Level 3 and Tertiary, and parent engagement and participation.

Two sections of the document conveyed the methodology, pedagogy, and evaluation processes that underpinned their collective direction. The methodology of appreciative inquiry was utilised as a means to envision a more equitable future for students at risk and maintain coherence within and across schools. Collaborative inquiry offered a process whereby they could "craft and recraft new practices together" (p. 12). Therefore, they described their CoL's pedagogical core as comprising "the learner, the educators, the content, and the resources" (p. 12). This concept was reinforced by their engagement with the OECD's work on innovative environments and their seven principles of learning found in the publication entitled *The Nature of Learning (2010)*. The achievement plan lists these as follows:

1. Make learning central, encourage engagement and be where leaders come to understand themselves as learners.
2. Ensure that learning is social and often collaborative.
3. Be highly tuned to learners' motivations and the importance of emotions.

4. Be acutely sensitive to individual differences including prior knowledge.
5. Be demanding for each learner but without excessive overload.
6. Use assessments consistent with its aims, with strong emphasis on formative feedback.
7. Promote horizontal connectedness across activities and subjects both in and out of schools.

Evaluative tools and measures included summative assessments, surveys, attendance data, and non-cognitive tools such as learning maps. The document concluded with a statement claiming that “ongoing use of these evaluative tools will provide robust and rigorous data for self-review, and the sustainable development of our community” (p. 13).

Appendices at the end of the document included a timeline for the set-up phase, appointment information, cluster data from the MoE and their Code of Conduct that aligned with their Memorandum of Agreement (see appendix G).

## **Interview with Community of Learning Leader B**

CoL B has eleven member schools. They have been working together since 2015 when their achievement challenge was ‘signed off’ by the MoE. As a principal in one of the member primary schools, this participant was in their second term of office, as CoL leader, at the time of interview.

### *Prerequisites of the role*

Throughout this interview it became increasingly apparent that this participant’s personal vision for networking was the core reason for taking on the role of CoL leader, and was one of the most significant and positive experiences in their career to date:

I live and breathe it and I want it to continue. I’m so glad, that even if it did change I would stick with it even without resources, (that) is the icing on the cake. I would be inclined to do it as much as I could because I really believe in it.

They considered prior leadership experience and confidence to be influential in determining ability to see “outside” the confines of their own school:

I was quite prepared to put my hand up as a CoL leader because I had a bit of background. I had a bit of time as a leader in a couple of schools so I felt I was in a position that I could offer something to other people.

This confidence clearly emanated from their previous experience in a Learning Change Network (LCN) that has augmented belief in their networking philosophy:

It worked, it really worked. I had better conversations with my colleagues in the LCN than I have ever had in my whole career. We weren’t talking about sports days and uniforms

and rubbish like that we were talking about data and learning and kids progress and that for me was the fundamental change and that was what put me onto CoLs. Once I had done that, and found how effective it was, when the CoLs came along, I was in.

Credibility as a CoL leader is reinforced through displaying a disposition for bigger picture thinking but also required endorsement from colleagues who trusted that the role would be taken seriously. The participant affirmed, “this is not something that I just add on” and claimed that a “successful leader and a respected leader” possesses attributes that allows transference of skills to the CoL leader context. For instance, they believed that “if you are a collaborative leader in your own school that role will easily transpose to CoL leadership”. Therefore, a collaborative approach to leadership is a prerequisite recognised by this participant as necessary for effective across sector partnership “it is not me and my, it is us and ours”.

### *Collaborative approach to leadership*

This participant claimed that collaborative leadership “is probably the biggest factor in determining effective practice” and an approach demanding constant modelling:

You can’t espouse that you have a collaborative approach and then go back to the CoL and have a sort of dictatorial approach. You’ve got to walk the talk and people have to see evidence of it.

They defined a collaborative approach as meaning across sector practices that are common to all schools as a way of developing collective responsibility relating to the CoL vision, goals, and achievement challenges. Discussions in their CoL have focused on defining terms such as networking and collaboration so they have a shared understanding of practice. They noted the difference between co-operation and collaboration as significant in building social capital for improved outcomes. It is not about “nodding your head” it needs to have “grunt”.

So co-operation is sitting around having a cup of tea and a few muffins, and you walk back to your own school and you don’t make changes. Collaboration means that you are actually making change in practice. And you change practices because you have been informed by the people around you and that’s real true networking collaboration.

However, they do note the inherent challenge faced by a CoL leader when dealing with people and school cultures you are not immediately involved in. They perceived their role to be one of “bridging (or) joining” schools together by focusing on their similarities to build a community.



### *Bridging the cultural divide*

During the interview, discussion pertaining to 'bridging the cultural divide between schools', evidenced their personal networking vision in action. Without attention to this concept, they claimed the CoL would be difficult to "drive." They used the analogy of an octopus whose tentacles need to go out in all directions in acknowledgement that commitment to working together requires a:

Strong head and a strong heart for it to happen ... and people can sense that in you, they just know that you really feel and live it .You can't buy it, you can't explain it.

Team building is advocated as essential in fostering good and positive relationships across the CoL. This participant had a firm belief in the potential of others and saw their role as being one of facilitation not power and ownership. Even though they were leading a "big machine" which required the ability to organise systems, they saw this as "day to day stuff that anyone can manage." They regarded relational leadership as a personal value and key to "working with others in a positive and engaging way." Therefore:

When I talk about a leader of collaboration I'm talking about – good leaders put good leaders around them. It's not me and my ideas. I've just got a fantastic base of people who are competent and innovative and I'll facilitate that. I'll support them and I'll see that they get what they need to make it happen.

### *Facilitation not power or ownership*

In all respects, this participant displayed a belief that a sole practitioner mind-set and a hierarchical approach to leading a CoL is undesirable and untenable. You cannot be a "peacock or a peafowl" when it comes to dealing with colleagues of equal standing as they too are "very experienced and competent practitioners in leadership roles." They understood that, as CoL leader, the buck stopped with them in regards to legal requirements but asserted strongly that they "are not the person in charge" and it is others that make it happen:

I am the person who helps, supports, facilitates, co-ordinates, drives, is passionate, and has the vision. But like a school, the people around me are the ones who are going to make it happen.

However, transitioning from sole leadership to leading across a network of schools has not come without its challenges, and this participant advocated the following dispositions as imperative to the role of CoL leader; being humble, listening and accepting others' opinions, having the ability

to compromise, and having resilience. They admitted to having to “temper some of (their) personal positions and stances” as they considered the success of all schools, not just their own. Most significantly, this has changed the way they look and view things and, as a result, their “world view has changed”.

This is illustrated through the example of interactions with secondary school colleagues. They admitted that their knowledge of NCEA, and how the secondary sector operated was “a huge learning curve” and consequently they had to consider the way they behaved and interacted with teachers who work in a system very different from the primary sector - “they are very siloed and it’s quite a different perspective in terms of integration than primary schools”. Accepting secondary teachers’ passion for their subjects and appreciation of “department” systems has deepened understanding of cross sector differences. In turn, this has led to a sense of inclusion. There has been more contact with this school than ever before and the participant feels “comfortable wandering on down there.” They also provided another example of the reciprocal benefits of cross sector participation:

The maths department couldn’t work out how our kids could do maths inquiry and they were learning. Oh my goodness, this is how it works ...that is what the primary level is doing.

As a result, collegiality and mutual respect have grown over time. They argued that “slowing down” and patience needed exercising when leading change across a CoL. Therefore, different operating systems have required alignment to bring about practices to support the learning process and provide smooth transition pathways – a policy requirement of the CoL initiative. Practice between schools was “really stilted before but now it is becoming more linear”.

### *Systems and processes*

They saw “systems and processes as important because they are the framework that hold it all together.” They described their approach as a triangulated framework linking people, operating systems and vision and thus providing direction and cohesion. They accepted the learning needed to reach this point, as in the initial stages much was completed in earnest. However, once again they attributed their LCN experience to their philosophy for successful networking and the potential of others to bring about change:

The expertise is here, leading from the middle, not middle leaders, but leading from the middle. So the people in here were the ones that could upskill their colleagues because in every school you are going to have high fliers and they're the ones you have to tap into.

With this in mind, they appointed their within-school teachers first to get “things humming in schools” and then their across school teachers. Although an approach not preferred by all CoL leaders, they saw merit in a bottom-up system:

By building the capacity here your across leaders will rise because you know the people who are the real high fliers. Some of them applied for the across school leaders' jobs so we knew them, so we weren't going in blind.

Linking the professional development of across school leaders in pursuit of successful collaboration and strong relationships was key. Front loading these professionals with coaching and open to learning training “even before we let them loose” was a purposeful strategy that enabled skills, dispositions and attributes to be developed:

You don't just become across schools and off you go. Some of these are classroom teachers and they did not have leadership training. They hadn't had to have hard conversations with people.

Evaluative capability and reflective practice were attributes this participant said supported system change when principals felt they were not getting enough traction or feeling of ownership in the work being accomplished. They went through a “rebirthing process” that required “backward mapping” to move forward. As a result, new initiatives were put in place lead by either the across school leaders, DPs or principals. This structural change needed bravery “say it's not working, say you've made a mistake, move on”.

### *Barriers to practice*

Support from the MoE, in the initial stages, was lacking “it was the blind leading the blind”. However, this participant believed a CoL leader should have both a personal and professional responsibility to make things happen. National standards no longer drive achievement challenges therefore an alternative way to assess outcomes, measure progress and provide accountability is required:

So we have a pilot group to open up the doors and look at some other things in terms of assessment tools and the way we are going to measure our progress.

Similarly, seeing the lack of support for CoL leadership training, in the initial stages, as constraining is a pointless exercise:

You can't wait for someone to give it to you. I could sit back all day and say no, no, I haven't had enough. Whose problem is that? It's mine so you've got to look at yourself as to what it is that you need and want, and go searching for it. You can't have things handed to you on a platter.

However, they recognised the resource of time as challenging to build effective across school leadership teamwork because “there hasn't been a huge amount of opportunity for us to meet as a big group and do some nice stuff.” Similarly, the use of release time in individual schools is organised differently thereby influencing the ability to arrange meetings. Timetabling, release, and principal autonomy has the potential to be a barrier if not managed effectively. This participant acknowledged that communicating with principals, who have different ways of approaching things, required careful consideration through open conversations in order to reach joint decision-making and shared agreement:

We decided on some benchmarks, this is the minimum and this is the maximum. The style was – you have to have this but the practice of how you achieved it was up to you. Adopting such an approach is an intentional way of remaining solution focused and having a collective responsibility for ensuring people do not put up the resourcing and the timetabling and the logistics of the initiative as a barrier.

## **Case Study B Findings**

From start to finish, the interview with CoL leader B provided insight into their palpable belief in the system they were leading. Their achievement plan reflected the importance of breaking down silos through collaborative work to secure seamless transition pathways for students. Consequently, the CoL leader saw their role as a system leader, aligning operating structures and practices to achieve cohesion across sectors. The concepts of collaboration and inquiry permeated both interview and documentation. Relational leadership was espoused as an expectation of network practice, and a necessary component to facilitate the appreciative and collaborative inquiry approaches promoted as methodology and pedagogy in their achievement plan.

The CoL leader made explicit their belief in the capability of others to effect change across the system. They saw their role as enabling ‘bottom up’ innovation for shared ownership. However, they identified the following challenges when uniting people towards a collective direction: moderating their views and opinions in consideration of all, connecting schools with unique characteristics and cultures, sustaining traction of initiatives, and finding time to come together.

A key factor mitigating some of these issues was improved evaluation and reflective practices. Their achievement plan referred to the evolution of evaluative tools to enable rigour in self-review processes, a system change they suggested would ensure sustainable development of their CoL in the future.

## **Community of Learning Leader - Case Study C**

### *Internal Documentation*

Two CoL documents were analysed in this case study (as summarised in appendix G). Their Memorandum of Agreement is attached as an appendix to the 'Shared Achievement Challenge Plan' following their Code of Conduct and Operating Structure. Together these provided the context for how their CoL would work together to establish and maintain relationships based on respect, challenge and the value of the unique context of individual schools.

The achievement plan began with background information about the geographical location of the CoL, the differing sizes of the schools involved, and students' learning pathways. They recognised these variations as challenging and therefore needed factoring into planning and implementation. A section dedicated to describing past successful collaborative enterprise illustrated their belief that their "community is well placed to build on the successes of collaboration to drive improved student outcomes" (p. 2). Further data provided contextualization of student engagement i.e. attendance and retention is high whilst truancy and suspension is low.

Historical student achievement levels captured, in the form of National Standards for writing and mathematics and NCEA Level 2, the obligation to close the gap between the achievement of Maori and Pasifika students and those for all students. In recognition of this challenge they have used *The Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling – Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration* (BES, 2009) as a guide to improve student agency because "sustained higher achievement is possible when teachers use pedagogical approaches that enable students to take charge of their own learning" (p. 4). The same publication supported their approach to parent and whanau engagement through attention on building effective partnerships that cultivated learning focused relationships between home and school.

Finally, their core strategy to promote valued student outcomes across the cluster is explained with reference to Helen Timperley's (2008) framework for Teacher Inquiry and Knowledge Building Cycle<sup>15</sup>. There are five dimensions underpinning the cycle, namely; student learning needs, teacher-learning needs, deepening of professional knowledge, changes in classroom practice, and evaluating impact on student learning. Each of the five dimensions is then broken down into driving questions, possible sources of evidence, and the principles or guidelines for using the evidence. It is clear from the document that enabling the conditions to support a culture of inquiry is key to providing the strategy through which the achievement challenges may be addressed. However, only one example is documented suggesting this framework may be adapted to suit individual school contexts.

## **Interview with Community of Learning Leader C**

This participant was the CoL leader across eight schools. They had completed nearly three years in this role at the time of interview in order to provide stability in the formation stage and to prevent a contested leadership. They felt a deferred succession necessary to provide consistency and sustainability during a vulnerable stage in their CoL's development.

### *Prerequisites of the role*

CoL leader C resolutely believed that you have to show "faith in the system" you are leading. They referred to it as "a different take" and "a radical shift and change in the way that we operate." Having an overt faith in the system requires dispositions of positivity, genuineness and commitment. A negative mind-set passes through leadership to other people therefore:

You have to show that you are really willing and have confidence that this is worth a go. So you are portraying to them that this is not a resource grab or about money or status, it is about us trying to do things differently.

However, they also demonstrated a sense of realism, respecting that any new approach could cause frustration due to slow progress - "it is a five to ten year gig". The impact of CoLs takes time and its longevity is important to its success:

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<sup>15</sup> Helen Timperley's spiral of inquiry has six parts and makes more explicit the process of developing collective professional agency either within a school or across a cluster.

So publicly I've got to make sure I'm buoyant, and I'm up for this and you know energetic, enthusiastic, and even when things aren't going well, just keep hammering the line. This is about innovation and doing something differently and let's make this work together.

Unwavering commitment united many of the themes running throughout this interview. From attendance in every single meeting to a genuine obligation to ensure the CoL does not “flounder or drop” after they stand down, this participant was fully engaged with the networking philosophy and viewed collaborative practices as the vehicle through which the CoL ideal can be realised.

### *Collaboration*

Despite their view that collaboration is an overused word, they firmly believed a CoL leader should model collaboration and develop the practice within others:

Communities of learning is about collaborating at different levels that we haven't done before. If you, as a lead principal, can't show and model collaboration and value it, try and strengthen it, then your CoL is knackered.

They defined collaboration as “working simply, working together, smarter than alone, so shared decision making (is) a really democratic way of resolving challenges and coming to solutions at different things”. They appreciated that knowledge does not sit with one person, especially not the CoL lead, and saw strength in building social capital for collective sense making. “The first year I used the expression silos of inquiry but now it's a group effort”. They have noticed that within-school teachers are now facilitating collaboration within their own schools, and felt the culture and environment has been set up to support “equality (so) everyone is on a level playing field”. They believed this has taken humility on their part and a focus on relational leadership to “keep people in the waka”.

