

The Work of Deans in Secondary Schools: Critical Pastoral Middle Leadership for Student Engagement

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Abstract

This research critically examines Deans' work to improve student engagement and outcomes in secondary schools, by analysing Deans' perceptions and experiences of their role in this work. It is established that student engagement has a significant impact on academic and social outcomes, and that pastoral care is an essential part of schools. However, while they occupy pastoral middle leadership positions in most New Zealand secondary schools, there is a noticeable lack of literature on the role of Deans. This critical qualitative study comprises of interviews with six Deans, who work at three very different secondary schools.

The diverse school contexts offer an understanding of the common attributes of Deans and their work while also providing insight into the contextual nature of both student engagement and educational leadership. Perceptions of barriers to engagement are presented, along with the efforts, challenges and enablers Deans experience in supporting the success of their students. Relationships are found to be paramount to effective pastoral care and leadership. Deans are understood to have special qualities that enable their work in a role interpreted as distinct to that of curriculum middle leaders. The findings further substantiate the complex nature of student engagement and illustrate the multi-faceted and boundary-spanning work of Deans. A socio-ecological model of effective pastoral care leadership for student engagement and success is presented, along with recommendations for improving student care and support of the Deans' role.

This research was approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 4 July 2018, AUTEK Reference number 18/245.

Attestation of authorship

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

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis critically examines the experiences and perceptions of pastoral middle leaders in three quite different secondary school settings. The focus is on Deans' work to improve student engagement. However, the findings and analysis also more broadly expose some of the critical challenges and enablers that affect both students and educators in their work to foster positive academic and social outcomes for students. This chapter establishes the rationale for the research by examining the need to better engage students in New Zealand schools. My personal and professional experience, the educational context, and gaps in the current literature are also presented. A justification of the methodology completes the rationale section. The research aim and questions are presented along with a brief description of the study. The chapter concludes with an outline of the chapters in this thesis.

Rationale for the research

The rationale for this research stems from multiple sources. This section provides the professional, contextual, research and methodology rationales for the topic and approach of this study.

Professional and personal

In twelve years of teaching, I have had various roles within schools. Most recently, I have been a Dean for five years in a large Auckland secondary school. I am also a lead member of my school's Māori Achievement Committee, which seeks to raise the profile and success of Māori and Pasifika students. In these roles, I have seen first-hand the immensely positive difference pastoral care middle leaders can make to outcomes for students as well as school culture. At times, I have also been absorbed by the frustration of trying to motivate students who are disengaged from school. I have had both successes and failures in promoting attendance and academic success within a system that alienates too many people. I have struggled to change mindsets and systems, and been privy to despair when my efforts are not enough. I chose this career path because I view the world through a critical lens, having always been concerned with the injustice of social inequity and because I still believe in the value and emancipatory power of education.

Hence, this research looks to understand the experiences of Deans in their attempts to increase student engagement and the associated social and academic outcomes of students. A recent government-funded report, *Te Pakiaka Tangata: Strengthening student wellbeing for success* (Ministry of Education, 2017a), is hopefully testament to a revitalised focus on student wellbeing and success criteria which are not solely focussed on narrow neo-liberal notions of achievement. It is also one of the only documents I could find that somewhat acknowledges the role of Deans, and provides the only published definition of the role in New Zealand that I could locate:

Deans are experienced teachers who are responsible for all students within a year or a vertical group. They hold an overview of all aspects of their students' wellbeing, participation, engagement and achievement. Deans are the integrated link, for students, between senior management and classroom teachers. The role of a dean includes facilitating support for students and liaising with families. They provide leadership responsibility and support to teachers in providing student pastoral care alongside the guidance counsellor(s) and wider pastoral care team. (p. 21)

This definition attests to the complexity of the role. Middle leaders are teachers who balance teaching loads with leadership responsibilities (Cardno, 2012). Deans are the middle leaders primarily responsible for the pastoral care of students, but who also now commonly oversee the academic achievement of their cohort (Fraser, 2014; Joyce, 2013; Murphy, 2011). My role as a Dean is highly relational and spans many of the important relationships in a young person's education. It is because of this that I believe Deans have the potential to make a difference to student engagement.

The context

Improving student engagement is critical given New Zealand schools and their achievement results reflect a concerning inequality within our society. The *PISA 2015: New Zealand summary report* (May, Flockton, & Kirkham, 2016) shows our very best students do very well. Others do not, especially when they are from low socio-economic backgrounds or are Māori or Pasifika. Fifteen year olds considered to have low socio-economic status, for example, are six times more likely to underachieve in Mathematics. Furthermore, the difference in achievement between students from

advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds is larger than average for countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (May et al., 2016), highlighting New Zealand's unusually large 'achievement gap'.

In New Zealand this educational inequity has been attributed to cultural marginalisation (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2009), deficit thinking (Webber, 2012), cultural capital (Haque, 2014), students' perceptions of their teachers' care for them and their learning (Hattie, 2009), as well as the all-important socio-economic status. It is likely a combination of these factors that impact different people in varying degrees. However, the gap does suggest what Bourdieu (1986) coined 'social reproduction' by education. That is to say, the privileged 'class' retain their position in society because the values of the powerful majority are deeply entrenched as educational 'norms'. This is not to say this is a deliberate or even conscious act, but rather to suggest that to break this cycle, interventions need to change these educational norms. Educational inequity often equates to social inequity. This is a critical issue which requires immediate attention.

Accordingly, the need to better serve those who have historically and, too often, continue to be failed by our education system, has led to several important government initiatives. The 'priority learner' initiative ensures schools focus their efforts on "groups of students who have been identified as historically not experiencing success in the New Zealand schooling system. These include many Māori and Pacific learners, those from low socio-economic backgrounds, and students with special education needs" (Education Review Office, 2012, p. 4). Additionally, the *Pasifika Education Plan* (Ministry of Education, 2017b), *Ka Hikitia - Accelerating Success 2013–2017* (Ministry of Education, 2013), and *Te Kōtahitanga* (Bishop et al., 2009) also have a strong focus on increasing engagement. These documents focus on increasing culturally responsive practice and a sense of belonging and competency, and building trust and relationships with students and whānau. At my current school as a Dean, I am responsible for ensuring the 'priority learners' in my year group achieve their potential. This responsibility includes academic tracking, mentoring, meetings with whānau, and ensuring teachers are aware of students' needs and how to support them. At my school, this initiative has been hugely successful in terms of achievement results, engaging students in their academic work, and focusing teachers on the students most

at risk of low achievement. However, a synthesis of school evaluations (Education Review Office, 2012) concluded that while Māori and Pasifika achievement and school retention rates are improving, too many schools are not doing enough, and the significant achievement gap affecting priority learners needs to be more urgently addressed. Despite the value of the current initiatives for Māori engagement, Berryman and Eley (2017) emphasise a view that there is no 'quick fix' to the cumulative effect of intergenerational inequities. They further assert there is still much more work to do and they are especially critical of the Ministry of Education's lack of practical leadership in respect to *Ka Hikitia* (Ministry of Education, 2013).