It's all about relationships especially in the first two founding years. There are many occasions you are keeping people in the waka. Some schools went into CoLs, I believe, for ‘missing out’ issues – all the other schools are doing it so I need to do it. Some people went in just for the resource. So these people that are a bit funny about things will always be throwing stones at the roof and you have to manage them really strategically and sensitively.

In a collaborative environment, they recognised that competing agendas needed reconciling. When disagreements emerged, strong relationships provided the foundation to move forward. They illustrated this point with an example that required “progressing the issue while maintaining the relationship.” Conviction regarding their stance on the importance of relationships supported

their belief that progress was strengthened, rather than hindered, when relational leadership focused decision-making:

There were criticisms of me particularly by one principal who operates in a different way than me. That I was too interested in relationships and that I should be more hard-arsed with some of the principals... I'm always open to reflection but in the first two years this is all about relationships... but in a CoL you can't be dictatorial, you have no power over any other school or any other principal ... there is nothing that I could do other than appeal to their collective sense of why we were here.

This participant believed a collaborative, consultative and inclusive approach should be an innate quality that drives their work *most* of the time. On the one hand, they contended this philosophy was consistent in both their own school setting and when leading the CoL, and illustrated this by using the language of “our” and “we”. On the other hand, they recognised there would be times when a tough call presented itself:

Sometimes you have to draw a line and you have to make leadership decisions, and you can't collaborate and operate in a democratic way all the time. But I believe that, even in a CoL, if you are collaborative in nature most of the time then people will give you the times when you have to say no we are just doing this.

They saw trust and respect as values that underpinned others' confidence in them. Consequently, they considered their leadership role to be one of building relational trust to support distributed leadership as a model through which greater collaboration and innovation could develop.

### *Distributed leadership – from micro to macro management*

They defined distributive leadership as “empowering other people to make decisions, not micro-managing stuff, and giving people the trust to problem solve and work things out themselves.” They used coaching to support people to come up with their own solutions which they regarded to be “a big part of distributed leadership, because one of the goals of the CoL was to develop another level of middle leadership – leading from the middle”.

Admitting a tendency to micro-manage in the initial stages of becoming a CoL leader, they felt they have “loosened up” and can step back now because they “know when other people can do stuff without (them) having to do it and be there.” They described their activity in meetings as supportive because “leadership does require visibility and involvement without killing other peoples' ability to grow other leaders”. However, “it's a balance (they) don't get right all the time, far from it”. They believed that “under the current legislation and structured New Zealand schools’



(system)” it’s not possible to have “tight” frameworks and therefore their leadership style has become more “relaxed” with a propensity towards macro-management. They used the examples of goal setting and use of a shared teaching as inquiry tool to illustrate their point, and suggested that bottom up innovation spreads whilst top down expectations thwart movement toward new ways of thinking:

We struggled to get eight principals to write a strategic plan and so now I think, why are we even trying? We’ve got these broad overall goals – just let it flow. I wanted all eight schools doing the same thing and now it’s so contextualised... I wanted the same inquiry model ... and we had set templates that all the teachers had to use and now I’m like it doesn’t matter, all inquiry is the same. There are these people who have got the skills obviously, and experienced, if they want to do that inquiry model, let them do it.

### *The importance of providing context*

Central to their vision as a CoL leader is seeing the potential in others to be “drivers of learning”. They believed you need confidence in people to operate in their context for “maximum impact”. Therefore, they promoted contextualisation as key to success that requires space for innovative practice to emerge, not a system that “hems” people in. Forming shared commitment to goals when different agendas present can be a leadership challenge. Even though they approved this practice as an exemplar, they were keen to point out a need for a uniform system in the early stages of working together to enable “something to happen”. When movement occurs, “then people can diversify”.

They acknowledged that even though the system requires flexibility it also ensures accountability through common understandings. They saw uniformity as undesirable and unworkable “when the system has the schools set up to be self-individual identities.” During the last three years, their leadership direction has required reshaping to maximise benefits of networking practice:

Why quash innovation and enthusiasm saying I have to do this. If a teacher has got a really good idea about changing their practice, and doing what’s best for the kids, why narrow them down to this, this, and this? It’s been about pockets of innovation that are growing well across our CoL. It’s been spread – cascade them, defuse them around and let’s grow networks around those things.

External systems supported this participant’s vision and helpful MoE personnel “have always been there on the end of the phone ... I can’t fault their support and advice” They saw the MoE as having a vested interest in assuring that “these first set of people make it work”. In addition, capable Deputy Principals have been essential to ensure the smooth running of their own school to avoid their leadership “crumbling in both places”.

## *Overcoming barriers of MoE policy*

The policy constraint impeding Deputy Principals' participation in the CoL process, through restricted access to the roles, was a "struggle" for this participant in the early stages:

First of all there was disengagement because they were cut out of the picture. Then there was a bit of dissatisfaction because they were being asked to do some CoL tasks and not paid for it.

It was the participant's ability to build relational trust, by giving quality time to discussion, which enabled "buy-in." Through "familiarity, familiarising, being congenial to the next level" Deputy Principals could listen and learn from each other without "judgement". In addition, with the abolishment of National Standards and "us having a broader strategy ... people (could) see their place at the table a bit more." Once again, the participant highlighted contextualisation as supportive of inclusion.

Another MoE constraint was a lack of resourcing flexibility. They argued that it would have been more helpful to provide CoLs with the units and left the decision of distribution to them "so first of all the Deputy Principals would have got a unit straight away." They acknowledged that getting people together requires the monetary resource but claimed it "was rolled out without any consultation from the teachers' body."

They believed that the future of CoLs requires system-wide change asserting that:

We're talking about operating in two eco-systems here – collaborative eco-systems and the *Tomorrow's Schools*. Until they are able to merge a little bit I don't think we are truly going to get there.

Their dissatisfaction with *Tomorrow's Schools* is reinforced in the statement:

*Tomorrows Schools* has made the rich get richer and the poor poorer, I don't care what anybody says. The schools that really needed effective governors and management and leadership often haven't had it.

Their solution:

We went from such a centralised system to the exact opposite overnight. Surely there should be some sort of middle ground where a blended version of both of those can exist.

### *Sustainability under the current system*

Despite reservations about the very nature of the system itself, this participant was committed to sustaining across school partnerships for improved outcomes. Their belief in distributed leadership extended to the role of CoL leader and a recognition that everyone should have an opportunity to take on the role:

We have all got different skills and talents and at different times the CoL will need different leaders and so I don't think it should ever be a superintendent type role. I believe it should be rotated around the principals when they really want to do it.

They saw relational leadership as crucial in the formation stage but “different leaders are needed for different times” and now might be the time in their CoL for someone with specific skills in “driving through strategy.” They saw a change in leader as bringing fresh ideas and energy. Succession planning is already underway thus providing stability through a transition process once an appointment is confirmed.

### **Case Study C Findings**

Alignment between documentation and interview findings in case study C provided an outline of espoused theories and theory in action. Key points raised in discussion with the CoL leader were mirrored in their achievement plan. For instance, emphasis is placed on the success of the LCN initiative in supporting rewarding, collaborative partnerships across a network. Consequently, relational leadership is espoused as critical to maintaining mutual respect for engagement. Likewise, there was an understanding that inclusion of all stakeholders would be enhanced if credit was given to the unique context of individual schools. Documentation confirmed the value placed on this notion. A school's ability to adapt the teaching as inquiry cycle is an example of this theory in action. Deliberate acts of leadership were required to transition from micro to macro-management in support of this approach.

The CoL leader demonstrated genuine commitment to their role and the model of distributed leadership to develop collaboration and innovation. However, they saw both challenge and opportunity in operating structures that provided leadership opportunities for others. Missing from their documented personnel structure was the positioning of principals, senior leadership teams and existing middle leaders in each of the schools. This participant recognised the exclusion of

DPs as a potential barrier, and the challenge of principal autonomy and leadership style as an obstacle to overcome. Such radical reform of the system was recognised as inherently problematic when schools were set up as self-managing silos. System-wide change was advocated as the solution to ensuring positive engagement and future realisation of the vision for networks under the Community of Learning initiative.

## Principal members' questionnaire analysis

After receiving only one response out of twenty-seven, I have captured the themes arising from each question in the table below. There was insufficient data to write a narrative account.

**Table 5. 1Thematic analysis of questionnaire**

Question	Thematic Analysis
What key characteristics or dispositions should a CoL leader exhibit in order to provide effective CoL leadership?	Empathy, relational, collaborative, firm, decisive
How does your CoL leader support high levels of participation, collaboration and ownership across the CoL?	All voices heard, mutual respect, surveys, IT systems, face to face meetings
What do you perceive to have been the challenges for your CoL leader moving from sole school leadership to network leadership in your context?	Distributed leadership, workload, finding time, facilitating collaborative practices
What internal and/or external systems and processes are in place to enable sustainability of your CoL as you effectuate change to meet your goals?	Self-review, flexibility, future focused on challenges
What advice would you give to your CoL leader to facilitate better outcomes for your network?	Continue to do as they are doing now. They are a strong and much appreciated leader.

This response alone does not add value to the findings of this study and therefore, although interesting, is limited in providing contextual insights that advance understanding of the phenomenon of CoL leadership. Therefore, little weight has been placed on this final source of data.

## Conclusion

This chapter has presented the network practices expected of CoL leaders. MoE guidelines have been unpacked to illustrate protocols associated with role selection, appointment and expectations of CoL implementation, whilst interview evidence and internal documentation

translated how this played out in practice. Findings showed that suggested practice was aligned to participants' lived reality but current educational systems and processes created tensions.

Therefore, the phenomenon of CoL leadership is a complex practice existing in a landscape of self-managing schools. Hierarchical structures and positional power typically reside, within individual schools, which has the potential to conflict with the collaborative approach advocated by networking philosophy and IES policy. Responsibility lies with the CoL leader to facilitate collaborative practices for improved student outcomes. However, external demands of MoE policy alongside competing agendas of individual schools created as many barriers as it did opportunities. National Criteria has been established to ensure selection of an experienced and capable leader to the role. The espoused and enacted dispositions described by each participant corresponded with the criteria for effective practice.

All participants were incredibly positive about their role and the progress their CoL had made. They attributed this to a strong conviction regarding networking and collaborative leadership. They believed these were prerequisites for the role and enabled easy transition from sole school leader to leading across a network. They were all candid in their responses to the pressures involved in enabling cross-sector participation, yet commented on their personal growth as a leader – much of which was trial and error in the early stages.

Although there were many similarities between the case studies, the differences are reflected by the weight given to particular aspects of their personal journey. The subheadings created from analysis of their transcripts provided an insight into their interpretations of CoL leadership and gave meaning to the unique context of their experience.

The next chapter will provide a synthesis of the case findings to identify themes common across all three data sets. The discussion will focus on situating these themes within the policy context, as described in Chapter Two, and in relation to the review of literature, Chapter Three.

## **Chapter Six: Discussion**

This chapter examines the expectations of CoL leaders in relation to IES policy intentions, and the lived reality of these leaders as they effect change through network leadership. Initially, synthesis of the cross-case study findings and each CoL's internal documents form the basis for discussion. This analysis provides three key themes for consideration, and enables examination of the commonalities and contrasts between the experiences of the three CoL leaders. Finally, the cross-case findings and MoE document synthesis are located within the policy framework, and theoretical context of the literature review, to assess the degree of alignment and/or correlation between expectations and actuality of practice.

### **Cross-case findings**

Merging findings from each of the case CoLs allows thorough exploration of the 'quintain' or target that, in the context of this study, is principal CoL leadership. Similarities and differences emerge providing rich data for discussion. However, a collective case study approach does not intentionally detract from the individual or unique contextual experiences of each CoL. Indeed, when investigating a phenomenon such as networking, it is clear that contextualisation is key to successful engagement. Likewise, in a system reliant on relationships for sustainability of practice and outcomes, it would be ill-advised to ignore the social capital each school can contribute to the collective. However, sustainability also requires alignment between policy and practice. In a system of self-managing schools, the complexities of leading across a network abound.

**Table 6. 1 Synthesis of case findings**

	Case Study A findings	Case Study B findings	Case Study C findings	Cross-case findings
Engaging the collective	Engaging the collective has been made possible through inclusive team building with a relentless focus on goals, seeing the potential in others, working towards shared commitment and direction, and an ability to confront issues when they arise. There is alignment between internal policy and practice	Engaging the collective has centred on team building with a collective responsibility for goals, relationships, and the CoL leader's position regarding their role as a facilitator and the importance of lateral leadership structures. There is alignment between internal policy and practice	Engaging the collective has involved reconciling differences and ensuring the unique context of each school is prioritised through a focus on the relationships, distributed leadership and a shared commitment to goals. There is alignment between internal policy and practice	Engaging the collective has taken time, and an evolving focus on systems and practices to remedy opposition and/or apathy towards commitment to collective goals. MoE policy requirements regarding CoL roles have been unhelpful in supporting engagement due to lack of clarity over how these roles will co-exist with already established leadership structures in individual schools
Collaborative cultures and practices	Monitoring and evaluation procedures allow mechanisms for relational trust, shared language of learning and collaborative inquiry to permeate work of CoL. Knowledge between sectors has developed. MoE policy requirements related to achievement data seen as a challenge.	Methodology, pedagogy and evaluation practices underpin collaborative approach that is seeing gains in collective capacity and commitment to a shared direction. MoE policy requirements related to achievement data seen as a challenge.	Involvement in LCN has been invaluable in providing basis for collaborative relationships. As has the focus on teaching as inquiry as a practice through which improved student outcomes can be realised. MoE policy requirements related to achievement data seen as a challenge.	Systems and processes are established to provide the context through which social capital and knowledge transfer can occur but, despite the inclusion of performance indicators (in the form of hard data), improved student outcomes are yet to be realised.
Sustainability	Transition processes are in an establishment phase as shared understandings of teaching and learning across sectors develop. Monitoring and evaluation practices are established to provide strategic direction.	Cohesion across sectors is challenging when trying to bridge the cultural divides. Systems and processes need constant review to ensure sustainability.	Moving from micro to macro-management has been a challenge but a necessity due to the unique characteristics of individual schools and the dilemma of working within two eco-systems under the current self-managing school structure.	Sustainability of CoL initiative requires system-wide thinking (an understanding of interdependence) but also an understanding of the independence of each school within the current education system. Accountability therefore, is problematic and challenging.

## Cross-analysis of MoE documentation

Providing a synthesis of the document analysis enables links to be made between policy expectations and the reality of practice. Together with the key concepts arising from the literature review and the cross-case findings, a discussion of the complexity of network leadership in the CoL context can be explored.

**Table 6. 2 Synthesis of MoE documentation**

	Role Selection and Appointment information	Memorandum of Agreement	Guide for Schools and Kura	Tips and Starters: Working Together	Cross-analysis of the documents
Engaging the collective	Engaging others through development of professional relationships that engender trust, respect and challenge. Seeking commitment to shared goals.		Joint action required to mobilise collective responsibility towards pursuance of shared goals.	Engaging others through focus on relationships and mutual trust. Communication key to addressing problems and issues to prevent dis-engagement. Power differentials and status are recognised.	Relational trust and collective responsibility towards shared goals are key to engaging the collective but there is also recognition of positional power issues that could be best resolved through shared leadership structures.
Collaborative cultures and practices	Facilitating collaboration for collective responsibility to achieve shared goals.		Finding deliberate ways to build collaboration to progress towards collective goals. Encouraging collaboration to build capacity, expertise and innovation.	Shared leadership through collaborative inquiry	Collaborative practices include shared leadership and facilitating structures to support collaboration
Sustainability	Mutual support of all involved to sustain structures and processes for improved student outcomes.	Role changes require notification so that individuals can be remunerated accordingly.	Added value will be achieved through supportive systems and processes that enable school and CoL roles to work alongside each other for greatest impact on student outcomes.	Operating structures and systems need to acknowledge the 'uniqueness' of individual schools to support goal setting.	It is important to ensure formal CoL leadership roles coexist with established school structures for coherence in pursuit of collective direction towards shared goals.