The attendance rates in New Zealand secondary schools further justify concerns about the engagement of our young people. A recent national attendance survey found that in 2017, only 63% of students were attending regularly – 'attending regularly' being defined as present at school for more than 90% of all half-days. Only around half of the students who identified as Māori or Pasifika attended regularly, and this rate dropped to only 47% in Decile 1 schools (Ministry of Education, 2018). The statistics have been consistent for decades. They indicate the considerable number of New Zealand students not even attending school, let alone being engaged at any deep level. Furthermore, a longitudinal study in New Zealand concluded that although most students feel safe and supported at school, secondary school is not as engaging as it could and should be for a sizeable minority (Wylie, Hodgen, Hipkins, & Vaughan, 2008). Clearly, the current educational context is not meeting the needs of young people or society.

The research

Education matters because of the significant benefit to individuals and society, which according to an OECD report, includes but goes beyond employability and income (OECD, 2013). Additionally, student engagement significantly affects academic performance and high-school completion and has been found to mediate academic risk factors such as socio-economic status (Reschly & Christenson, 2012). My study adopts a common definition of student engagement, whereby it is considered to be a multi-dimensional construct which comprises students' behaviour, emotion and cognition (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). This

suggests educators must respond to students' needs on multiple levels, and hence research should aim to understand such needs and enabling pedagogical practices.

My study presented in this thesis responds to a need to further such research as well as research in other important areas of education. Firstly, there is a noticeable lack of literature on the role of pastoral middle leaders, such as Deans, despite their place in most New Zealand secondary schools (Joyce, 2013; Murphy, 2011). There also needs to be much greater acknowledgement of the importance of middle leaders, in practice and in research (Cardno, 2012; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013). Furthermore, it is argued that future leadership research should focus on discovering the leadership practices perceived to improve the variables in schools for which there is already considerable evidence of impact on student outcomes (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Finally, as Lawson (2017) states, school engagement research now needs to better attend to the everyday realities of educators who work beyond the classroom to support students. Understanding how pastoral middle leaders can and do support student engagement in school, as well as the enablers and challenges they encounter, means we can be more effective in supporting good practice. Hence, this research aims to examine and present the critical work of Deans, thus far neglected in the literature.

The methodology

My study is a critical qualitative study of the perceptions and experiences of educators who fulfil a similar pastoral middle leadership role to me. My life experiences, interests and values have influenced both the topic and methodological approach of this study. As Bryman (2012) states, "The training and personal values of the researcher cannot be ignored ... they may influence the research area, the research questions, and the methods employed to investigate these" (p. 7). Foremost I am a teacher but, additionally, I have experience in various professional development and leadership roles. I also have a bachelor's degree in Political Studies and Psychology. My political leanings are a response to issues of injustice and social inequity, and I am critical of the structures that maintain inequality. Such values are indicative of a critical lens (Steinberg, 2012). My interest in the socioemotional and psychological factors of learning and engagement is longstanding. Rubie-Davies (2011) argues that a better understanding of such factors brings hope for a more cohesive and effective education

system for all students. While psychology has traditionally taken a realist stance to understanding human behaviour, the discipline now has strong advocates for qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Furthermore, Youngs (2011) suggests the study of leadership is more suited to qualitative research because it is so complex and contextually rich. In my study, I sought to understand how those leaders who are seemingly responsible for many aspects of student engagement experience their role. Moreover, aligned with Braun and Clarke's (2013) description, I tend to have "qualitative sensibility" (p. 9) with an interest in process and meaning over cause and effect, and a critical and questioning approach to life and knowledge. Clearly, I am not a neutral researcher. From the outset, I value school engagement and assume, from experience and empirical evidence, engagement to have a positive effect on people's lives. Engagement may not be the ultimate goal of education, but disengagement opposes most educational and intrinsically valuable life goals.

A critical qualitative study, which values the personal and social importance of education and learning, fits with my personal and professional experiences and values. It is also hoped that this research will contribute to filling a gap in the literature, increasing our contextual understanding of pastoral middle leadership.

Research aim and questions

The contextual considerations outlined above, along with my personal and professional experiences, shaped the focus of this study. The research aim is:

To critically examine the ways in which pastoral middle leaders perceive and experience their role in supporting students' school engagement to improve social and academic outcomes for secondary school students.

The principal research question is:

How do Deans perceive and experience their role in supporting students' school engagement to improve social and academic outcomes for students?

The subsidiary research questions are:

1. What do Deans perceive to be the most important aspects of their role?
2. In what ways do Deans define and understand student engagement?

3. What practices do Deans report using to improve student engagement and associated outcomes for students?
4. What challenges and enablers do Deans experience in their practice with regard to fostering student engagement?

This research is a critical qualitative study which sits within an interpretive paradigm and a constructivist worldview. A critical lens was also used to further question the inequities and structures that maintain apparent issues within the education system. The data were collected through six semi-structured interviews with Deans/Heads of House from three different schools in a range of socio-economic areas. Ethics approval was obtained before inviting the participants to this study (Appendix A). The voices and synopses of the participants' views are presented under each of the subsidiary research questions above, then thematically analysed to inform a discussion of the findings. An overview along with recommendations completed the research.

Outline of the thesis

This thesis is organised into six chapters which each represent a different aspect of the research process. These are outlined below:

Chapter one provided a rationale for the research and outlined the research methodology, aim, and question.

Chapter two is a literature review. This is divided into three main sub-headings to present the literature most relevant to each concept in this study: student engagement educational leadership; and pastoral care.

Chapter three presents and justifies the methodological approach and interpretive paradigm. It explains the process of data collection and analysis. There is a discussion about the application of trustworthiness, validity and dependability in this study as well as the ethical considerations.

Chapter four is a presentation of the findings. The participants and their context are outlined. The four subsidiary research questions provide the headings for each section

in which tables present the themes, which are exemplified through explanation and participant quotes.

Chapter five is a critical discussion of the findings. The four main themes that emerged from thematic analyses are discussed in terms of relevant literature presented in Chapter two.

Chapter six summarises the overall findings and discusses the implications of these in the wider social and educational context. Recommendations for schools and the government, as well as future research, are made.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter is a review of the literature relevant to this study. It provides a critical synthesis of the current knowledge on educational leadership, pastoral middle leadership, and student engagement and outcomes, organised respectively under these three headings. The literature included is that which I deemed most reliable, pertinent and well-regarded, with literature most relevant to the Aotearoa/New Zealand secondary school context used where possible.