## Engaging the collective

Communities of Learning promise to deliver improved student outcomes through collective responsibility for equity and excellence across multiple sites thus requiring the establishment of shared goals. Working towards common goals “has meant that people may have had to put aside their individual ideas for the benefit of all” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 2). Consequently, uniting diverse self-managing organisations towards a common cause requires leadership that is both emergent and relational - characteristics that each CoL leader recognised as imperative to success. Robinson et al. (2009) suggest that effective goal setting requires leaders to establish clarity and importance of goals as well as engendering a sense of commitment. All three case studies emphasised cohesive team building strategies as essential in establishing a functioning network and embody the structure through which shared commitment and direction can be realised. Empowering others through a team learning approach enables direction, alignment and commitment to a vision (Decuyper et al., 2010). Likewise, over time, the accumulation of solid evidence drives collective goal setting and achievement challenges common to all or most of the schools within the CoL (Ministry of Education, 2016b). The notion that goals can be “generally agreed” is recognition of the barriers that may hinder progress (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 2.). Therefore, engaging heterogeneous institutions in social practices that generate collective capacity is thwart with tension and each case has referred to the difficulties inherent in reconciling opposing agendas and perspectives, becoming more pronounced the larger the organisation becomes.

Coherence necessitates mutual engagement by all participants. Although this is a matter of diversity as much as homogeneity (Wenger, 1998), it relies on building sustainable interpersonal relationships based on “challenge, trust and respect” (Ministry of Education, 2016d, p. 8). Case study A highlighted their struggle maintaining relationships with school principals who would exercise autonomy despite being part of a collective agreement reached at CoL level. Their solution acknowledged the importance of compromise, mutual respect and the capacity to have open to learning conversations when confronting issues. Case Study C recognised the challenge of working alongside other principals when leadership styles conflicted. Not surprising, as distributed forms of leadership provide the space for conflict to emerge (Flessa, 2009). They demonstrated commitment to maintaining the relationship at all costs whilst progressing the issue.

In this respect, the CoL environment is an advocate for neither conformity nor submission. Opposition and challenge can be forms of participation and a CoL leader needs to steer such engagement towards a collective process of negotiation whereby inclusion in what matters provides a sense of belonging, motivation, and commitment. The MoE (2015) recognises that people work in different ways and suggest, “the group will need to accommodate different ways of working and thinking, which may change over time in light of new evidence” (p. 3). Interestingly, Case study B revealed little evidence of opposition at school principal level. Their interview was the most succinct of the three but clearly defined their views of CoL leader as a facilitator, an enabler. It was their understanding that engagement by others was what made things happen. On the one hand, it could be argued that the participant had enabled a social network of mutual influence and engagement where facilitation, not power or ownership prevailed. On the other hand, apathy and the concept of learned helplessness is also worthy of consideration. Raelin (2016) argues that the traditional, hierarchical view of leadership can be sustained due to a culture that focuses on individual achievement and finds security in someone being in charge.

The IES initiative views CoL roles as being complementary to existing leadership structures in place in individual schools. There is recognition in the documentation that “people within the group may have different levels of status and power but all have particular expertise to offer” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 3). Similarly, Bolden (2011), in his review of conceptual and empirical literature on the concept of distributed leadership, found three premises shared by most authors:

1. Leadership is an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals.
2. There is openness to the boundaries of leadership.
3. Varieties of expertise are distributed across the many not the few. (p. 257).

However, in practice, it has taken time and purposeful strategic planning to engage particular groups in the work of the CoL across all three case studies. The exclusion of APs, DPs and in some cases middle leaders (depending on the number of management units they receive) has created a major challenge for each CoL leader. Segregation of roles and responsibilities, and a lack of clarity about how the two will co-exist amplify the difficulties of engagement. Through deliberate leadership actions, each CoL has overcome initial barriers by placing value on the contribution all levels of leadership can make to the work of the CoL. In the words of CoL leader C “they could see their place at the table”. Dilemmas of this nature highlight disconnect between policy expectations and actual practice. The IES initiative advocates for flatter leadership

structures but has created formal roles with titles and monetary incentives. This contradicts policy rhetoric calling for collaborative practices that require information sharing, experience and expertise regardless of differentials of power and status (MoE, 2015). However, it would be naive to suggest that distributed forms of leadership can exist independently of solo forms of leadership in member schools, or that spreading leadership is always a good thing. What appears lacking is an understanding of how to maximise both formal and informal influences for upmost benefit.

## **Collaborative cultures and practices**

Establishing deliberate ways to build collaboration as well as developing systems and processes to make it work will assist CoLs to progress towards their collective goals (Ministry of Education, 2016b). Two of the three case studies emphasised collaborative leadership as a prerequisite for engaging others in practices to build social capital and allow for innovation and knowledge transfer. Modelling such an approach was imperative to enabling a shared understanding. Collective ownership of common goals and achievement challenges formed the basis for collaborative relationships but not one of the case studies could attest to improved student outcomes over the three-year period they had been operating. The IES has never claimed to be a 'short fix' solution and building relational trust across multiple sites takes time. Furthermore, ERO (2017a) concede that although there is a growing evidence base for effective network leadership, they have no idea how this will play out in the New Zealand context.

Despite the lack of empirical evidence to support these reforms as the solution to New Zealand's education achievement challenges, each CoL leader was resolute in their belief in the system. Each saw their role as one that empowered, facilitated, or released the potential in others to bring about collective responsibility and sustainable change. In this respect, their views align with the National Criteria expected of CoL leaders – leading collaborative professional learning to improve outcomes for all learners (Ministry of Education, 2016d). This is consistent with Prange et al. (2016) who claim that collective impact is one form of collaboration “designed specifically to solve a multi-faceted and complex problem by banding together multiple organizations from different sectors with a common goal” (p. 93). The CoL leaders discussed aspects of flat, lateral, or distributive leadership as necessary to provide the conditions for collaborative partnerships spanning organisations. Enabling others was key to their philosophy that knowledge production,

through the interplay of actors, allowed informal innovation to emerge and spread across the network. Bureaucratic functions such as the co-ordination of activities, as expressed in *Role Selection and Appointment Information* (MoE, 2016d), had a part to play in their role as CoL leader but these were isolated to management issues as opposed to generating creativity. CoL leader A espoused that leadership resides outside of the title aligning closely with contemporary views of leadership – it is in the interactions between actors that leadership takes place. However, the use of the phrase “exercising leadership is more about persuasion”, and alluding to the importance of leadership qualities that reside in formal positions, highlights the pull back towards more traditional views of leadership. In terms of managing complexity, there is allure in returning to the known as an antidote for ambiguity, challenge, and uncertainty – something CoL leaders need to be mindful of. System leadership advocates an emergent view of leadership not an elusive construct or as a set of standards to be practised (Fullan, 2004).

Relational trust is an attribute each case study raised as an unequivocal consequence of effective networking and collaboration. All three CoL leaders already had established trusting relationships through previous networking experiences prior to taking up their role. This supported collaborative relationships with others as trust and respect underpinned others’ confidence in them, which according to the MoE (2016b), translates well into a CoL context. CoL leader C suggested that a collaborative, consultative, and inclusive approach was essential to working in a democratic way, but when a tough call presented, they had the trust of the other principals to make that call. Interestingly, no case study reported trust as an issue between teachers working across schools on shared projects or inquiries. A lack of shared history, shared language and values between boundaries, are places for potential misunderstandings and confusion, particularly challenging when each teacher within the network is also accountable to their own organisation. Personal connections and quality relationships take time to build, as does trust (Ministry of Education, 2015). However, the case studies reported genuine engagement and connection to the work streams in progress. There was a sense of energy, purpose, and agency between participants that lead to positive outcomes for the CoL and revisions to their achievement plans based on evaluative commentary that propelled them forward. With the abolishment of National Standards, each CoL leader felt more empowered to produce a collaborative achievement plan based on the specific needs of the community rather than ‘ticking a box’ to satisfy mandatory policy. This success could be attributed to the CoL leaders’ predisposition to managing themselves emotionally as well as

rationally. The priority was given to creating a collaborative culture rather than just a restructure of the system, which according to Emihovich and Battaglia (2000), is the most difficult hurdle to overcome as “collaborative work is not done smoothly and neatly, nor can it be mandated into action” (p. 236).

## **Sustainability**

Sustainability of across school partnerships requires purposeful systems to ensure continuity and ongoing progress (Ministry of Education, 2015) with dual commitment to long-term and short-term results (Fullan, 2004). Momentum could easily abate with change of CoL leader or policy reform – the latter being a possibility in light of the recent directive preventing the formation of new CoLs. Two of the case studies had succession plans in place, deliberately contrived to minimise the impact of change. In two cases, the leader had begun a second term. One to maintain stability, the other at the request of the member principals. This suggests recognition and respect of their leadership capabilities by their peers. Competency is a trait highlighted in each of the case studies as a prerequisite for the role, and aligns with policy recommendations related to proven experience (Ministry of Education, 2016d). Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) argue that competence is bound by a community’s definition of it. There is social negotiation of what constitutes competence and a CoL leader is accountable to that competence. Competence, as recognised by the participants in each of the case studies, encompassed emotional and relational aspects of leadership rather than organisational or administrative qualities. However, one participant understood their limitations and believed that different skills are required at different times, and at different phases of a CoL’s development, such as relational in the early stages of engagement and then strategic vision to lead the CoL forward. This is consistent with Feys and Devos (2015) and Smith and Wohlstetter (2001) whose phased approaches to network leadership are described in Chapter Three. Despite the seductive appeal of salary allowances for principal CoL leaders, only one of the CoLs had an incident of contested leadership. Policy dictates that the ‘formal’ role of CoL leader cannot be shared thus suggesting a status of autonomy or ownership aligned with the title. This contradicts somewhat the idea that leadership resides in the interactions between people, not in the authority of the position, highlighting the challenge faced by CoL leaders as they adapt to the need for self-organising, knowledge generating partnerships, whilst working within the operational confines of policy expectations.

Internal accountability is a complex dichotomy between the expectations of individual schools and that of the CoL and requires strategic direction for sustainability. It is important therefore to take “time to actively share and understand more deeply about the uniqueness of each kura/school” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 3). In theory, it would be advantageous for accountability in one location to be an expression of the other. However, in practice this ideal puts pressure on the CoL leader to bridge the cultural divide between institutions thereby harnessing the capability of the network to sustain improvement of student outcomes for all. Fullan (2004) asserts that more system thinkers are needed to transform the system as “one indicator of collective identity is when individual school heads become almost as concerned about the success of other schools as they are about their own school” (p. 8). This requires strategies to support empowerment and mutual influence. The ‘inquiry cycle’ example provided by CoL leader C demonstrated their flexibility of approach when faced with the dilemma of meeting the needs of both the network and individual schools. A prescriptive inquiry process constrained practice and required the leader to modify their predisposition of micro-managing. A more relaxed, macro approach to leadership resulted. Therefore, although inquiry was a non-negotiable, how this actuated became an individual school prerogative. Space created innovation to emerge across the CoL. Although each case study had different approaches to achieving their goals, it was evident that the systems, processes, and strategies in place provided a framework based on the unique context of each CoL. Therefore, both internal and external forces shape the system and CoL leaders need to adapt to its complexity when managing the interrelationship between the micro and macro for sustainability.

External accountability measures such as MoE policy pressure for data collection (in the form of the now defunct National Standards), and achievement plan formation was considered mechanical and generalised by CoL leader A. By the time their achievement plan was signed off, the data expressed in the document was outdated and of little use. Every case study commented on a lack of support from the Ministry for ‘early adopters’. However, this did not stop them rising to the challenge of progressing their collaborative enterprise for sustainable outcomes, irrespective of inadequate professional learning development or resourcing inflexibility. Although the Ministry were willing to offer support, they too were coming to grips with radical reform to an education system that, according to participant C, was trying to operate between two eco-systems. Sustainability therefore, rests with the CoL leader’s aptitude to make sense of their role within a dynamic and conflictual policy environment.

## **Policy, theory and practice – locating the findings of this study**

New Zealand's neoliberal education policies of the 1980s resulted in the *Tomorrow's School* reforms aimed at decentralising Department of Education control in support of a self-management system. Discontent had been building with both the Government and the profession regarding equity, accountability, and efficiency. Responsibility, repositioned at local level, placed individual schools and their Boards of Trustees in an unenviable position of working between two systems that continued to endorse both internal and external mechanisms for control and accountability. The introduction of the IES policy is the latest attempt to reshape patterns of power and control. It shifted focus from individual responsibility to collective responsibility, across a network of schools, to solve the problems of student achievement. This shift in the system now situated collaborative practice as the focus on which sustainable change could be realised.

There is shared understanding in the literature review (discussed in Chapter Three) that interdependence is more powerful than independence, and challenging hierarchical school structures has the potential to reduce isolation thus increasing professional interaction. However, the current educational environment of Communities of Learning provides as many challenges as it does solutions. The case studies revealed there are still incongruent forces operating as barriers to practice. On the one hand, centrally mandated policies related to the roles, responsibilities and salary structures of CoL positions set conditions that conflict with already established leadership structures at individual school level. Furthermore, bottom up innovation (although the term 'bottom up' still suggests a hierarchical view of leadership) supported by Ministry funding is yet to live up to its claims of improving outcomes through capitalising on collaborative expertise for knowledge building and transfer. Therefore, CoL leaders are facilitating the work of their community amid a landscape of contrary agendas and conflicting interests. On the other hand, all three case schools had found ways to align their practice with policy requirements and developed leadership capabilities and/or strategies to solve problems they encountered along the way. Despite lack of Ministry support in the early stages of their development, they remained heavily invested in their commitment to the ideal of networking as the solution to raising student outcomes, through a tenacious conviction to the philosophy of system leadership and collaboration as a vehicle for sustainable change. Simkins (2005) suggests "the reality, of course, is that policy arenas are

complex places in which a range of desirable, and not always consistent, values and purposes are held in tension” (p. 13).

In each of the three case studies, engagement of all stakeholders in the process of collaborative enterprise has exposed similar tensions as those expressed in the literature, particularly those related to new and existing forms of leadership (Townsend, 2015). Feys and Devos (2015) argue that collaboration has become a policy response through the introduction of incentivised networks with varying degrees of success and often motivated by egoistic gains. Incentives, if viewed through this lens, are therefore a pragmatic solution to stimulate collaboration between schools that need a push to get collaboration started. Although it is difficult to ascertain an individual’s agenda, each of the three CoL leaders did not present as motivated by intrinsic reward, monetary gain or position. Theirs was not a self-serving motive, but one inspired by a greater purpose, with a desire to empower their wider community for the benefit of all students. As an alternative to Feys and Devos’ (2015) claim, Fullan and Quinn (2016) regard motivational resourcing, not in an incentivised way, but one that builds informal accountability through establishing “greater focus, capacity and commitment at the level of day to day practice” (p. 119). However, each case revealed this precept compromised through interactions with other member principals. Although, the role of CoL leader and principal members should co-exist in a collegial consensus of commitment and direction, principal autonomy exercised at individual school level, disrupted the parameters of agreement between CoL members in examples given by two of the three cases. There are various reasons for joining a CoL that impact on a principal’s ability to engage in the networking philosophy fully. For instance, ERO (2017a) uncovered differing motives for joining a CoL with some principals feeling isolated from the process, feeling they might miss out, or pressured into joining without clear understanding of purpose. Whatever the reason, if principal members assume their role to be one of positional power, particularly within their own school context, a collaborative leadership approach is contrary to how they engage in leadership practice at a personal level. Consistent with the literature review on hybrid notions of leadership, a predisposition to viewing power as the property of an individual is at odds with the distributed forms of leadership necessary to enable spontaneous acts of leadership to emerge as and when needed. Therefore, although each CoL leader enabled systems and processes to support facilitation of their work streams, it took skills of negotiation, dialogic conversations, and qualities of humility, respect, and patience to ensure inclusion of every school. Over time, there has been



a shift in configurations of leadership in each CoL and more sustainable interaction between the CoL roles and existing leadership structures, a necessity within a network (Townsend, 2015). However, guiding documents do little to support how CoL leaders can co-ordinate cross boundary working when others have formal line accountability to someone else.