Educational leadership

This section reviews some of the most prominent findings in the literature on educational leadership as it relates to leadership effectiveness and student outcomes. This connection has been the subject of educational leadership research for the past few decades, and is a complex, multi-layered and contextual challenge (MacBeath, 2008). A comprehensive study by Louis et al. (2010) asserted that leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning. Yet, there is more to learn, especially regarding the variety of leadership that exists in the distributed leadership context now common in schools (Cardno, 2012; Youngs, 2014). Notman and Youngs (2016) recently highlighted the difficult yet important challenge of evaluating school leadership, especially in secondary school contexts. As their study attests, there is now strong empirical evidence for core elements of effective school leadership, even though much of the evidence is based on senior leadership positions, notably school principals, and rarely exclusively focussed on secondary schools. This section examines the influence of educational leadership on key variables which affect the success of schools, educators and students. Middle leaders are considered to affect and be affected by such variables, while they also have specific role needs and issues which are discussed towards the end of this section.

Influence of educational leadership

A substantial report on educational leadership outlines the two core functions of school leadership as setting direction and exercising influence (Louis et al., 2010). Direction ensues when strategic goals are formulated to improve teaching and learning while obtaining and managing resources (Ministry of Education, 2012). Principal or senior

leadership influence is commonly understood to be mostly indirect, through influencing other people and the environment, while middle leaders can have more of a direct influence on teaching and learning (Brundrett & Rhodes, 2010; Cardno, 2012; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013). A pertinent model, conceptualised by Hallinger and Heck (2011), presents school leadership as influencing student learning outcomes through affecting three main variables: school culture, academic structures and processes, and people. Notably, they assert that leaders and leadership are also influenced by school variables, such as school conditions and performance outcomes, and hence these variables are likely to have reciprocal effects. Hallinger and Heck (2011) add to their model the notion that context impacts on each of the above aspects; and furthermore, that leaders' personal antecedents – values, beliefs, knowledge and experience – impact on school leadership. This model aligns with a body of current literature which portrays leadership as personal, interpersonal and contextual. Influence, it seems, is multi-directional, suggesting the need to appreciate both the leader and the context to understand leadership.

Hence, researchers agree that effective leaders are responsive to both school and societal context (Hallinger & Heck, 2011; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Louis et al., 2010; Notman & Youngs, 2016). Aligned with the idea that leaders both shape and are shaped by the context and culture in which they work, Walker (2010) asserts that school culture influences human thought and behaviour “at every turn” (p. 180), and hence has a significant impact on teaching and learning. Brundrett and Rhodes (2010) state that effective leaders are aware of “inclusion issues and take measures to encourage the engagement of all learners as their outcomes can be strongly influenced by other factors such as family socio-economic level and home environment” (p. 161), which is particularly relevant to Deans' work. However, it is also clear such an understanding should accompany a culture of high expectations, where teachers accept responsibility for their students' learning and do not assume learning difficulties are a result of ability, socio-economic status, or family background (Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall, & Strauss, 2010). This is deemed especially important for the success of Māori students, who may have been affected by negative stereotypes (Bishop, 2011). According to Robinson (2011), a foundational aspect of leadership is creating a safe and orderly school environment as without this, educating students is

practically impossible: “Students’ engagement with school, particularly their attendance, is strongly affected by whether they judge it to be physically and psychologically safe and whether they feel that most of their teachers care about them” (p.142).

This implies leaders, especially those who have regular contact with students such as Deans, must work to ensure students feel safe, supported and encouraged to achieve.

Schools should also be places where staff feel safe and supported. Leaders shape the environment in which teachers work (Cardno, 2012; Louis et al., 2010) and must be aware of both the affective and professional needs of their staff (Bush & Middlewood, 2013; Crawford, 2009; Leithwood, 2011; Louis et al., 2010; Walker, 2010). This need is exemplified in Acton and Glasgow’s (2015) research from Australia which shows teacher wellbeing impacts on educational goals. The research led them to advocate for contexts where manageable and realistic work demands allow for autonomy; where professional expertise and practice are respected, valued, and celebrated; and which ideally enhance professional flourishing (Acton & Glasgow, 2015). Similarly, Leithwood (2007) found that school cultures where teachers are able to find their work meaningful, such as by having clear and morally inspiring goals, where collaboration is encouraged, and collegiality common, positively contribute to the affective lives of teachers.

Such consideration is perhaps particularly relevant in New Zealand where teacher shortage is a pressing issue, with just under half of beginning secondary teachers leaving teaching within five years (Roberts & Rodgers, 2016). In fact, recent research depicts even teachers thought to show considerable promise after their second year of teaching to mostly be only persevering and coping after eight years (Cameron & Lovett, 2015). This is especially so in secondary schools. Of note, the *Teachers of Promise* study also shows that teachers with management duties or middle leadership positions often struggle to meet the demands of the dual responsibilities which leaves them feeling dissatisfied (Cameron & Lovett, 2015). The implication is that educators and leaders who are overwhelmed or discontent may not be in the best position to encourage and support other staff or students.

It follows that leadership is considered foremost about people. Researchers emphasise the importance of nurturing trusting relationships with staff, students and community

(Cardno, 2012; Hayes, Christie, Mills, & Lingard, 2004; Leithwood, Anderson, et al., 2010; Robinson, 2011; Tamati, 2011). This sentiment is evident in Māori leadership theory which positions the leader as a guardian - he kaitiaki - “protecting and nurturing a caring environment where people and ideas are valued; health, safety and well-being are enhanced; and relationships are strong” (Ministry of Education, 2012). Similarly, Hayes et al. (2004) advocate for a culture of care, while Tamati (2011) views leadership as about both contribution and responsibility whereby people and relationships are prioritised amongst all stake-holders. Fairman and Mackenzie (2015) state relationships are central to the ability of a leader to have influence, as does Cardno (2012) who emphasises the interpersonal skills required by middle-leaders, especially noting empathy. Bolden, Witzel and Linacre (2016) discuss the ability of effective leaders to influence through social processes, such as “sense-making, boundary spanning and providing a compelling narrative” (p. 48). Evidently, the personal antecedents of leaders, as defined by Hallinger and Heck (2011), are essential considerations given the influence leaders can have on culture, staff, and relationships across the school and community.

The importance of leaders’ personal qualities is further substantiated by Dufour and Marzano (2011), who state the best leaders lead with moral purpose. They love their work and those they serve, lead by example, are good learners, and empower, support and train others. Leadership is thus “an affair of the heart” (p. 193). Key leadership qualities of senior and middle leaders are also outlined in the Ministry of Education’s (2012) leadership documents. Echoing the sentiments above for example, *manaakitanga* is a quality that embodies leading with moral purpose in the care for others. It seems especially likely that those who undertake pastoral care leadership roles, such as Deans are inclined towards such care and purpose.

However, moral purpose must be accompanied by skills and leadership development (Dufour & Marzano, 2011). Leaders must have a commitment to learning, which is regarded as *ako* in the Ministry of Education leadership documents (2012). They must be able to lead beyond their own values or worldview, and see situations from multiple perspectives (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Crawford (2014) states both personal and professional development are essential, and emphasises the importance of regular reflective practice to learn from experience. van Velsor, McCauley, and Ruderman

(2010) agree and developed a model of leadership development which states leaders develop through assessment, challenge and support. Effective leaders have a commitment to continually developing and improving themselves as well as their schools.