Policy and network literature recognises the necessity to connect with others and develop professional cultures in boundary spanning ways with a strong emphasis on building relational trust – a construct highlighted as essential by all three case studies too. Feys and Devos (2015) suggest that although the schools they surveyed generally entered a network with a ‘pessimistic’ perspective, half of those changed their views over time. At the conclusion of their study, the schools held a more positive outlook in recognition of the benefits it brought to their organisation and the broader network. This outcome aligns with the experiences of the three CoLs, evidenced by their evaluation and review of their achievement challenges that became more contextualised as time went on. In addition, previous collaboration in the LCN initiative had established constructive and rewarding relationships based on mutual trust, confidence, and common understandings. Literature suggests that schools with a common history, and leaders who understand the context of their local area, are more likely to effect change when working in a larger network. However, with a multitude of interests to reconcile and with so many diverse starting points, complexity increases and so does the difficulty of engendering strong identification (Bolam et al., 2005). ERO (2017a) found instances of resistance from principals when working with across-school teachers concerning their role in the critique of data and practice. They suggest this may be a result of CoLs not resolving matters of relational trust and communication at the early stages of development. Although PPTA (2017) contend the CoL leader appointment process deals with this issue, it is unrealistic to expect one person to have the capacity to appease everyone’s sensitivities. Personal responsibility should also reside in the collaborative space. Policy negotiations recognised the conflict between ‘official’ title names and the purpose of collaborative leadership and shared action. Therefore, although network literature and policy documentation discuss the on-going professional needs of network leaders to fulfil their roles with credibility and success, it is necessary to develop effective network practice, for all participants, to bring about cohesion and the conditions for sustainability.

Collaboration is a social construct heavily reliant on what people bring to the table. The literature and policy reviews, presented in previous chapters, discuss the notion that enhancing social capital through highly developed collaborative structures and new models of leadership, ultimately, will lead to strengthened professional practice and improved student outcomes. However, with increased diversity of views, opinions and personal biographies of participants, there is no guarantee of success. Individual teachers may have quite fixed mental models of practice and therefore take polarised positions when faced with innovative changes to practice. For some teachers, change is not just a cognitive process but is embroiled in personal values and expectations seen as threatening and confrontational (Dooner et al., 2008). Within each CoL, there were no reports of dissatisfaction with the collaborative practice experienced by within-school teachers. In fact, quite the opposite occurred and effective practice evolved through professional interactions for the benefit of the CoL. However, according to one participant, internal politics did play a role in determining the dissemination of collaborative practice when trying to reach consensus through the distribution of information and resources. ERO (2017a) claim the most effective resource for effective collaboration is time. Although schools have been allocated 'inquiry time' linked to annual staffing adjustments, all CoLs felt challenged when trying to find mutually convenient times to participate in meaningful and productive exchanges. Each participant accentuated the importance of team building and mutual engagement as prerequisites for success. Therefore, they developed creative systems to support shared activity within the confines of policy. For these reasons, it is significant that the title Communities of Schools changed to Communities of Learning communicating a clear message of collective involvement in knowledge generation.

Purposeful collaboration is recognised as an effective strategy employed by high performing education systems for sustainable improvement (MoE, 2014c), and system leadership as a means of managing the complexity implicit in a network (Hatcher, 2008). Despite a prevalence of literature on the potential of professional learning communities (PLCs), there is little scholarly research on the impacts of such structures on student achievement, and also insufficient evidence to assume that conditions associated with effective PLCs can easily transfer to a network of schools (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Therefore, sustainability of the CoL initiative relies on adaptive CoL leaders equipped to deal with a plethora of new challenges, not yet truly appreciated. Peurach et al. (2016) argue that "there is little to suggest that hubs and schools have the

foundation - the essential strategies and operational supports - to manage that which is to be continuously improved: intellectual capital" (p. 608). Yet, the cases in this study have provided evidence of perseverance and resilience. They were proactive in seeking relevant professional development and found ways to overcome the bureaucratic demands of policy through engagement of formal leaders within their individual schools.

However, it is not safe to infer that all cross-school networks will succeed. Patterson (2014) concludes, "sometimes success comes down to luck, timing, and the personalities and commitments of people involved" (p. 4). ERO (2017a) recognises variance exists between CoLs, just as variance invariably exists between schools within a CoL. This suggests contrasting operational structures - those who work tacitly and reactively and those who work more explicitly and proactively. One strategy all participants discussed as essential to success was the use of internal expertise to support contextualisation of their work. Their pooled resource, internal expertise, increased efficacy of those involved for greater impact. On the other hand, policy endorses the use of expert partners, particularly in the early stages of development, to support the foundation work of articulating purpose and direction through the building of relational trust (ERO, 2017a). CoL leaders have a responsibility to facilitate the operating structures decided upon by their agreed stewardship/governance group. Designing a system that maximises participation of all leaders and teachers in the work of the CoL, while recognising the real time constraints that prevent active participation requires, as the literature suggests, adaptive leadership. DeRue (2011) recognises the "social complexities and emergent properties of leadership in contemporary organizations" (p. 145). Leading and following in this context enables the collective to develop and adapt in dynamic ways – a process of significant challenge for CoL leaders.

Together, the literature and policy reviews highlight the importance of professional learning to support development of, and mechanisms for, collaborative practice in cross-school networking. At present, focus is on the CoL leader as a facilitator and system leader. However, the deliberate acts of change leadership, such as participant B's development of a shared language for collaboration and co-operation, highlight the importance that collaborative practice requires understanding, commitment and involvement by everyone in the organisation. Considering the need to sustain a positive culture that encourages open mind-sets and innovative inquiries, and

mitigates conflicts resulting from absence of trust and power struggles, it would seem pertinent to explore professional learning opportunities beyond the confines of those with formal CoL roles. Fullan (2004) advocates the need for fostering system leadership across all levels to engage bigger picture thinking and actions that affect larger parts of the system. However, managing the phases of stakeholder involvement requires strategic intent. Each of the case studies has begun with a narrow focus and then widened their stakeholder base to activate teacher connections, thus strengthening their people resource. They recognised the need to work smartly for impact. Engagement of principal members was the key focus in the initial set-up phase, rightly so given the dual function of a CoL – to enable individual schools to fulfil their own school vision whilst building capacity across a network of schools. Although each participant CoL leader was passionate about their role and the potential of networking, not all principal members shared their philosophical standpoint. Given the nature of the tensions exposed in this study it would be appropriate to consider policy directives related to leadership of the CoL. ERO (2017a) claim the CoL lead would need a “considerably different skill set that doesn’t really lend itself to being passed around” (p. 19). Despite the fact that many principals would not wish to take up the role, deficit thinking is conspicuous in this statement. The literature review highlights complexity as inevitable in leading change in today’s educational landscape. This being so, it is reasonable to expect that all principals will need an understanding of, and skills in, creating the conditions for sustainable development and improved student outcomes within their own organisation, thereby contributing to sustainable outcomes across the CoL. Therefore, high expectations of all lead professionals (including those without formal CoL titles) in a network is worthy of consideration when designing professional learning opportunities to build capacity across the system.

## **Conclusion**

The role of the CoL leader, within the confines of this study, has highlighted the complexity involved in negotiating the political and practical landscape of practice inherent in leading a Community of Learning (CoL) in New Zealand. Overcoming challenges to practice included a focus on engagement of stakeholders, particularly those estranged from roles dictated by policy reform. Consequently, each CoL leader created opportunities for rich collaborative practices to evolve dependent on emerging leadership and shared understanding of direction. Differences in approach highlighted the need for adaptive leadership according to the context of individual CoLs.

Therefore, sustainability requires not only system leadership but also an education system that provides enough flexibility for CoL leaders to shape their individual contexts and environments. With such an overhaul to the *Tomorrow's School* self-management system, engaging diversity of voice, values, leadership styles and cultures across schools are concepts thwart with tension. These will be explored further in Chapter Seven, as will implications for future practice, limitations of the study and possible areas for further research.

# Chapter Seven: Conclusion

## Introduction

This thesis research has highlighted the complexities involved in leading a network formed through a national policy initiative. The IES initiative challenged the education sector to consider an official approach for using the collective. This is supposedly enhanced through collaborative relationships, spanning schools and crossing educational sectors. In New Zealand, Communities of Learning (CoLs) are currently presented as the structure through which this is expected to be realised. However, this chapter argues the system, still in the early stages of development despite being in operation for four years, needs to take a closer look at aligning policy with the network perspective to maximise the benefits of building and sustaining educational connections. The case studies reveal both the successes and challenges of leading across a network of schools. Therefore, the first section of this chapter locates the findings through the key aim and questions that guided this research. Following this, limitations and implications of the study are presented along with suggested areas for future research.

## Research objectives

*Research aim: To identify the practices that embody successful network leadership by the principal CoL leader.*

The aim of this research has enabled both interrogation of policy and principal accounts of practice as it pertains to the role of CoL leader. The IES policy and subsequent Ministry of Education guidelines provided the rationale and recommendations for effective principal CoL leadership, whilst the reality of practice highlighted the tension between policy intent and outcomes. However, the term 'successful' is difficult to discern, as impact is subjective. In this thesis research, with only one response from the principal member questionnaires, success may be determined from the CoL leader's point of view alone. The following research questions were designed to contribute to the knowledge base relevant to leadership network practices, with a view to supporting those faced with the challenge of leading across multiple school sites.

*Research question: What network leadership practices does policy expect of school principals in Communities of Learning?*

National Criteria have been established to ensure principals have the necessary experience, skills and attributes to facilitate effective collaborative practices across their CoL (MoE, 2016d). Under the heading of 'Professional Knowledge in Practice – Ako', successful practice and understanding includes: bi-cultural knowledge and practice, evidence-based collective inquiry, strategic leadership and change-management to strengthen leadership and teacher capability, and collaborative professional learning to improve outcomes for diverse learners. In addition, focus areas relating to values, relationships and engagement provide standards of practice to lead and sustain a CoL (MoE, 2016d). Alongside these expectations, the IES policy refers to system leadership as a vehicle through which on-going improvements to performance can be accomplished.

According to Boylan (2016) there are three meanings associated with the term system leadership and each was apparent in the narratives provided by the case studies. The CoL leaders in this study saw themselves as leaders of education, not just leaders within their school – the meso-system. They believed this was a prerequisite for the role of CoL leader and imperative for co-ordinating the activities of the CoL. There was recognition that the systemic challenges faced by New Zealand education go beyond organisational self-interest to an understanding that organisational success depends on creating cohesion within the larger system of which their schools were a part. Macro-system leadership was exercised through the realisation that complex problems require solutions beyond those of an individual school working in isolation and shifts focus from pursuing symptomatic fixes to generating co-created future potential for system-wide change. In this respect, CoL leaders needed to enable the conditions and space for change that could eventually cause new practices to be self-sustaining. This required a micro-level of system leadership supported by an adaptive style. Each CoL leader discussed aspects of practice that align closely to literature on complexity theory, particularly regarding the reciprocity of interchangeable systems when attempting to reconcile competing agendas and bridge cultural divides. However, CoL leadership is not merely a structural change of role, it requires behavioural changes for efficiency.

Consequently, collaborative leadership underpinned by strong relational leadership skills were practices espoused by the participants as essential to success. The themes of engaging the collective, collaborative cultures and practices, and sustainability emerged from the findings and feature strongly in network literature. Through the lens of a network, leadership can be viewed as a social process that unites the collective towards common goals and outcomes. Such a social process requires a formal leader to build relational trust in order that sustainable collaborative practices can evolve. Elgie et al. (2008) claim that relationships are the 'connective tissue' that provide the social capital necessary for people to work together over time. To exploit fully the power of the collective, a formal leader also needs to provide opportunities for informal leadership to emerge. Enabling others to 'step up' builds capacity and transforms the culture from reliance on command-and-control hierarchies to adaptive networks. Edwards (2011) claims that distributed leadership could be seen as both reflecting and engendering a sense of community amongst members" (p. 305). Therefore, it is necessary to look beyond position, a perspective acknowledged by all CoL leaders. Although they recognised their position as complimentary to existing school leadership structures, others' perceptions of their own roles and responsibilities within the CoL context caused occasional discord when practices conflicted with personal agendas. Principal autonomy is a phenomenon lacking exposure in both policy and literature reviews, yet it is a fundamental behavioural challenge for CoL leaders as they work towards developing practices to build collective capacity.

*Research question: How do CoL leaders experience the challenge of aligning policy expectations with the reality of practice?*

Despite endorsement by their principal colleagues, two of the CoL leaders expressed tensions when working with particular principal members in their network. This was perceived as a particular challenge when aligning policy expectations with the reality of practice. The system of Communities of Schools (CoLs) has simultaneously positioned principals as leading from the top of their own institutions but leading from the middle in the CoL context. This requires principals to hold both the interests of their schools alongside those of the CoL. If individual principals do not consider themselves system leaders then the fluidity required to transverse boundaries for



increased effectiveness is limited. These dual responsibilities of leadership have the potential to inhibit the operational strength of the CoL and create divisions and inequities within the system. Gronn (2009) argues that individual leaders still figure prominently in distributed leadership forms and “continue to exercise significant and disproportionate influence in comparison with other individual colleagues” (p. 392). Each of the CoL leaders considered themselves learners and believed they were growing as system leaders as they worked to transform relationships among the people who shape the network. This required a depth of commitment and energy. However, the CoL leaders referred to disengagement of some principals within their network when it came to following through on agreed collective decisions. There could be many reasons for these behaviours. Firstly, as discussed in the previous chapter, individual principals have various reasons for joining a CoL, not all of which relate to a belief in the networking philosophy. If they perceive the CoL as a mechanism for accessing resources, they may not invest of their time or their people if they cannot see immediate benefit to their own organisation. Secondly, minimum effort may result when goals are de-contextualised or set as the result of compliance to MoE directives – a feature of early achievement challenge plans resulting from National Standards. Finally, with increased complexity through engagement with multiple cultural contexts, direction and clarity can be lost in translation. This steers individuals back towards what is best for their own school rather than the opportunities that present by working collaboratively across the network.

The experience of collaboration has also been a key transition challenge. All CoL leaders believed they had a collaborative approach to leadership and understood the need to develop relational trust through their actions, competence and evolving systems and processes. However, policy had not accounted for the effects of excluding APs and DPs from the operational structure of the CoL. Network literature claims its design to be one of flexibility that counters the uniform weaknesses of policy driven practices and bureaucracies, and requires co-ordination across groups of practitioners working together (Townsend, 2015). Therefore, the flow of knowledge is compromised if one particular group is set aside at the expense of another. Each case study revealed this as a perception, and a weakness of the system. However, the literature has shown formal and informal leadership necessary to the effective functioning of a network. Perhaps then, it is the interplay of existing school structures and the newly created CoL roles that needs reconsideration. After all, if a hybrid configuration of leadership is to benefit the work of the

network, everyone needs to commit to the co-existence of different leadership roles and responsibilities. Bolden and Petrov (2014) build on this point and assert “simply advocating a distributed or shared approach to leadership is unlikely to have a positive impact in the absence of a clear sense of what constitutes a more or less configuration of leadership practice and pattern of social influence” (p. 415). This requires a CoL leader to undertake the position of facilitator to ensure positive influence derives from the different configurations of leadership. All three CoL leaders found this transition relatively straightforward and created resourceful ways of involving APs and DPs in strategic planning activities.

Much of the discourse regarding system leadership and networking approaches focuses on the role of the CoL leader. However, each case study exposed a lack of support from the Ministry of Education in the early stages of implementation. Professional development opportunities were limited and Ministry advisors were themselves inexperienced in effective network leadership approaches. However, each CoL leader demonstrated a resilient and tenacious approach to their own personal development. They concur that the situation has improved more recently but did not mention the use of an external partner to support the change management process during the formation stage of their CoL. This is a policy recommendation and supported by funding. Although external expertise had been sought to facilitate leadership development of other formal CoL positions, they spoke enthusiastically about the formation of between school collaborations to support student progression. The challenge in this regard related to finding quality time for scaffolding leadership practice as a community activity to maximise the potential of all teachers who could positively influence teaching and learning. They valued collective efficacy and agency, and prioritised it.

The pressures of policy requirements were felt in the very first stage of implementation. The formulation of their first achievement plans needed to account for individual school priorities alongside CoL direction. Aligning policy requirements whilst motivating all stakeholders to support CoL initiatives was a potential barrier. However, each CoL leader strategically used the resources of time, and professional learning opportunities, to mobilise intellectual and social capital in order to grow potential and manage change and transformation. In subsequent achievement plans, there was a deliberate shift from informed prescription to informed professional judgement when developing collective goals. The CoL leaders recognised the difficulties inherent in overcoming

inter-professional barriers arising from the cultural divide of values systems and work practices. They described a “let’s just get on and do it” attitude as fundamental in providing smooth transitions into collective enterprise. They modelled a positive mind-set and aimed to build sustainable collaborative cultures despite the confines within CoL related policy.

*Research question: How can principals and their schools sustain effective network practices?*

This research question is phrased to incorporate the effectiveness of the collective, not just the CoL leader. Therefore, mutual influence is required by all in a network to sustain innovative practices and knowledge transfer through the sharing of good practice. However, influence can be misdirected and focused on insignificant actions. The following quote by Simkins (2005) addresses the reality and experience of all three CoL leaders as they expressed their deliberate acts of leadership to overcome network challenges related to sustainability:

Boundary crossing is never easy: differences in cultural assumptions and practices as well as concerns about the future distribution of power and influence require extremely sensitive handling and are likely to affect significantly conceptions of appropriate forms of leadership in future years. (p.19).

Shared understandings of the network perspective through a system leader lens need to filtrate through the management levels within a school so that all teachers understand the potential of working in partnership for improved student outcomes. Elgie et al. (2008) claim that networks “move attention away from a preoccupation with micro-level change at the individual site and function at the meso-level to strengthen interconnections and spread innovation across all levels” (p. 113). If the network is to realise its potential, the knowledge and understanding of network practices and expectations cannot reside with the CoL leader alone. Ownership requires all actors to make sense of the environment they are working in and lead it. Townsend (2015) contrasts leadership configurations and claims that a hybrid approach allows the spread of leadership “when it arises through influence derived from relationships people form through work” (p. 732). A common thread running through each of the case studies was the CoL leaders’ faith in the potential of others. They recognised others as the drivers of reform. Through the interactions of both formal leaders and teachers within the network, capacity and sustainability of collaborative practices and hybrid configurations of leadership could be realised. However, tensions existed,

possibly because engaging the collective requires more than the establishment of collaborative cultures, it requires the transformation of mind-sets. Patterson (2014) argues that the self-managing New Zealand school system has narrowed thinking thereby restricting the spread of good practice between schools. The title of her report encapsulates the ideal that 'no school is an island'. Therefore, major shifts towards system thinking are required to transform education to a point where all principals think of themselves as a system leader with responsibility for student outcomes beyond the confines of their class or their school. Sustainability requires integration not segregation as educators process the need to see themselves as one part of the whole.

In the same way, it would be reasonable to expect that all formal leaders should understand the network perspective to appreciate the concept of lateral forms of leadership within the CoL context. Kuusisaari (2014) claims that social support enables reciprocal learning and the development of distributed expertise when actors have access to a wide range of ideas only possible through collaborative exchanges. Therefore, as CoLs navigate new vertical co-dependent relationships, moving between vertical and horizontal forms of leadership become essential to effective team building and growth of social capital. Marsh (2012) discusses communities as a place where people have a sense of belonging and are nurtured to realise their potential. Fostering a 'we' commitment was highlighted in the findings as language fundamental to the work of CoL leaders. However, the challenge of 'we', in accountability terms, is two-fold as it obligates principals and their schools to serve the interests of the CoL as well as the locality of their school. The network literature, visited in Chapter Three, supports MoE rhetoric that CoL roles and existing school leadership structures are necessary for sustained outcomes. Therefore, to sustain effective practices, and grow social capital, it is necessary "to find complementary synergy while appreciating differences" (Fullan, 2004, p. 12). Transparent systems and processes provided the structure through which to engage a shift in thinking and practice within the context of this study. Each CoL leader took different approaches to appointment of roles – either appointing across-school leaders first or within-school teachers. Deliberate choices were made according to the context and knowledge of their CoL. However, there was recognition of early mistakes and it took courage and ongoing commitment to revise frameworks and structures for greater effect. Despite this, finding time to bring the collective together for meaningful collaborative exchanges was limiting. Collective goal setting and mutually reinforcing activities were presented as structures through which cohesion could be developed. Anderson and Sun (2015) argue that leaders are

instrumental in encouraging the networking behaviours of others. By increasing the social capital between actors, the social capital available to the leader is increased. However, this research has highlighted the tensions of principal autonomy in decision making. Therefore, although outside the scope of this study, it would be interesting to consult with formal leaders in their schools to establish how views of positional power play out in the exchanges between the CoL roles and individual school leadership structures. After all, sustainability is dependent on system leadership, deep learning through engaging the collective in collaborative practices where hybrid forms of leadership exist, and negotiation of the complex and often-erratic arena of educational policy.

## **Research limitations**

As outlined in Chapter Four, the internal validity of this research is compromised by the inability to triangulate the views of the CoL leaders with principal members of their CoLs. The intended research design was established to provide some methodological triangulation. However, the realised research design has incorporated multiple methods due to the absence of responses from principal members of each CoL. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) offer a view that triangulation infers one correct or final conclusion from the corroboration of data. This may not be the case or even desirable in a qualitative case study where subjectivity is recognised. This said, the one response did not contradict findings from the interviews, but offered support in terms of recognising the relational nature of CoL leadership, the need for mutual respect, and development of collaborative and distributed leadership practices. In addition, there was more convergence than divergence between the individual case studies. Using a larger sample may have allowed for more contrasts to emerge. Furthermore, as these CoLs were the 'early adopters' it could be argued that their previous networking experiences and predisposition to system leadership had a positive effect on how their network developed. Therefore, the readers of this thesis will need to judge for themselves if the findings are transferable to their context. This may not be the experience of all CoLs.

Taking an interpretative approach has enabled meaning and knowledge creation from the lived experiences of CoL leaders as they manoeuvred the political landscape of network leadership. However, the interviews were limited by time constraints and, although participant validation of the transcripts and findings were sought, interviews only captured viewpoints at that moment in

time. A longitudinal study or the ability to return to participants after the initial interviews were coded would have provided an opportunity for deeper exploration of the emerging themes. In this respect, it is important that readers' perceptions of the findings, and the resulting discussion and conclusions, are positioned in the context of this small collective case study to avoid misinterpretation of the realities of CoL leadership. Complexities are subjective, as are the effects of leadership actions, therefore readers need to see what is missing not just what is presented.

## **Research implications**

The concepts embodied within the research title “(Re)locating New Zealand school principals as leaders in school networks: Leadership in Communities of Learning”, have implications for individual schools as well as principal CoL leadership, when working within a networked approach aimed at sustaining improved outcomes for students. Although the CoL leader has responsibility for facilitating and co-ordinating the work of the CoL, responsibility is also placed on participating schools to invest and adopt networking philosophy.

Effective CoL networks may be defined as those that make a difference to the outcomes of all students through their focus on shared goals in satisfaction of both individual and collective aims. Undertaking a networking approach requires understanding by the whole school community of how collaborative practices and distributed leadership roles will be employed across and within schools. These structures are needed to support the mutual benefits of collective efficacy and agency for sustained improvements to teaching and learning. This implies focus on enabling the conditions through which hybrid approaches to leadership can thrive, thus generating greater system awareness by way of integrating both formal and informal leadership. If viewed through the lens of system-wide leadership, roles will need to be re-defined, existing roles played out in different ways, and new roles created to exercise agency when required. However, Bolden (2011) expresses caution in how distributed forms of leadership are utilised. He claims they are not necessarily inclusive or democratic, and may simply describe leadership practice rather than providing a framework for developing leadership. Hargreaves and Fink (2008) contend that distributed leadership should be seen as a democracy, not as a motivational device used by policy reforms for the purpose of delivering government targets.

Therefore, undertakings of this complexity reside outside the capacity of an individual CoL leader to make a difference when working within the boundaries of current policy mandates. CoL leader C summarised his dissatisfaction with the system by arguing that a blended version of both the *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms and the IES initiative was needed to support network development and organisational effectiveness. If CoL leadership is to leverage the potential of the network to spur change and transformation, then professional learning and development is required for all those involved in network activity.

Implications for leadership training are significant when viewing development through a network lens, particularly to enable hybrid forms of leadership to emerge. Network practices require the ability to establish and sustain professional working relationships where trust and mutual respect underpin the development of social capital. Therefore, highly tuned social practices are necessary to capitalise on the knowledge diversity present in collaborative spaces. Decuyper et al. (2010) contend that team learning “requires the dialogic space amongst team members in which communicative behaviours such as sharing, co-construction and constructive conflict are balanced” (p. 111). CoL leader A discussed, in some detail, their positive experience of professional learning related to ‘open to learning conversations’. As their conversational skills developed, they felt more confident in conflict resolution, and dealing with tensions inherent in team learning and collaboration. Professional leadership training traditionally offers those in formal leadership positions the opportunity to upskill. The findings in this study are consistent with this notion as CoL leaders discussed the professional development initiatives they had organised to support their across and within-school teachers. However, as their collaborative practices became more established, ‘cluster days’ provided a platform for all teachers across the network of schools to come together for focused professional learning. Therefore, professional development linked to collaborative inquiry, dialogic skills (including open to learning conversations), coaching techniques and mentoring, are practices that would support the development of social capital. However, timetables are full and meeting expectations before and after school add to an already heavy workload for teachers. If used strategically, professional learning in the aforementioned practices may enhance capacity at both individual school and network level. However, school leaders will need to apply systems thinking to prioritise contextualised professional learning for their teachers whilst also considering the development needed to sustain an effective network.

## **Recommended areas for further research**

At the time of writing, the New Zealand Government has put a halt on the creation of new CoLs due to budgetary constraints. Furthermore, although the Tomorrow's School Taskforce (2018) has reported back to the Minister for Education, the outcomes are yet to be published. However, it is not expected that CoLs will disappear from the educational landscape as the Government have committed to continued support of existing CoLs. Regional hubs are expected to replace the current Ministry of Education regional offices and will work in partnership with schools in an advisory capacity, and with responsibility for employing school principals, school finances and property.

Therefore, network leadership, collaborative practice and sustainability of systems and processes to support cross-school partnerships continue to remain high priority. To this end, further research is needed to evaluate the impact of networking on existing school structures so that all stakeholders can make sense of their activity. The following questions provide a starting point for those interested in further study.

- What does system leadership look like at all levels of the network, and how is this played out in practice?
- How can hybrid configurations of leadership establish effective alliances between existing school structures and the roles assigned by the IES initiative?
- How can leadership development better meet the needs of those faced with the complexity of leading across a network?

The success of CoLs will be measured over time but, just as the IES initiative was implemented to promote best practice between schools, further research is needed to ensure CoLs are subject to the same consideration. If CoLs are to succeed, educational professional learning and student outcomes need to be considered in equal measure. A deliberate approach to organisational learning, within the network context, is therefore required to empower leaders and teachers to sustain on-going improvement and development for the benefit of the communities they serve.



## Conclusion

The case studies presented in this thesis accentuate the complexities and ambiguities of leading in the CoL context. As a result, highly skilled, competent leaders, with strengths in relational and collaborative leadership are needed to provide facilitation and co-ordination of network activity. From the previous and current Government's priorities for education in New Zealand, system leadership provides the basis for reform. However, leading a network within a centralised system of self-managing schools is fraught with tension, and aligning policy with practice is not for the faint hearted. The politics of education is in a continual flux of change, dependent on both global and internal influences.

Firstly, the conceptualisation of leadership remains elusive. It is difficult to generalise the term when working within a network. For instance, is leadership located in the title, the role, or visible in the interactions of others? Or, as network literature suggests, does it reside in all three? Any simple configuration of leadership is problematic, therefore a shared language of leadership would help support CoL leaders deal with conflicting agendas, values and beliefs. Grint (2011) explores the history of leadership and concludes "there are no perfect leaders or leadership systems out there to be imitated" (p. 14). He suggests two models that offer an explanation for patterns of leadership. The first refers to the swinging pendulum between centralization and decentralisation, and the second is situated in the language of opposites – science and culture. He argues that leadership styles or models are adopted to suit the current leadership fashion. When insufficiencies surface, change is instigated. Therefore, he warns of the dangers of "pursuing the romance of collaborative leadership as we previously were of pursuing the romance of individual leadership" (p. 11). CoLs represent a political educational reform that values networks as a social structure through which better outcomes for students can be achieved. Kilduff and Balkundi (2011) recognise the need for formal leaders to manage the boundary between inside and outside of the network. Therefore, perhaps the conceptualisation best describing CoL leadership is 'boundary spanner'.

Secondly, engaging the collective to work towards shared goals and achievement challenges requires a wider view of the challenges faced by New Zealand's education system – system thinking. Schools need to see their part in transitioning students through the schooling system as

a whole, particularly new entrant to Year 13. The case studies provided evidence that contextualisation of goals is possible at individual school level, as well as meeting the needs of the CoL, through deliberate strategic planning at all levels.

New Zealand's education system is yet to realise the potential that exists in networks as a reform tool, divorced from mandates and control, but incentivised by collective norms and collaboration. Therefore, if expected outcomes are to be realised, engagement in networking philosophy is a priority for all those engaged in CoLs. In terms of relocating New Zealand school principals as leaders of school networks, this research study has provided candid reports of how CoL leaders experience the reality of building and sustaining effective network practices. Through their accounts a critical lens can be applied to the concept of network leadership that highlights the importance of relationships, collaboration and systems thinking for sustainability. The term (re)locating suggests a move towards building a more effective system. In order to (re)locate New Zealand school principals as leaders in school networks, a shift in thinking is required by all stakeholders. This is best illustrated through the Maori whakatauki 'Ehara taku toa I te toa takitahi engari he toa takimano' – my strength is not that of an individual but that of the collective.

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<sup>16</sup> No longer available on MoE website. Archived by MoE via personal communication on 24/06/2019.

<sup>17</sup> As above.

<sup>18</sup> As above.