The need to develop staff is clear. A well-regarded synthesis of research (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009) established the school leadership practice of promoting and participating in effective teacher professional learning has twice the impact of any other leadership activity on student outcomes. This relates to the finding that of all school variables, teachers and instruction are deemed to make the biggest difference to student outcomes (Hattie, 2009; Robinson et al., 2009). It is important to note most of this research was in primary schools, where students generally have one main teacher. While agreeing with the critical role of teachers, Louis et al. (2010) state that most school variables, when considered separately, have relatively small effects on student learning, and the greatest impact is when they are combined. Hence, they emphasise the place of leaders as well positioned to “create synergy” across variables and all the people who work hard for improved educational outcomes (p. 9).

Furthermore, Leithwood et al.’s (2010) research concluded larger gains can be made from variables other than teachers’ instructional practices, especially when these are already good. They outline four paths of leadership influence on student learning: rational, emotional, organisational, and family. Of these, the family path is deemed a high leverage option for school leaders as it accounts for as much as 50% of variation. The family path consists of several variables which, according to Hattie’s (2009) synthesis, schools can influence. These include: the home environment, parent involvement and home visits by school personnel (Leithwood, Anderson, et al., 2010). Robinson (2011) also advises creating a safe and engaging school environment goes beyond the school gate and that leaders must use effective strategies to engage families. Leithwood et al. (2010) state that:

Parent engagement is nurtured when parents come to understand that such involvement is a key part of what it means to be a responsible parent, when parents believe they have the skills and know-how to make meaningful contributions to the school’s efforts and when they believe that school staffs, as well as their own children, value their participation in the school (p. 24).

This implies schools and the education sector should take greater responsibility to include and esteem parents. Deans, who are often the main point of contact for parents in secondary schools, are perhaps well-placed to impact whānau involvement in such a positive way.

An issue for leaders at multiple levels of the education sector is how to best ensure schools work for all students and whānau within an inequitable society. While Haque (2014) believes schools and teachers can and do mitigate negative variables, he argues research provides compelling evidence that shows student achievement to be directly related to outside school factors – mostly the home environment, including socio-economic factors and cultural capital. Haque (2014) asserts cultural capital accounts for much of the “serious achievement gap” (p. 13) apparent in New Zealand. This is often correlated with socio-economic status but is perhaps more able to be influenced by educators. Cultural capital would, for example, incorporate what Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) referred to as family educational culture, which they found to be a powerful variable in student engagement. Haque (2014) outlines the academically-helpful behaviours of parents with high cultural capital, who value the school system - as it reflects their own values - and know how to best support their students’ success at school. It seems obvious that misunderstanding and incongruence between home and school, in terms of expectations, culture and values makes teaching and learning harder for all involved. This ought to be a critical responsibility of leaders; one that would be a critical step towards alleviating generational inequity in education. Yet, this is clearly a difficult task.

There is hence a call by more political educational leaders to look to external variables and wider policies to understand student underachievement and to affect change. Fullan (2003) argues school leaders have a moral responsibility to extend their influence beyond their own schools and to policy-makers at the government level. Haque (2014; 2018) blames the government for many systemic issues in education and society, as does Thrupp (2017) who criticises the previous government for their over-emphasis on teachers as the main variable in educational outcomes and their denial of socio-economic issues. This is further argued by Berryman and Eley (2017) who repeat Ladson-Billings’ (2006) earlier use of the term ‘education debt’ to describe the societal deficit – such as social problems, low wages, unemployment and crime – that require

ongoing public investment but are influenced by the lack of resources invested in the schooling of those who need it most. They assert focusing only on the achievement gap will not create sustainable change given the impact of historical, economical, socio-political and moral decisions that have created the 'education debt' over generations. The literature suggests tangible policy change is required to address the social, socio-economic, and educational barriers faced by many of those who do not succeed in the current school system. It is perhaps the place of educational leaders to assert such pressure on the government. It is also perhaps a frustration felt by many educators, especially those such as Deans, who may work with the human face of such inequity.

Variables which often appear in the achievement gap discussion are culture and ethnicity. Globally, educational inequality for indigenous youth is pervasive (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2015). In our context, leadership must aim to reverse the underachievement of Māori (Berryman & Eley, 2017; Bishop, 2011; Webber, 2012) and Pasifika students (Talení et al., 2017). Hence, many researchers assert culturally responsive pedagogy is essential (Berryman & Eley, 2017; Bishop et al., 2009; May et al., 2016; Talení, Macfarlane, Macfarlane, & Fletcher, 2017; Webber, 2012). It is argued Māori and Pasifika students have a history of underachievement and disengagement from education because schools do not adequately reflect or value their values and cultural identity, or understand how they best learn (Berryman, Lawrence, & Lamont, 2018; Bishop et al., 2009; Webber, 2012). I note this resonates with both the student engagement concept of student-environment 'fit' (Wang & Eccles, 2012) discussed in the next section, and as an issue of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), whereby the 'capital' of the students does not match the 'capital' – knowledge, values, and dispositions – valued by the school. According to Bourdieu's (1986) influential theory, cultural capital explains the 'social reproduction' of inequality in education: those in the dominant population have the valued socialised tendencies, dispositions and knowledge which enable them to more easily find success in a school environment built around such valued 'cultural capital', hence perpetuating a cycle of success and stratification of social status and power. Notably, such 'habitus' and cultural capital are seen as deeply ingrained, operating at a subconscious level; hence the dominant cultural capital is often seen as inherently valuable and unquestioned. If education is to address the persistent achievement gap and ensure equity in both process and

outcome, it seems issues of cultural capital and social reproduction must be questioned. Certainly, to create necessary social change, it is no longer acceptable to work predominantly within a Western paradigm, as argued by Santamaría and Santamaría (2015) who state that leaders have a responsibility to strengthen their own culturally responsive practice and that of those around them. They argue this means educators must recognise their own biases, expose dominant underlying assumptions, and actively incorporate indigenous ways of knowing. This need is reinforced by previously mentioned Ministry initiatives (Bishop et al., 2009; Ministry of Education, 2013) which advocate for Māori achieving and realising potential as Māori, and not through a process of assimilation, which has not worked for Māori (Berryman et al., 2018; Bishop, 2011; Webber, 2018). This is a pressing issue for leaders at all levels of the educational hierarchy.

Middle leadership

Middle leaders are defined in *Leading from the middle* (Ministry of Education, 2012) as a diverse group of teachers who “work with and support classroom teachers and students, providing pedagogical and pastoral leadership and fulfilling various administrative functions” (p. 7). It is noted that the necessity and normalisation of distributed leadership in secondary schools means researchers must seek to understand more about the roles and influences of middle leaders (Cardno, 2012; De Nobile, 2018; Harris, 2010; Youngs, 2014). As Fullan (2003) states, you cannot have effective leadership without effectively distributed leadership. Yet “middle-level leadership has not captured the research interest it deserves” (Gurr & Drysdale, 2013, p. 57). Moreover, extant leadership literature tends to focus on curriculum leaders (Cardno & Bassett, 2015; Feist, 2008; Fitzgerald, 2009; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013) and mostly neglects pastoral middle leaders such as Deans. As other Master’s theses have noted, with regard to Deans, there is a silence in the literature (Joyce, 2013; Murphy, 2011).