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# **Appendices**

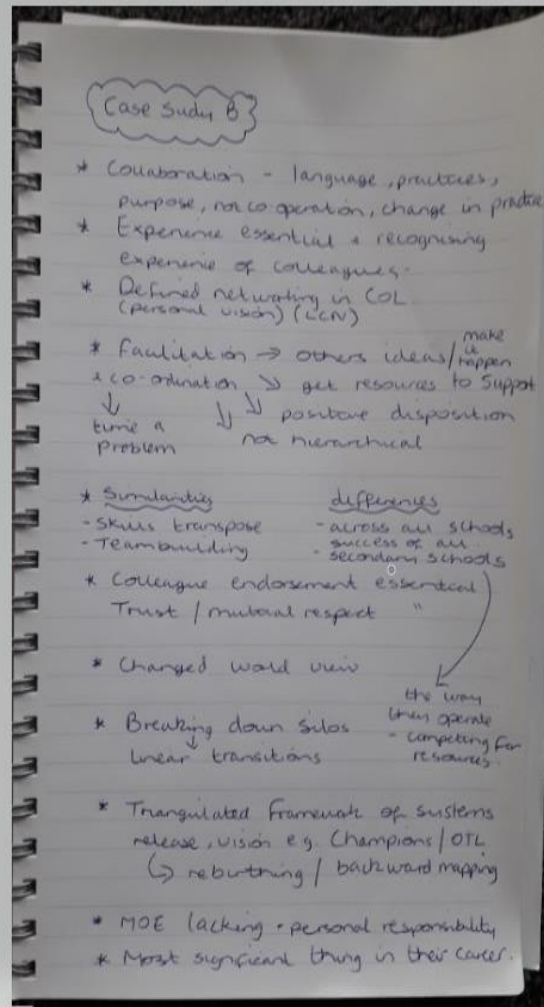
## **Appendix A**

### **Interview questions**

1. In your opinion, what are the key characteristics or dispositions CoL leaders need to espouse for effective practice?
2. How do you perceive the similarities and/or differences between leading in your own school and leading across a CoL?
3. How has your leadership style changed or adapted to meet the needs of your new role?
4. What systems or processes are in place to support your ability to effectuate change across a cluster of schools?
5. What practices have been successful in promoting effective cross-school collaboration?
6. What have been the barriers to promoting effective cross-school collaboration?

## Appendix B

Figure 1 Case Study B – Interview notes



## Appendix C

### Questionnaire to principal members of each CoL

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# (Re)locating New Zealand school principals as leaders in school networks: Leadership in Communities of Learning

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey which is due to be completed by 3 August 2018.

The questions have been formulated in response to themes raised during the interview with your CoL leader. Your responses will provide valuable insight into the practices that support successful CoL leadership.

The survey should take approximately 20 - 30 minutes to complete. All data is treated as confidential and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. By completing the questionnaire you are providing consent for the data to be used. Findings will be circulated to all participants prior to publication.

Please answer each question as fully as possible.

\*Required

What key characteristics or dispositions should a CoL leader exhibit in order to provide effective CoL leadership? \*

Your answer

---

How does your CoL leader support high levels of participation, collaboration and ownership across the CoL? \*

Your answer

---

What do you perceive to have been the challenges for your CoL leader moving from sole school leadership to network leadership in your context? \*

Your answer

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What internal and/or external systems and processes are in place to enable sustainability of your CoL as you effectuate change to meet your goals? \*

Your answer

---

What advice would you give to your CoL leader to facilitate better outcomes for your network? \*

Your answer

---

SUBMIT



## Appendix D

### Invitation email to principal members of the CoL

Master of Educational Leadership Thesis Research – Invitation to participate

Primary researcher: Michelle Dibben (Deputy Principal of an Auckland Primary School)

Supervisor: Dr Howard Youngs AUTECH

**Title: (Re)locating New Zealand school principals as leaders in school networks: Leadership in Communities of Learning**

Dear (Principal),

As part of my thesis, I am looking to find out about leadership practice within a Community of Learning. I am conducting a research study to identify the practices that embody successful Community of Learning leadership, and to ascertain the extent to which these leadership practices are being employed. This will require gathering data from both your Community of Learning leader (in the form of an interview), and completed questionnaires from each of the principals in your network. Would you help me?

As member of a Community of Learning, of approximately 2 years' duration, you are in an ideal position to provide insight and perspective of network leadership, and to provide data about the specific practices used to mobilise and strengthen participation across different schools.

If you decide to participate, you will be required to complete an anonymous on-line questionnaire, consisting of five open ended questions. The questionnaire should take approximately 20 – 30 minutes to complete. The questionnaire is designed to gather opinion, views and perspectives about theories of action and theories in use demonstrated through the systems, structures and interactions of leaders within your Community of Learning. The questionnaire will not contain any identifying questions and neither myself or your Community of Learning leader will be able to identify who has responded.

The outcomes of this research will give participant Communities of Learning and their leaders an opportunity to reflect on their leadership practice and their potential as a network to make a positive difference to student outcomes. Although your case study is context specific, it is hoped that the findings generate theory/recommendations that can be considered by others to inform practice within their Community of Learning context. For example, the outcomes of this research has the potential to be used as an insight into future leadership development. In addition, it may uncover implications for further research in an aspect of leadership that is both topical and relevant. Your participation will also support my aim to complete a Master of Educational Leadership.

If you agree to participate in the research study, please follow the link and complete the questionnaire. By doing so you are giving your consent. As this survey is anonymous I will be unable to withdraw your data once it is submitted. The deadline for completion is **16 July 2018**, two weeks from the date of this email.

A participant information form has been attached for your information. If you have any further questions about the research, please feel free to contact me via email:

[mjdibben64@hotmail.com](mailto:mjdibben64@hotmail.com) or by phone: 021 214 2795.

Kind Regards,

Michelle Dibben





## **Participant Information Sheet**

### **Network Principal**

**Date Information Sheet Produced: 12/11/2017**

### **Project Title**

(Re)locating New Zealand school principals as leaders in school networks: Leadership in Communities of Learning

### **An Invitation**

My name is Michelle Dibben and I am researching this topic as part of a Masters of Educational Leadership Degree. I am currently working as a Deputy Principal in an Auckland Primary School, and my school is a member of a Community of Learning (CoL).

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

The purpose of this research is to identify the practices that embody successful Community of Learning leadership and the extent to which these practices are being employed. There will be a focus on the challenges faced by transitioning from sole school leadership to network leadership. The value of this study is to provide participant Communities of Learning and their leaders an opportunity to reflect on their leadership practice and their potential as a network to make a positive difference to student outcomes. In addition, the research will have wider community benefits in terms of providing recommendations that could be considered in other Community of Learning contexts. For example, the outcomes of the research have the potential to be used as an insight into future leadership development.

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

I am seeking your participation in the study as your Community of Learning is based in Auckland and has been working collaboratively for approximately two years. Your network is composed of between eight and twelve institutions that cover the primary, intermediate and secondary sectors.

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

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. By completing the on-line questionnaire you are giving consent to participate.

### **What will happen in this research?**

The study involves collecting data from your Community of Learning leader and each of the member school principals. This will take the form of an interview with the Community of Learning leader, and completion of a questionnaire by each of the participating principals. Your questionnaire will consist of five open ended questions and take approximately 20 -30 minutes

to complete. The questions will be based on the themes/issues that arise from the interview with the Community of Learning leader.

**What are the discomforts and risks?**

You do not have to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable with. However, once you have submitted your responses it will not be possible to withdraw the data as the questionnaire is anonymous.

**What are the benefits?**

Participant benefits – the outcomes of this research will give participant Communities of Learning and their leaders an opportunity to reflect on their leadership practice and their potential as a network to make a positive difference to student outcomes.

Researcher benefits – through conducting this research and involving herself in an extensive literature review, the primary researcher will be able to grow her own understanding and knowledge base regarding new ways of thinking about leadership. This provides opportunities to share and apply knowledge gained, in the contexts and/or future contexts in which she works, with the ultimate aim of raising student achievement. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher will gain a Master of Educational Leadership qualification.

Wider community benefits – although your case study is context specific, it is hoped that the findings generate theory/recommendations that can be considered by others to inform practice within their CoL contexts. For example, the outcomes of this research has the potential to be used as an insight into future leadership development. In addition, it may uncover implications for future research in an aspect of leadership that is both topical and relevant. Presentations and academic articles may be published as a result of this research.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

There are limits to the level of confidentiality afforded to the participants through this study as it is quite possible that potential participants will be known to each other. However, the questionnaire is anonymous and does not contain any questions that require answers that may identify you in any way. I will not be able to identify who has responded, or from which Community of Learning those responses have come from.

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

You will have two weeks to consider this invitation from the date of the email.

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

You will be able to view the findings on a website PDF the details of which will be emailed to all member principals of your Community of Learning once completed.

**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, Howard Youngs, AUT, [howard.youngs.aut.ac.nz](mailto:howard.youngs.aut.ac.nz), 09 921 9999 ext 9633

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

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

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

Researcher Contact Details:

Michelle Dibben, [mjdibben64@hotmail.com](mailto:mjdibben64@hotmail.com), 021 2145 2795

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Howard Youngs, AUT, [howard,youngs.aut.ac.nz](mailto:howard.youngs@aut.ac.nz), 09 921 9999 ext 9633

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 12 December 2017, AUTEK Reference number 17/432.

## Appendix E

### Thematic analysis– Step 1 (phenomenological approach)

Figure 2 Step 1 (a) – highlighting of text to gain understanding of phenomenon. Text descriptions generated

<p>incredibly valuable life skill. It is way of approaching a conversation with another person which is actually respectful and recognises that they are an autonomous being who ultimately won't do things just because they are made to. They will do things, and you will get the best results out of people, if they can do something they themselves see the merit and the worth in and believe that this is something that they should be doing. Then you get that intrinsic motivation or build internal commitment. It's incredibly important for CoL leaders.</p> <p><i>It's very comprehensive isn't it.</i></p> <p>Now why is that so important for a CoL leader? It is very important because a CoL leader - here is the difference between somebody who is the principal of their own school and the leader of the CoL. The principal of their own school could potentially in the end make someone do something. They could say - even though you don't believe it I am the principal and you have to do this thing. While that is still not ideal and, in fact, if that's the only way a principal gets stuff done, they won't be very successful, but it is certainly sitting in the background potentially. It's not with a CoL leader because as a CoL leader basically I can't make other principals do anything they don't want to do. And so the CoL will only work if all the leaders within the CoL and ultimately the teachers within the CoL see the value in what you are doing. We have seven whakatauki actually now sitting alongside the seven aspects of our CoL achievement challenge. Really it's our strategic plan, essentially our way forward. The first of them, which is about building the community, waka eke noa, means we are all in the waka together without exception, so how can you achieve that? So, coming back to those two things of Vivan Robinson, you won't build the relational trust without that ability to hold those open to learning conversations which really build the internal commitment. You do need this relentless focus on the goal to raise student achievement because otherwise you will just spend your time being nice to each other and back away from the difficult conversations.</p> <p><i>And that can happen when you're all peers together.</i></p> <p>And I think that we are only just at the point of pushing some of the boundaries around that. I'm talking that over at the moment with the new leader so she is really aware of that, of where the areas are, where there needs to be some more conversations held and its going to be a matter of time to some extent.</p> <p><i>Can I ask for an example, obviously not using identifiers, where you have tried to achieve that relational trust in terms of what you have done? An example.</i></p> <p>Every time an issue has arisen that seemed like we've got a bit of a block, I've said to myself, and to anyone else I've talked to about it, that I have to go and front up to the relevant person, usually the principal, and try and articulate</p>	<p>Respectful conversations Top down v bottom up practice Intrinsic motivation – merit/worth Leadership skill - building commitment Positional power of individual principals</p> <p>Positional power v lateral leadership Values and beliefs – influence v manipulation Intrinsic motivation – value work Shared values, direction Building community – waka analogy</p> <p>Relational trust Open to learning Internal commitment Student achievement</p> <p>Values and beliefs – influence v manipulation</p>
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Figure 3 Step 1 (b) – statements clustered to form codes/sub-themes/themes

<p>many cases I was probably actually manipulating them. In the OTL training they talk about the difference between pseudo inquiry and genuine inquiry and the reason why that is incredibly valuable for all educational leaders, for all leaders, and actually it is probably an incredibly valuable life skill. It is way of approaching a conversation with another person which is actually respectful and recognises that they are an autonomous being who ultimately won't do things just because they are made to. They will do things, and you will get the best results out of people, if they can do something they themselves see the merit and the worth in and believe that this is something that they should be doing. Then you get that intrinsic motivation or build internal commitment. It's incredibly important for CoL leaders.</p> <p><i>It's very comprehensive isn't it.</i></p> <p>Now why is that so important for a CoL leader? It is very important because a CoL leader - here is the difference between somebody who is the principal of their own school and the leader of the CoL. The principal of their own school could potentially in the end make someone do something. They could say - even though you don't believe it I am the principal and you have to do this thing. While that is still not ideal and, in fact, if that's the only way a principal gets stuff done, they won't be very successful, but it is certainly sitting in the background potentially. It's not with a CoL leader because as a CoL leader basically I can't make other principals do anything they don't want to do. And so the CoL will only work if all the leaders within the CoL and ultimately the teachers within the CoL see the value in what you are doing. We have seven whakatauki actually now sitting alongside the seven aspects of our CoL achievement challenge. Really it's our strategic plan, essentially our way forward. The first of them, which is about building the community, waka eke noa, means we are all in the waka together without exception, so how can you achieve that? So, coming back to those two things of Vivan Robinson, you won't build the relational trust without that ability to hold those open to learning conversations which really build the internal commitment. You do need this relentless focus on the goal to raise student achievement because otherwise you will just spend your time being nice to each other and back away from the difficult conversations.</p> <p><i>And that can happen when you're all peers together.</i></p> <p>And I think that we are only just at the point of pushing some of the boundaries around that. I'm talking that over at the moment with the new leader so she is really aware of that, of where the areas are, where there needs to be some more conversations held and it's going to be a matter of time to some extent.</p> <p><i>Can I ask for an example, obviously not using identifiers, where you have tried to achieve that relational trust in terms of what you have done? An example.</i></p> <p>Every time an issue has arisen that seemed like we've got a bit of a block. I've said to myself, and to anyone else I've talked to about it, that I have to go and front up to the relevant person, usually the principal, and try and articulate what the issue is and say - can we find a way forward together? To do it respectfully rather than</p>	<p>Practice genuine inquiry rather than pseudo inquiry as respectful discourse</p> <p>Intrinsic motivation and commitment comes from recognition of autonomy and belief in system</p> <p>Understanding of positional power v lateral leadership</p> <p>OTL conversations build relational trust which builds internal commitment</p> <p>Building community requires shared commitment in direction through belief in system</p> <p>Successful leadership requires tough conversations its not just about relationships</p> <p>The skill of OTL dialogue is an ideal</p> <p>Difficult/courageous conversations/confronting issues are essential to move forward otherwise a barrier</p>	<p>Facilitation not control</p> <p>Belief in system</p> <p>Lateral leadership</p> <p>Shared purpose and direction</p> <p>Belief in system</p> <p>Relational trust</p> <p>Skill</p> <p>Student achievement</p> <p>Confronting issues</p> <p>Skill</p>
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## Appendix F

### Thematic analysis – Step 2 (homogeneous categories identified)

Figure 4 Step 2 (a) – Comparing and re-categorising codes (see summary of coding 2d)