However, several key findings in the literature on middle leaders are considered pertinent to Deans. Middle leaders are often closer to students than senior leaders and can have more direct influence on engagement and achievement through their relationships with colleagues (Brundrett & Rhodes, 2010). They can more directly support teachers’ professional needs (Bennett, Woods, Wise, & Newton, 2007; Gurr &

Drysdale, 2013), and have been found to have a bigger effect on student engagement than principals (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Additionally, Leithwood, Anderson, et al. (2010) found that sharing of leadership is correlated with collective teacher efficacy, which is associated with many exemplary teacher practices including, “adopting a more humanistic approach to student management” (p. 18), responding to students’ needs, persistence, high expectations, and commitment to community partnerships.

It is clear outcomes depend on how leadership is distributed (Harris, 2010; Leithwood, 2011). The ideal is that teachers are empowered to contribute, thus, as Brundrett and Rhodes (2010) state, realising both personal and organisational potential. However, it is well-noted that distributed forms may simply lead to more levels within a hierarchy, with perhaps only marginally increased autonomy and influence (Youngs, 2011), and potentially more distributed stress (Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010). In Louis et al.’s (2010) study, for example, responses from teachers suggest very few noticeable changes in schools, despite the common rhetoric of greater democracy. Ings (2017) criticises the persistent hierarchies in school leadership, believing that organisations that are based on flexibility, inclusion and disseminated power are more successful, and that hierarchical structures lead to exploitation and the limiting of human potential. Raelin (2011) is also critical of the structures, and advocates for leadership that arises when, where, and by whom the need calls, rather than existing within assigned roles. However, Gurr and Drysdale (2013) insist that any ideal that leadership is for everyone is misguided because it neglects the special qualities of leaders and the support and professional learning required. Hence, they insist on wider acknowledgement of the often-unrealised potential and impact of middle leaders on student and school improvement. It is clear that if Deans are to achieve their potential within the distributed leadership models in schools, more must be understood about their core responsibilities, influences, and the needs of their role.

Such knowledge is critical given there is substantial evidence to suggest middle leaders have an ever-increasing workload, have to balance demanding leadership and management responsibilities with a heavy teaching load, and are often overwhelmed with managerial tasks rather than leadership (Cardno, 2012; De Nobile, 2018; Feist, 2008; Fitzgerald, 2009; Fitzgerald, Youngs, & Grootenboer, 2003; Louis et al., 2010). Furthermore, it is argued, there is a lack of recognition and professional support for the

specific challenges of middle leaders (Cardno, 2012; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Louis et al., 2010). Cardno and Bassett's (2015) New Zealand study found an interesting discrepancy in perspectives: "middle-level leaders did not perceive themselves to be adequately trained to do the job whilst the senior leaders felt strongly that they were" (p. 34). Despite role expansion bestowed on them from senior leaders, there is no national initiative for middle leadership development and it is unlikely there will be one in the future, which Cardno and Bassett (2015) assert is insufficient. This suggests it is unlikely Deans are receiving the professional development they need. The next sections specifically examines the literature relevant to the role of Dean.

Pastoral middle leadership

Deans are the middle leaders considered to have a primary focus on student pastoral care. They occupy roles in most New Zealand secondary schools and, as the only known definition states, are considered responsible for the overview of students' wellbeing, participation, engagement and achievement; and the link between students, families, support services, senior management and classroom teachers (Ministry of Education, 2017a). This section briefly reviews the concept of pastoral care and the literature on the pastoral middle leadership role.

Pastoral care is considered a United Kingdom (UK) phenomenon, originally based on Christianity and passed on through colonial links (Best, 1999; Calvert, 2009; Hearn, Campbell-Pope, House, & Cross, 2006). However, both the concept and practice has evolved over years (Best, 2014; Calvert, 2009; Lodge, 2006). Pastoral care has many definitions. Calvert (2009) says it is an ill-defined broad term used "to describe the structures, practices and approaches to support the welfare, well-being and development of children and young people (p.267). Purdy (2013) calls for a broad definition of pastoral care which is "much more than an emotional crutch" (p. 2), is about a whole school atmosphere, and ensures young people are prepared for the realities of life and the inevitable challenges ahead. Best (2007) states that "pastoral care embodies the idea that schools should not limit their activities to the transmission of knowledge but should educate the whole child" (p.249). While Grove (2004) aspirationally defines it as "all measures to assist an individual person or a community reach their full potential, success and happiness in coming to a deeper understanding

of their own humanness” (p. 34). It is evident in this literature that pastoral care is considered as much about supporting young people through difficulties as it is about ensuring their personal development as a well and capable member of society.

Research into the practice of pastoral care in schools further attests to such a broad focus. In reviewing literature, Hearn et al (2006) found consistent evidence for four core components in pastoral care: the promotion of health and wellbeing, resilience, academic care, and social capital. While, Best’s (1999; 2007) model of pastoral care is often referred to in the literature. He outlined five pastoral tasks: reactive casework; proactive, preventive work; developmental pastoral curricula; promoting and maintaining an orderly and supportive environment; and management and administration of pastoral care. Of interest is how the Deans’ role in New Zealand fits within each of these tasks and components.

Pastoral care has often been regarded as separate and parallel to the academic, according to Calvert (2009) who notes that pastoral care often refers to the assigned hierarchical roles within a school, such as the pastoral Head of Year in the UK – a role which seems similar to the role of Dean in New Zealand. It appears this role has now evolved to include more of an academic focus (Calvert, 2009; Lodge, 2006). Lodge (2006) believes this came about due to the increased public pressure on schools to improve attainment, which led to a sharper emphasis on the academic tracking of students. She notes this has also emerged as a way to feedback to teachers and support altered classroom practices. In fact, many researchers now advocate for the integration of pastoral and academic care (Addison, 2012; Best, 2014; Calvert, 2009; Hearn et al., 2006; Lodge, 2006; Notman & Youngs, 2016). Addison (2012) advocates for the concept of ‘academic care’ that transcends the out-dated academic-pastoral divide. He calls for an ‘ethic of care’ focused on the support of learning and the needs of students, and not just performance, which is deemed to build both self-efficacy and resilience.

The changing nature of schools, according to Lodge (2006), has also led to the change in the pastoral leader role in the UK, from disciplining disaffected students into fitting the demands of the school to changing the school to meet the needs of young people. Calvert (2009) states that historically, pastoral structures had a strong control dimension with Heads of Year being cast as ‘superdisciplinarians’, which he notes sat uncomfortably with the caring aspect of their work. Despite the changing role, Lodge

(2006) notes the persistent and frustrating perceptions that pastoral care is for behaviour management or a watered-down welfare service. Furthermore, Grove (2004) asserts that many schools struggle to fulfil their pastoral care needs because of a lack of theoretical and practical knowledge.

In New Zealand schools, pastoral care systems have been found to focus on understanding the “whole student” and on developing good relationships with students and their whānau, according to a synthesis regarding ‘priority learners’ in secondary schools (Education Review Office, 2012). The report also noted that teachers who care are more likely to find out how they can best help students learn, adding:

Effective leaders have a strong sense of ethical commitment to making school a place that fosters students’ learning and wellbeing. They convey to teachers that education... is as much about focussing on students’ pastoral care as on ensuring that they are successful (Education Review Office, 2012, p. 9).

This assertion acknowledges and validates the place of pastoral care in New Zealand schools, and appears to counter any argument that academic and pastoral care are unrelated.

Further to this, *Te Pakiaka Tangata: strengthening student wellbeing for success* (Ministry of Education, 2017a) states schools are in a unique position to improve young people’s wellbeing and asserts pastoral care is the responsibility of all staff. The report states tutors and Deans are required to be observers and listeners, and to continually check students’ levels of wellbeing and academic progress. The pastoral role is to “guide, enable and empower students to use good information to make well-considered positive choices for themselves, educationally and in life” (p. 19). Pastoral care work is deemed critical given the increasingly complex challenges adolescents face, including poverty, family dysfunction, bullying, substance misuse, and the high rates of both family violence and youth suicide in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2017a).

Despite the apparent need, prior to this recent publication (Ministry of Education, 2017b), there are no known documents relevant to Deans in New Zealand schools. While the place of pastoral leadership is acknowledged in the Ministry’s core middle leadership document, there is no specific discussion of the role (Ministry of

Education, 2012). In Australia, De Nobile's (2018) recent categorisation of the six middle leadership roles does include the 'student focused role'. Referencing various pastoral-type roles, he states this involves dealing with student issues such as welfare needs, problem behaviour, academic choices, and liaising between school and home. While this appears to portray the Deans' role, De Nobile also notes this role has little mention in the literature.

Despite a dearth of literature, there have been some significant unpublished master's theses focused on the role of the Dean in New Zealand. Joyce (2013) outlines the complex nature of the role whereby Deans attempt to bridge the pastoral academic divide, taking a holistic approach to improving student outcomes. Similarly, Murphy (2011) and Fraser (2014) each note the multifaceted nature of the role, the problems with defining responsibilities, authority, and duties, the growing demands which make for an implausible workload, as well as the need for specific training. It is also clear the role is ill-defined in school documents (Joyce, 2013; Murphy, 2011). The studies also show Deans fulfil a dual care-disciplinarian role, which they accept as an essential aspect of their work (Fraser, 2014; Joyce, 2013; Murphy, 2011). In one study, the researcher (Fraser, 2014), was surprised that many Deans believed instilling fear in students to be a necessary part of their role. There certainly tends to be a perception in schools that pastoral middle leaders are primarily responsible for discipline, as well as all matters related to the students in their care (Fraser, 2014; Joyce, 2013; Murphy, 2011). Fraser (2014) also noted the Deans' role appears to function as a 'dumping ground' for challenging tasks. Another thesis was aptly entitled, "Everything to everyone" (Joyce, 2013), while Murphy (2011) refers to Deans as "the glue of the school culture" (p. 112). These studies depict Deans as having responsibilities across many aspects of student experience, often being a link between various people and aspects of secondary school. They also reflect research on other middle leaders in finding they are often over-stretched and under-supported.

Joyce (2013) attributes the lack of empirical research to the low status of pastoral middle leadership, which is supported by Murphy (2011) who also states Deans receive less remuneration than curriculum leaders. Moreover, while Deans are perceived to have wider responsibility, they are perceived to have less positional

authority than their curriculum counterparts (Joyce, 2013). Similarly, case studies undertaken in Britain found teachers in pastoral roles reported feeling under-valued both in terms of their priorities and their promotional prospects in comparison to curriculum career paths (Best, 1999). In a context dominated by performance and accountability, it is suggested a pastoral role is difficult to appreciate. However, as this section has shown, there is a well-established mandate for pastoral care roles. The next section discusses another important educational concept, student engagement, while further exploring notions of valuable school outcomes.

Student engagement and school outcomes

This section critically reviews the literature relevant to student engagement and school outcomes. It includes issues that affect student engagement and outcomes in New Zealand, definitions of student engagement and a synthesis of relevant literature. This review favours literature which offers insight into the practical aspects of student engagement. Lawson (2017) suggests that within engagement research there is a need to better understand the “nuanced demands of practice in diverse school contexts” (p. 223). He proposes research should better attend to integrating theory with practice and take more notice of the realities of school personnel and the strategies and interventions they use to engage students at risk of disengagement or poor achievement. Hence, while most engagement research is quantitative, my study is qualitative, focusing on such practical realities of educators.

Such understanding may help to better support students who are disengaged from school. Fifteen years ago, a study commissioned by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) concluded that in every country, there is a substantial number of young people who are disengaged from secondary school, and that meeting the needs of these students is critical if they are to participate as active citizens in mainstream society (Willms, 2003). In New Zealand, the aforementioned achievement gap (Haque, 2018; May et al., 2016) and concerning attendance rates (Ministry of Education, 2018) suggest there is still much work to do around improving the engagement and outcomes of New Zealand students. A longitudinal study established a significant number of New Zealand secondary school students are disengaged or not as engaged as they should be – around 30% of 16 year olds (Wylie et al., 2008). These

researchers also found that school attendance, National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) achievement, and teachers' perceptions of student behaviour and attitudes at age 16 are all linked to how well students feel they are engaged with school. Understanding student engagement and how secondary schools encourage it is critical.

Student engagement is defined as a multi-faceted concept (Appleton et al., 2008; Fredricks et al., 2004) which comprises both psychological and behavioural components, as originally defined by Finn (1989). Built on this, are two similar definitions, which recent literature tends to use. One was proposed by Fredricks et al. (2004) and specifies three dimensions of student engagement: behavioural, emotional, and cognitive, which they describe as:

Behavioral engagement draws on the idea of participation; it includes involvement in academic and social or extracurricular activities and is considered crucial for achieving positive academic outcomes and preventing dropping out. Emotional engagement encompasses positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, academics, and school and is presumed to create ties to an institution and influence willingness to do the work. Finally, cognitive engagement draws on the idea of investment; it incorporates thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 60).

Appleton et al. (2008) proposed a similar model which separates the behavioural component into a fourth subtype, academic engagement, which refers specifically to academic behaviours such as work completion and time on task. In both models, behaviours are deemed overt, while the cognitive and emotional aspects of engagement are covert, and hence can be harder to identify (Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010). In regard to the role of Deans, viewing students' needs and actions through a lens which encompasses behavioural, cognitive, and affective elements may lead to greater understanding and support.