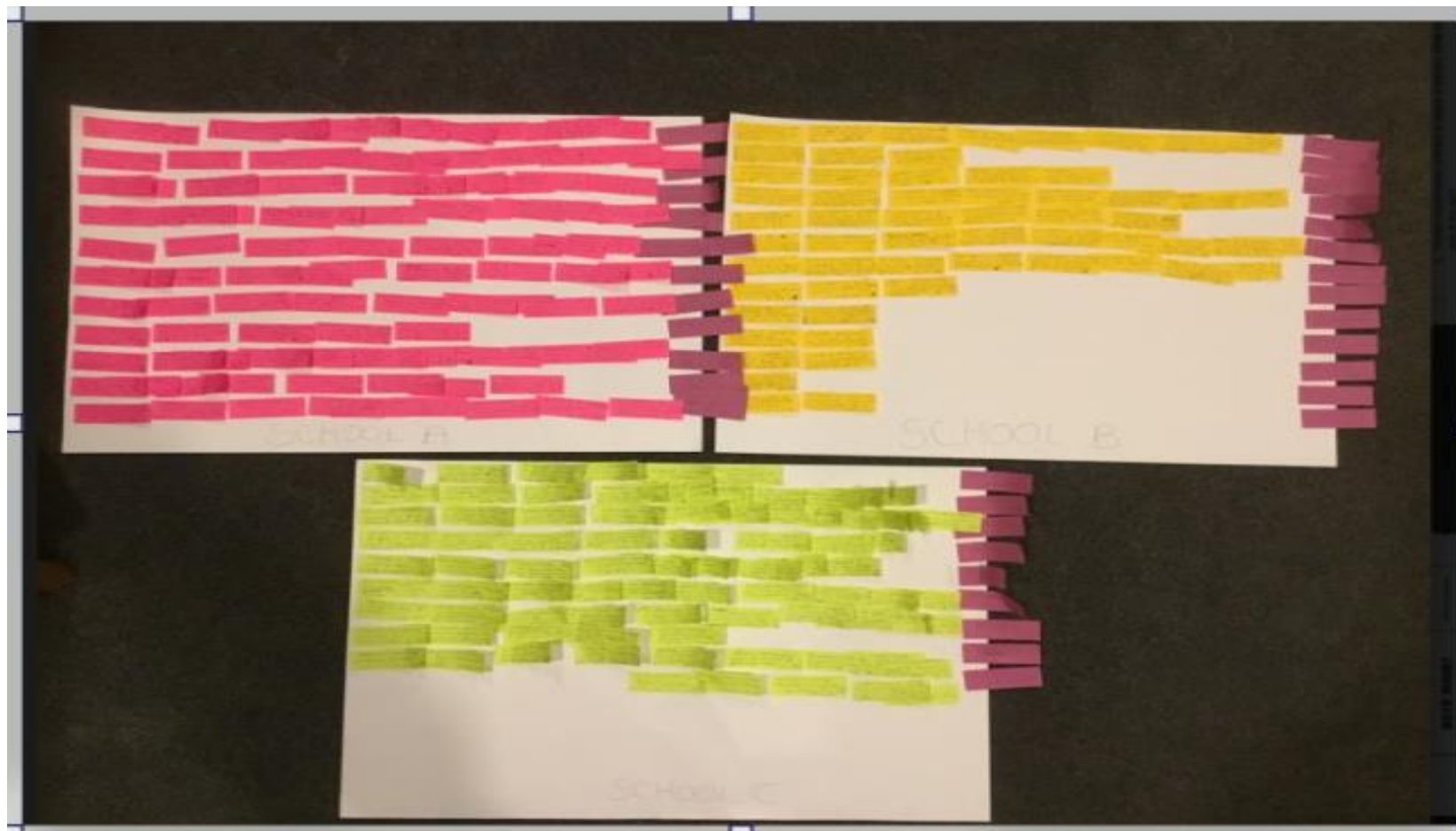




Figure 5 Step 2 (b) – Comparing and re-categorising codes (see summary of coding 2d)

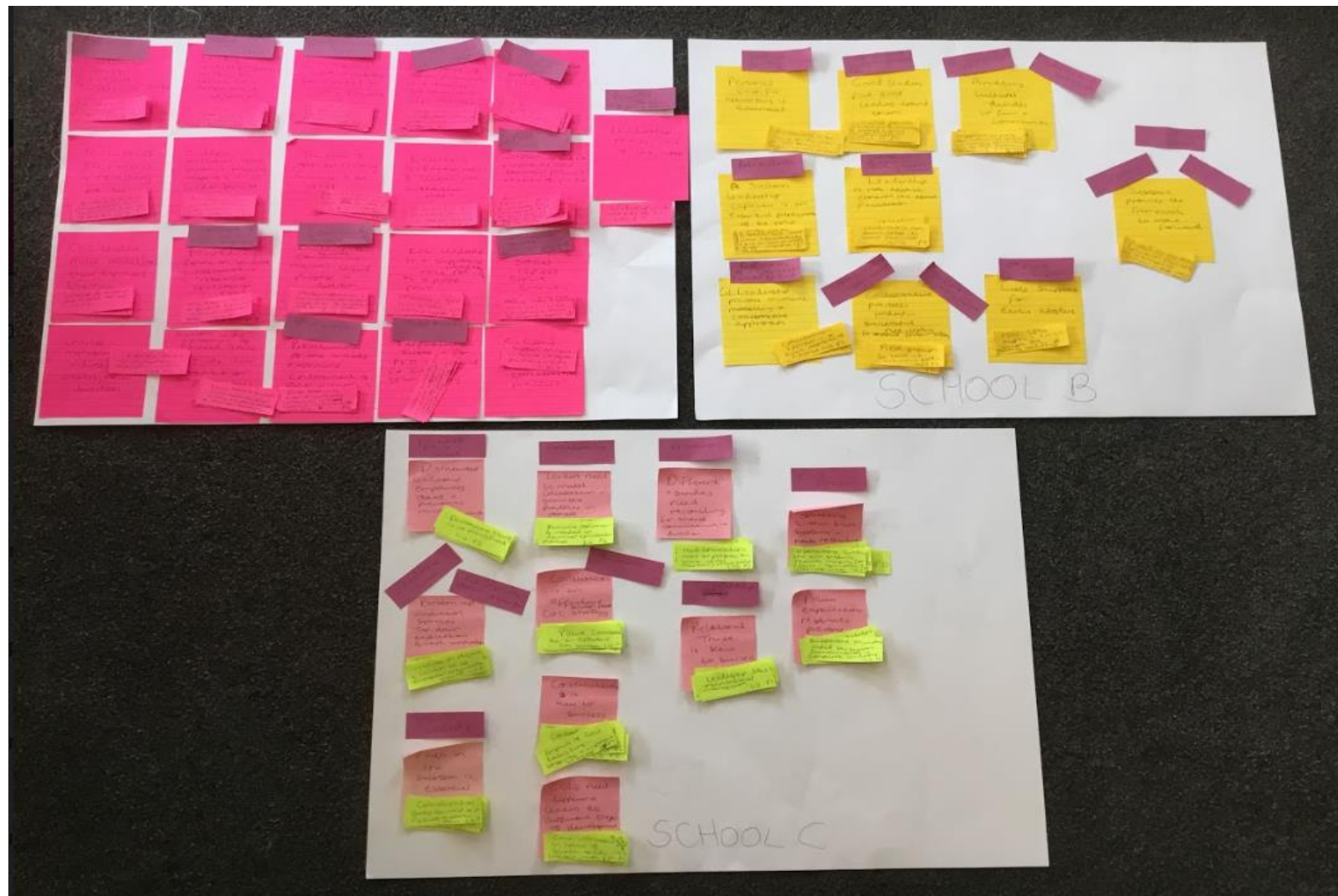
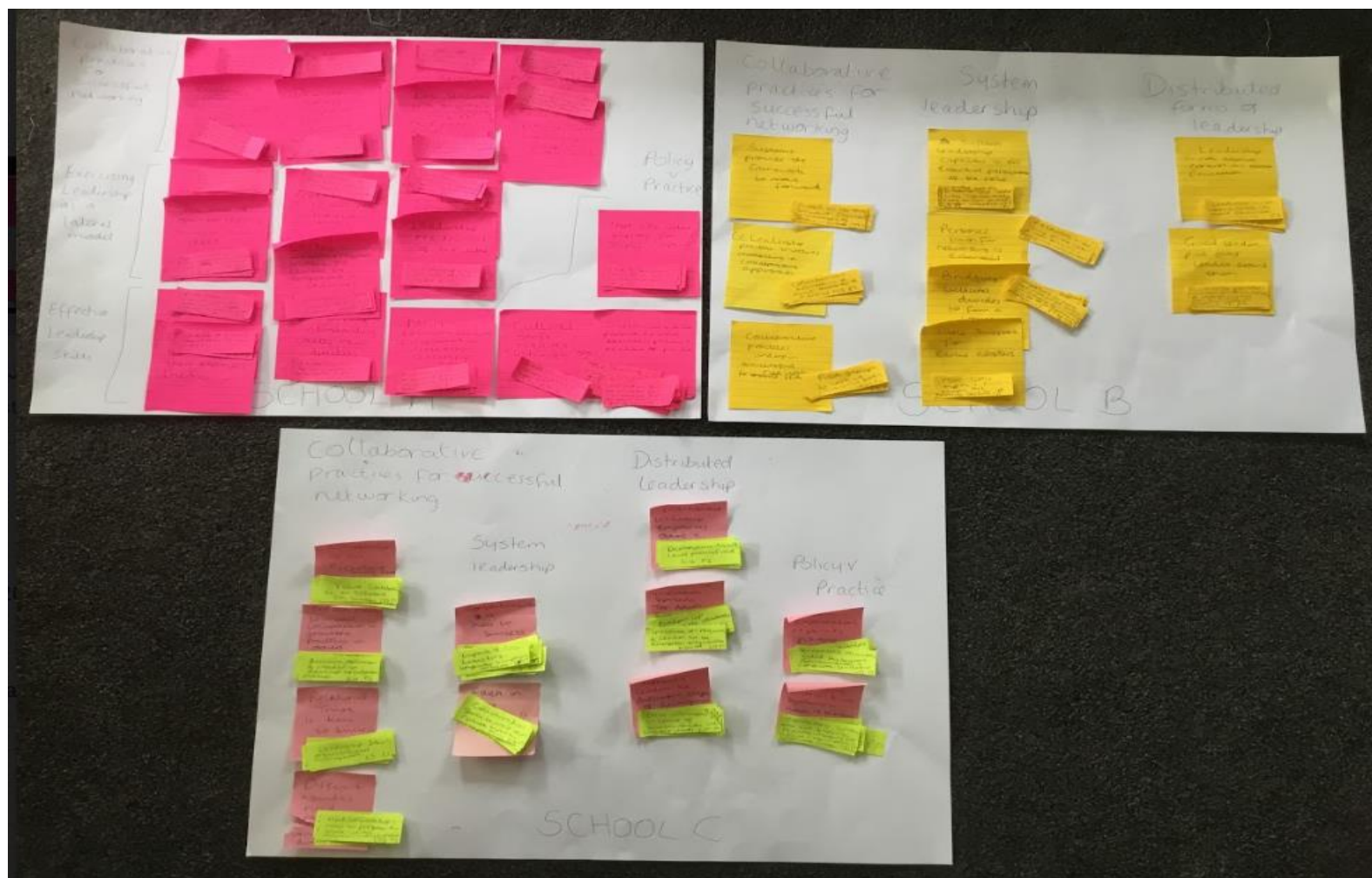


Figure 6 Step 2 (c) – Comparing and re-categorising codes (see summary of coding 2d)





**Table A. 1 : Step 2 (d) – Summary of coding**

<b>School A</b>	<b>School B</b>	<b>School C</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sustainability</li> <li>2. Inclusion</li> <li>3. Espoused theories and theories in use</li> <li>4. Change management</li> <li>5. Relational trust</li> <li>6. Student achievement</li> <li>7. Policy v practice</li> <li>8. Confronting issues</li> <li>9. Positional power exists</li> <li>10. Shared purpose and direction</li> <li>11. Prerequisite</li> <li>12. Principal autonomy</li> <li>13. Lateral leadership</li> <li>14. Support</li> <li>15. Team building</li> <li>16. Little support for early adopters</li> <li>17. Systems</li> <li>18. Developing social capital grows everyone</li> <li>19. Collaborative practices</li> <li>20. Leadership resides outside of the title</li> <li>21. Qualities</li> <li>22. Belief in system</li> <li>23. Skill</li> <li>24. Facilitation not control</li> <li>25. Persuasion not control</li> <li>26. Potential of others</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Personal vision for networking</li> <li>2. System leadership</li> <li>3. Modelling collaborative approach</li> <li>4. Good leaders put good leaders around them</li> <li>5. Facilitation not power or ownership</li> <li>6. Collaborative practices</li> <li>7. Bridging cultural divides to form a community</li> <li>8. Little support for early adopters</li> <li>9. Systems provide the directional framework</li> <li>10. Prerequisite of role</li> <li>11. Dispositions</li> <li>12. Lateral leadership</li> <li>13. Potential in others</li> <li>14. Collective responsibility</li> <li>15. Developing social capital changes practice</li> <li>16. Sole practitioner approach untenable</li> <li>17. Inclusion</li> <li>18. Reciprocal learning supports linear transition process</li> <li>19. Flat leadership structure</li> <li>20. Change leadership</li> <li>21. Policy barriers</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Distributed leadership</li> <li>2. Bottom up innovation spreads – top down expectations quash</li> <li>3. Overt faith in the system</li> <li>4. Modelling collaborative practices</li> <li>5. Different leaders needed at different stages of development</li> <li>6. Contextualisation key to success</li> <li>7. Competing agendas need reconciling</li> <li>8. Relational leadership</li> <li>9. Policy expectations restrict practice</li> <li>10. Genuine commitment</li> <li>11. Potential of others</li> <li>12. System leadership</li> <li>13. Disposition</li> <li>14. Strength in building social capital</li> <li>15. Lateral leadership</li> <li>16. Flat leadership</li> <li>17. Systems</li> <li>18. Facilitation not control</li> <li>19. Skill</li> <li>20. Sustainability</li> <li>21. Change in approach</li> <li>22. Collective responsibility</li> </ol>

**Table A. 2 Step2 (e) - Extracting subthemes related to research questions**

**School A**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Sub themes</b>	<b>Research questions</b>
2 Inclusion 5 Relational trust 10 Shared purpose/direction 15 Teambuilding 18 Developing social capital grows everyone 17 Systems 19 Collaborative practices 22 Belief in system	Collaborative cultures and practices Inclusive team building Collective goals	What network leadership practices does policy expect of CoL leaders in Communities of Learning?
8 Confronting issues 9 Positional power exists 12 Principal autonomy 13 Lateral leadership 14 Support 20 Leadership resides outside of the title 24 Facilitation not control 25 Persuasion not control 26 Potential of others	Exercising leadership as a lateral model Principal autonomy – positional power exists Confronting issues Potential of others	How do CoL leaders experience the challenge of aligning policy expectations with the reality of practice?  How can principals and their schools sustain effect network practices?
3 Espoused theories and theories in use 4 Change management 6 Student achievement 11 Prerequisite 21 Qualities 23 Skill	Prerequisites for the role Effective leadership skills	How can principals and their schools sustain effect network practices?
1 Sustainability 7 Policy v practice 16 Little support for early adopters	Policy v Practice Transitioning into CoL leadership	How do CoL leaders experience the challenge of aligning policy expectations with the reality of practice?  How can principals and their schools sustain effect network practices?

**School B**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>	<b>Research questions</b>
3 Modelling collaborative approach 6 Collaborative practices 9 Systems provide the directional framework 11 Dispositions 14 Collective responsibility 15 Developing social capital changes practice 17 Inclusion 18 Reciprocal learning supports linear transition process	Collaborative cultures and practices Systems and processes Collective goals	What network leadership practices does policy expect of CoL leaders in Communities of Learning?