Clearly, student engagement with school affects both academic and social outcomes. As Finn and Zimmer (2012) state, educators can easily understand engagement behaviours. Furthermore, "the relationship between engagement behaviour and academic performance is confirmed repeatedly by empirical research" (Finn & Zimmer,

2012, p. 99). This strong correlation was recently confirmed by a meta-analysis which highlights the mass of empirical research (Hao, Yunhuo, & Wenye, 2018). Student engagement is also strongly correlated with secondary school completion (Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Lamote, Speybroeck, Van Den Noortgate, & Van Damme, 2013). It also positively correlates with socially valued goals such as prosocial behaviour (Wentzel, 2012) and persistence and resilience (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Furthermore, engagement is considered a critical factor in a young person's long-term wellbeing, success, and development as a competent member of society (Abbott-Chapman et al., 2014; Gemici & Lu, 2014; van Acker & Wehby, 2000; Willms, 2003). Hence, there is a strong argument for ensuring students are engaged in school.

Furthermore, some studies suggest school engagement mediates the effects of socio-economic status and other academic risk factors. In his report for PISA, Willms (2003) made a point of stating that despite finding socio-economic status is a dominant risk factor for student disaffection, there are also a number of students from such backgrounds who are engaged. Finn and Zimmer (2012) reviewed several studies that show highly significant correlations between engagement and academic outcomes exist even after controlling for such things as home and parental background, demographic factors, and self-esteem. They conclude that increasing student engagement increases academic resilience. Similarly, an Australian study found that high school engagement, can moderate the negative effects of socioeconomic disadvantage and Indigenous status, particularly through co-curricular involvement (Fullarton, 2002). In New Zealand, the pedagogy and leadership adopted in *Te Kōtahitanga* (Bishop et al., 2009) has proved to have a positive effect on student engagement and academic outcomes for Māori and other minoritized peoples. Although it is well-noted, as Bishop (2011) asserts, changes at multiple levels of the system are required to have substantial and sustained effect.

A central premise of the concept is that it is malleable. Student engagement is modifiable and responsive to the practices of teachers and schools, thus allowing for improved engagement and school outcomes (Appleton et al., 2008; Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012; Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Fredricks et al., 2004). Finn and Zimmer (2012) identified four key school factors which promote student engagement: teacher warmth and supportiveness; instructional processes that encourage participation;

small school size; and a safe environment with fair and effective disciplinary practices. Evidently, engagement is improved when students have a positive school experience, which has clear implications for pastoral middle leaders.

Social supports are deemed critical to positive school experiences and enabling a good school 'fit'. In engagement research, the importance of the goodness of fit between a student and the learning environment is often deemed paramount (Appleton et al., 2008; Fredricks, Filsecker, & Lawson, 2016; Wang & Eccles, 2012). Quality affective relationships, according to Wentzel (2012), promote a positive sense of self, emotional well-being, and motivation to engage with the environment. Equally, engagement research suggests that instead of seeing the characteristics of a student who behaves poorly as the problem to be solved, we look at the social context and systems that support and maintain these behaviours (van Acker & Wehby, 2000). Wang and Eccles' (2012) longitudinal study of the relative influence of different social supports determined no single intervention can promote student engagement. Their study found that while peer influence was significant, the effect of teacher support on emotional and cognitive engagement was greater than peer social support, and that support from parents and teachers can counteract negative peer influence. Hence, they emphasise the critical role of teachers: "Supportive teachers play a particularly important role in reducing the declines in school compliance, sense of school identification, and subjective valuing of learning at school across the secondary school years" (p. 890).

Further to this, Voelkl's (2012) research on the role of school identification finds students must both recognise that school experiences are useful to attaining future goals and value schoolwork for its personal importance. Voelkl (2012) emphasises the role of external encouragement from teachers and parents in fostering this. Then, over time positive school identification becomes an internal source of motivation for continued school engagement (Voelkl, 2012). The importance of both internal and external factors is also emphasised in Gibbs and Poskitt's (2010) review of both international and New Zealand research. They found eight main factors which influence engagement: relationships with teachers and peers, relational learning, dispositions to be a learner, motivation and interest, personal agency, self-efficacy, goal orientation and academic self-regulated learning. This suggests that when working with students,

Deans would do well to consider personal characteristics, motivation and future goals, and the relational support they are receiving in their learning environment.

Clearly ensuring students feel they belong at school is critical. As the literature suggests, in both practice and conceptual understanding, there are clear links between engagement, motivation and wellbeing with regard to student success. For example, Robinson (2011) attributes positive student engagement to school experiences that fulfil students' need for autonomy, competence and relatedness. These are the three basic psychological needs of Self Determination Theory, established as essential aspects of motivation, human development, wellbeing and engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Like motivation, Lawson (2017) notes self-determination has an important and precursory role in student engagement and hence achievement. From another angle, New Zealand educational psychologists emphasise the critical socio-emotional aspects of learning (Rubie-Davies, 2011; Townsend, 2011). Townsend (2011) explains motivation is largely dependent on students' beliefs about their capability, task-value, causal attribution; as well as their academic emotions, such as pride, shame, guilt, hope, anger, boredom and relief. He asserts teachers cannot give students motivation, but they can encourage positive beliefs and emotions associated with motivation. Evidently, positive or negative feelings towards school and learning impact motivation, engagement and school outcomes. Hence they must be at the forefront of educators' work.

The importance of emotion is further evident in attempts to understand how the dimensions of engagement may interact. Research on the *Check & Connect* programme (Reschly & Christenson, 2012) which aims to reduce disengagement through a long-term facilitated mentoring programme, led researchers to speculate cognitive and emotional engagement are antecedents of behavioural and academic engagement. Similar work later emphasised these affective elements as critical determinants, noting the importance of belonging and school-identification (Reschly, Pohl, Christenson, & Appleton, 2017). Deans, in their work to ensure both attendance and positive school behaviours would do well to understand the emotional links. A practical example of this is found in Robinson's (2011) assertion that schools are largely ineffective when they try to use external incentives or sanctions to get students, who feel alienated, to attend and behaviourally engage. However, Gibbs and Poskitt (2010) came to a slightly

different conclusion, stating that emotional and behavioural engagement are preconditions for cognitive learning: “students need to be present in class (behaviourally engaged), and experience a degree of emotional comfort and connectedness (emotionally engaged), before they can become cognitively engaged” (p.11). Part of their rationale stems from the *Te Kōtahitanga* initiative (Bishop et al., 2009), in which presence and connectedness are fundamental principles in the project’s aim to raise the engagement levels of Māori students. While both theories place emotions in the antecedent group, most reviewed research recognises complex interaction, often reiterating Fredricks et al’s (2004) assertion that the dimensions are “dynamically interrelated within the individual... not isolated processes” (p. 61) and hence should be understood in this way. However, when working with students at risk of disengagement, the research suggests ensuring students feel connected and supported is critical. The recent *Check and Connect* programme in New Zealand (Wylie & Felgate, 2016) has had some success and emphasises that mentoring works best when a strong, long-term relationship is established. It is possible Deans fulfil a similar such role, especially when they follow students through their high school journey.