1 Personal vision for networking 2 System leadership 7 Bridging cultural divides to form a community 8 Little support for early adopters 10 Prerequisite of role 20 Change leadership 21 Policy barriers	Prerequisites of the role System leadership Bridging the cultural divide Barriers to practice	How do CoL leaders experience the challenge of aligning policy expectations with the reality of practice?  How can principals and their schools sustain effect network practices?
5 Facilitation not power or ownership 4 Good leaders put good leaders around them 12 Lateral Leadership 13 Potential in others 16 Sole practitioner approach untenable 19 Flat leadership structure	Distributed forms of leadership Facilitation not power or ownership	How do CoL leaders experience the challenge of aligning policy expectations with the reality of practice?  How can principals and their schools sustain effect network practices?

### School C

Codes	Sub theme	Research questions
4 Modelling collaborative practices 8 Relational leadership 7 Competing agendas need reconciling 14 Strength in building social capital 17 Systems	Collaborative cultures and practices	What network leadership practices does policy expect of CoL leaders in Communities of Learning?
3 Overt faith in the system 6 Contextualisation key to success 10 Genuine commitment 12 System leadership 20 Sustainability	System leadership Sustainability Importance of providing context	How do CoL leaders experience the challenge of aligning policy expectations with the reality of practice?  How can principals and their schools sustain effect network practices?
1 Distributed leadership 2 Bottom up innovation spreads – top down expectations quash 5 Different leaders are needed at different stages of development 11 Potential of others 15 Lateral leadership 16 Flat leadership 18 Facilitation not control 22 Collective responsibility	Distributed leadership Collective goals	How do CoL leaders experience the challenge of aligning policy expectations with the reality of practice?  How can principals and their schools sustain effect network practices?

9 Policy expectations restrict practice	Policy v Practice	How do CoL leaders experience the challenge of aligning policy expectations with the reality of practice?  How can principals and their schools sustain effect network practices?
13 Disposition 19 Skill 21 Change in approach	Leadership Attributes	What network leadership practices does policy expect of CoL leaders in Communities of Learning?

## Appendix G

**Table A. 3 Documentary Analysis Framework**

The first six categories are represented in the subsequent tables. The interpretative meaning can be found in Chapter Five – Findings.

<b>Framework</b>	<b>Checklist of questions to support analysis and interpretation</b>
<b>Document</b>	Name – internal/external documentation?
<b>Author and stance</b>	Who? Authenticity? How credible is the document – sourced from?
<b>Intended audience</b>	Who to?
<b>Purpose of document</b>	What are its key aims?
<b>Contextual position</b>	When was it written? What came before/after it? How does it relate to other documents?
<b>Content features</b>	Headings/subheadings How direct is the language? Does it inform, persuade, convince, provoke, cajole, sell etc?
<b>Interpretative meaning</b>	What are the key messages/ideas/themes/issues identified in the document?

The interpretative meaning of each of the documents analysed in this study can be found in Chapter Four - Findings.

***Adapted from Fitzgerald (2012), Scott (1990) and Wellington (2012)***

**Table A. 4 Ministry of Education Documents**

Document	Author and stance	Intended audience	Purpose of document	Contextual position	Content features
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Primary Principals' Collective Agreement</li> <li>2. Secondary Principals' Collective Agreement</li> <li>3. Area School Principals' Collective Agreement</li> <li>4. Guide to Writing a Memorandum of Agreement (MoE)</li> <li>5. Role Selection and Appointment Information</li> <li>6. Guide for Schools and Kura</li> <li>7. Tips and Starters: Working Together</li> </ol>	<p>All documents sourced from Government's education website. Official documentation from the Ministry of Education. Collective agreement signatories: Primary Principals – NZEI, Secretary of Education, NZSTA</p> <p>Secondary Principal' – NZSTA, SPANZ, NZPPTA, Secretary of Education</p> <p>Area Principals – PPTA, NZEI, MoE Advocate, NZSTA</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Primary School Principals – role specific</li> <li>2. Secondary School Principals – role specific</li> <li>3. Area School Principals – role specific</li> <li>4. Schools and school boards committed to forming a CoL together – particularly CoL principals in leadership group</li> <li>5. Selection Panel comprising of; representatives from Boards of trustees, principals and an independent advisor from the New Appointments National Panel of Independent Advisors</li> <li>6. Schools and school boards – particularly CoL principals –in leadership group</li> <li>7. Schools and school boards – particularly CoL principals in leadership group</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Covers work of principals in state and state-integrated schools – primary, composite and special. Binding on principals who are members of NZEI. Clause 4.6/4.7 details Community of Leadership role</li> <li>2. Covers work of principals in state or state-integrated secondary schools. Binding on members of NZPPTA or who have given or who give their bargaining power to SPANZ. Clause 3.7 Allowance for Community of Schools Leadership Role</li> <li>3. Covers work of principals employed in area schools. Binding on members of the Institute or Association. Clause 3.9 details Allowance for Community of Leadership role</li> <li>4. A guide to confirm agreement on how the CoL will work together</li> <li>5. A guide to detail processes and responsibilities of relevant parties</li> <li>6. A guide offering support on what a CoL looks like, formation of a CoL, how it works in practice and advice along the way</li> <li>7. Supplementary document to the Guide for Schools and Kura offering additional advice and support for Boards and principals of an approved CoL regarding collaboration, approaching first achievement challenge and CoL structure</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 17 May 2016 – 16 May 2018</li> <li>2. 12 May 2016 – 11 May 2019</li> <li>3. 30 June 2016 – 29 June 2019</li> <li>4. July 2016 (updated from April 2015)</li> <li>5. July 2016 (updated from April 2015)</li> <li>6. July 2016 (updated from April 2015)</li> <li>7. April 2015</li> </ol> <p>The July 2016 editions refer to 'Community of Learning' rather than Community of Schools' to better reflect original intention that a Community focuses on learner pathways. Term is interchangeable and refers to all schools who have signed a Memorandum of Agreement or access IES funding.</p> <p>Advice is consistent with previous version but updated to include: NZEI endorsement, minor text changes for internal consistency and improved clarity, links to Collective Agreements and a link to the Report of the NZEI and MoE Joint Initiative 2015</p>	<p>All collective agreements are intended to inform and provide a binding contract. Clauses pertaining to Community of Leadership role include following content: entitlement, allowances, appointment, additional staffing allowance for employing board, reasons to cease payments, recognition of leadership experience and associated allowances, appointment and suspension or cease of allowances, purpose of role as agreed in achievement plan.</p> <p>MoE guidelines have been written to inform and enable compliance to IES policy requirements.</p> <p>4. Document details content of MoA. Part 1 clauses are highly recommended and include; agreement purpose, timeframe, how the parties will work together and variance to the achievement plan. Part 2 clauses must be included; privacy and variations regarding joining and withdrawing from CoL. Part 2 requires approval by the MoE.</p> <p>5. Selection and appointment tasks are identified with roles and responsibilities clearly defined. The Community of Learning Leadership role is defined and the purpose and function established with sector partners is detailed</p> <p>6. The first part of the document provides the rationale for IES and sets out to convince the reader of the gains and positive impacts of being within a CoL. It makes some bold claims e.g. it will drive the spread of effective teaching". The second part of the document gives complementary information in support of documents 4 and 5. Appraisal of CoL leaders is also discussed.</p> <p>7. This document values collaboration as 'best practice'. It provides the reader with possible considerations when forming their achievement challenge in the form of a 'discussion starter'. It finishes with prompts to support the development of operating structures. It is written to inform and support. It uses questions to prompt thinking. It ends by suggesting 'a basket of evidence' from the Working Group for identifying objectives and for assessment purposes.</p>

Table A.5 Internal Community of Learning (CoL) Documents						
Document		Author and stance	Intended audience	Purpose of document	Contextual position	Content features
CoL A	Memorandum of Agreement	Unsigned copy provided by CoL leader – dated	School professionals and parent community within the Community of Learning, MoE.	Formal agreement on how the CoL will work collaboratively to raise student achievement.	Agreement for a 3 year period from April 2018. This is the second version to be reviewed 1 year prior to the end of the agreement. Follows MoE guidelines.	Headings: Parties, Purpose (including vision), Timeframe, How the parties will work together, Variation to achievement plan, Privacy, Variations, Community of Schools Privacy Protocol
	Achievement Plan	Sourced from MoE Education Counts Website – all member school names presented, dated	However, Achievement challenges and plans are available in the public domain as they are easily accessible via the Education Counts website, and MoE endorsed achievement challenges are accessible through educ.govt.nz	Provides their implementation plan for building a collaborative community of learners and details their achievement challenges and associated targets	Endorsed 2015 – Second version provided and has been revised for 2018-2020 in recognition of the end to National Standards. Follows MoE guidelines.	Headings: Our Community, Our Vision, Our Implementation Plan, Building a Collaborative Community of Learners, Culturally Responsive Pedagogies, Progress so far and plans for 2018 in literacy, mathematics, NCEA Level2+ Maori retention, Effective transition between schools, increasingly effective use of student achievement to drive improvement, Achievement challenges and associated targets, Monitoring and evaluation, Our Code of Conduct
CoL B	Memorandum of Agreement	Unsigned copy provided by CoL leader – dated		Formal agreement on how the CoL will work collaboratively to raise student achievement.	Agreement for 3 year period with progress being reviewed every 18 months. In December 2018 the CoL will meet to determine if it proceeds beyond this date. Follows MoE guidelines.	Parties, Timeframe, Agreement review, How the parties will work together, Variations to the plan, Privacy, Variations, Disestablishment of the Community of Schools, Appendix including information as follows: Who is the protocol for? Principals for sharing aggregated information, information sharing protocol for Communities of Schools, Who can access aggregated information held by schools?
	Achievement Plan	Sourced from MoE Education Counts Website – all member school names presented and dated		Identifies CoL achievement challenges and details their approach and strategies for strengthening pathways for students through their schooling journey.	Endorsed 2015 – First version provided Follows MoE guidelines.	Headings: Description and purpose of group, Collaboration and Consultation, Our Approach, Developing Student, Teacher and Community Agency, Achievement Challenges, Our Strategy, Action plans for – writing, reading, NCEA Level 2, NCEA Level 3 and Tertiary, Parent engagement and participation, Methodology and Pedagogy, Evaluation, Set up phase, Code of Conduct, Appointments, Cluster data
CoL C	Memorandum of Agreement	Attached as an appendix to Achievement Plan – unsigned but dated		Formal agreement on how the CoL will work collaboratively to raise student achievement.	Agreement is for 4 years. Two years prior to end of this term, CoL will formally review whether to continue in its current composition. Follows MoE guidelines.	Parties, Purpose, Timeframe, Achievement Challenge Plan, How we will work together, Variations to the Achievement Plan, Privacy, Variations, Disestablishment of the Community of Schools
	Achievement Plan	Sourced from MoE Education Counts Website – all member school names presented, undated		Shared achievement challenge plan that details possible approaches to meet targets.	Endorsed 2015 – First version provided Follows MoE guidelines.	Headings: Our Community – background information, Our Community – a history of collaboration, Learning pathways, Student engagement, Maori student achievement, Pasifika student achievement, student agency, Parent/Whanau engagement and partnerships, Shared achievement challenges – writing, mathematics, NCEA Level 2, Our Strategy – the inquiry cycle, A possible approach for achievement challenges, Code of Conduct, Our Structure, Memorandum of Agreement

## Appendix H

### CoL Leader information



#### Community of Learning Leader

**Date Information Sheet Produced:**

12/11/2017

**Project Title**

(Re)locating New Zealand school principals as leaders in school networks: Leadership in Communities of Learning

An Invitation

My name is Michelle Dibben and I am researching this topic as part of a Master of Educational Leadership Degree. I am currently working as a Deputy Principal in an Auckland Primary School, and my school is a member of a Community of Learning.

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

The purpose of this research is to identify the practices that embody successful Community of Learning leadership and the extent to which these practices are being employed. There will be a focus on the challenges faced by transitioning from sole school leadership to network leadership. The value of this study is to provide participant Communities of Learning, and their leaders, an opportunity to reflect on their leadership practice and their potential as a network to make a positive difference to student outcomes. In addition, the research will have wider community benefits in terms of providing recommendations that could be considered in other Community of Learning contexts. For example, the outcomes of the research have the potential to be used as an insight into future leadership development.

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

I am seeking your participation in the study as your Community of Learning is based in Auckland and has been working collaboratively for approximately two years. Your network is composed of between eight and twelve institutions that cover the primary, intermediate and secondary sectors.

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

You will agree to participate in this research by contacting me using my email or phone contact found at the end of this information sheet. A consent form will require signature at the time of interview (a consent form is attached for your reference).

**What will happen in this research?**

The study involves collecting data from the Community of Learning leader and each of the member school principals. This will take the form of a semi-structured interview with the Community of Learning leader, and completion of a questionnaire by each of the participating principals. The interview with the Community of Learning leader should take approximately one hour and will be audio recorded. The interview can take place in your own school or at AUT. A koha in the form of petrol vouchers will be given in appreciation of your time. The Community of Learning leader interview will precede the principal questionnaires to provide context for their questions. The questions will be based on the themes/issues that arise from the interview with the Community of Learning leader.

**What are the discomforts and risks?**

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. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable.



**What are the benefits?**

Participant benefits – the outcomes of this research will give participant Communities of Learning and their leaders an opportunity to reflect on their leadership practice and their potential as a network to make a positive difference to student outcomes.

Researcher benefits – through conducting this research and involving herself in an extensive literature review, the primary researcher will be able to grow her own understanding and knowledge base regarding new ways of thinking about leadership. This provides opportunities to share, and apply knowledge gained, in the contexts and/or future contexts in which she works, with the ultimate aim of raising student achievement. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher will gain a Master of Educational Leadership qualification.

Wider community benefits – although your case study is context specific, it is hoped that the findings generate theory/recommendations that can be considered by others to inform practice within their Community of Learning contexts. For example, the outcomes of this research has the potential to be used as an insight into future leadership development. In addition, it may uncover implications for future research in an aspect of leadership that is both topical and relevant.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

There are limits to the level of confidentiality afforded to the participants through this study as it is quite possible that potential participants will be known to each other. However, the research design and questions have been selected to minimise this risk. Confidentiality and anonymity are respected through consideration of ethical data collection and transcription, pseudonymous analysis tools and sensitive data storage. The questionnaire, given to network principals, is completely anonymous and non-identifiable to even the researcher.

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

You will have two weeks to consider this invitation at which time one follow up email and/or phone call will be initiated to confirm/exclude your participation in the study.

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

You will receive a transcript of the interview, and findings from the study will be circulated to all participants prior to its publication.

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *Howard Youngs, AUT, [howard.youngs.aut.ac.nz](mailto:howard.youngs.aut.ac.nz), 09 921 9999 ext 9633*

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTECH, Kate O'Connor, [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext 6038.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

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

**Researcher Contact Details:**

Michelle Dibben, [mjdibben64@hotmail.com](mailto:mjdibben64@hotmail.com), 021 2145 2795

**Project Supervisor Contact Details:**

Howard Youngs, AUT, [howard.youngs.aut.ac.nz](mailto:howard.youngs.aut.ac.nz), 09 921 9999 ext 9633

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 12 December 2017, AUTECH Reference number 17/432.

## Appendix I

### CoL Leader consent form



### Consent Form

**Project title:** *(Re)locating New Zealand School Principals as leaders in school networks: Leadership in Communities of Learning*

**Project Supervisor:** *Howard Youngs*

**Researcher:** *Michelle Dibben*

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 12/11/2017.
- ☐ 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: .....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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

Date:

***Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 12 December 2017,  
AUTEK Reference number 17/432***

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