The need to consider the interactions between the student and the social context has led some researchers to recommend an ecological perspective, such as that proposed by Bronfenbrenner (2005), to understand school engagement (Quin, Heerde, & Toumbourou, 2018; Wang & Eccles, 2012; Wentzel, 2012). Wentzel (2012) proposes a model of social supports and classroom competence, which highlights the interdependent nature of relationship provisions (emotional support, safety, help, and expectations and values) and self-processes (such as efficacy, attribution theory and affect). Quin et al. (2018) advocate strongly for a socio-ecological approach. While teacher support is important, they warn against an over-emphasis on it as a single solution, as their study found it did not uniquely predict engagement. Instead social support from peers, family and community were more significant, while overall, prior engagement and academic grades explained most of the variance in student engagement. Thus, they suggest engagement is a long-term process with a range of variables.

Hence, the earlier engagement interventions occur, the better. While engagement is malleable, it is deemed increasingly durable in adolescence (Lawson, 2017). Research

suggests trajectories of engagement and disengagement, noting it is often cumulative, and that there is a general decline in school engagement from early to mid-adolescence (Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Wang & Eccles, 2012; Wylie & Hodgen, 2012). Gemici and Lu's (2014) Australian study even concluded that once individual background factors are controlled for, school attributes have very little impact on the engagement levels of 15-year-olds. A New Zealand longitudinal study (Wylie & Hodgen, 2012) found an almost linear relationship between engagement trajectory patterns and school achievement from age 10 to 16. Such trajectories of disengagement correlate with early school leaving and leaving without NCEA Level 2 - the minimal qualification considered necessary for a secure adult future. Researchers note that higher scores on the attitudinal composite measure distinguish the Level 2 achievers, not higher scores on the cognitive composite measure, thereby reinforcing the importance of students' perceptions. Wylie and Hodgen (2012) also note there is still fluidity in engagement trajectories and that those with moderate or low levels are most open to change. Overall, the literature attests to the difficulty of changing the engagement levels of older students, and the importance of ensuring a positive attitude towards school from an early age to prevent disengagement. The long-term value of ensuring influential social supports, such as parents, positively contribute to young people's sense of school-value and self-efficacy is also inferred.

Insight into how schools can best work in cases of disengagement is gained from a recent review of Auckland initiatives which aimed to support schools to increase attendance and reduce rates of suspension and exclusions (Devine et al., 2013). A key finding from this review was that students and families experienced a lack of support, compassion, and empathy, when faced with any form of school-removal or exclusion. However, they also found that regular meetings with a Dean or Deputy Principal and counsellors supported students' reintegration. Additionally, schools' uptake of recommended 'restorative justice' practices were deemed effective by several schools (Devine et al., 2013). These findings further emphasise the decisive importance of relationships in all aspects of schooling and engagement, which is a central premise in both *Ka Hikitia* and *Te Kōtahitanga*. As Bishop et al. (2009) clearly state, "positive inclusive relationships and interactions will lead to improved student engagement in learning" (p. 736). When whānau and young people are supported by school processes

that are inclusive and respectful, the sense of belonging and hence engagement is more likely to improve.

Student outcomes

Much of the focus on student outcomes is on academic achievement but personal and social outcomes are also valuable. There is certainly a call within the literature to look beyond neo-liberal notions of success. Ryan and Deci (2017) suggest: “The aims of education should be broader than academic achievement and should include the intellectual and personal flourishing of students as they move toward adult roles and identities” (p. 351).

Academic competition and knowledge acquisition should not be the only measure of school or student success. The aforementioned PISA report recommends we consider engagement, and its associated sense of belonging and participation, as an important schooling outcome in its own right (Willms, 2003), with later research suggesting cognitive, social and emotional skills – akin to features of student engagement - are significant in explaining the effects of education on economic and social outcomes (OECD, 2013). It follows that engaged young people will have the skills and attitude required to continue as engaged citizens, perhaps regardless of their academic results. Indeed, in New Zealand the curriculum emphasises personal skills and attributes in the key competencies, “which put considerable emphasis on students having the disposition to learn, to participate, and to relate to others, as well as the inclination to manage themselves and their learning” (NZCER, 2017, p. 2). Successful life beyond school requires skills and aptitude beyond the narrow academic curriculum.

Aligned with this, Mulford’s (2013) Australian research on successful school leadership advocates for student empowerment and social development as an intrinsically valuable school outcome. He points to evidence that attests to social skills as many times more important than cognitive outcomes alone in determining students' relative life outcomes in the 21st century. Moreover, he found the strongest predictor of student academic achievement is the fostering of students’ social development, and not vice versa; this is true irrespective of socio-economic status (Mulford, 2013). Such broader understanding of school outcomes is relevant for people in pastoral care positions who may not be directly responsible for academic success, but may play a

critical role in ensuring young people have the support and skills required to be engaged learners.

Critically, Māori researchers are adamant we cannot afford to only focus on improved academic achievement without the accompanying focus on whakamana – esteeming – identity and culture (Berryman & Eley, 2017; Bishop, 2011; Webber, 2018). Taleni et al. (2017) echo this sentiment for Pasifika students. Berryman and Eley's (2017) comparison of Māori students in 2001 and 2015 found that even successful students still felt they suffered from pervasive issues such as negative stereotyping. It also highlighted the intrinsic value students place on having their culture affirmed. Berryman et al (2018) argue for responsive pedagogy, whereby learning relationships are dialogic and questioning, and teachers continually learn about and from their students. They believe education must be responsive to student's cultural identity and physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing, and not solely based on academic outcomes (Berryman et al., 2018). Clearly schools must value academic learning but they also should seek student outcomes which ensure students flourish as people, not just succeed on test scores. The literature suggests educators should recognise students as socially and culturally-located young people with emotional and social needs, which contributes to both academic engagement and personal development. This study seeks an understanding of the role Deans play in these broader notions of student needs and success.

Summary

This chapter has established the complex realities of school leadership, pastoral care, student engagement and student outcomes. Deans, as pastoral middle leaders, work with the social and emotional needs of young people while also ensuring academic care and positive school behaviours. The literature here supports the place of such work in schools, while also establishing a lack of existing research on the Dean's role.

Overall, the literature across the relevant concepts provides evidence for the human side of education. Leaders are people who in their roles are shown to influence key variables that affect students, teachers and their communities. The care and socio-emotional development of students is shown to have a critical place in education, while student's engagement with school is considered important for school and life

outcomes. It is also clear relationships are essential to create safe and supportive conditions for learning, and to foster students' sense of belonging, competence and value in school. Essentially, students, teachers and leaders are all shown to be sentient and social beings who face challenges in their respective roles and who each require support to reach their potential. The following chapter outlines the methodological and design considerations of the current study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the ontological, epistemological, and critical assumptions which underpin this research. It examines and justifies the use of an interpretive paradigm and qualitative research methods. The rationale and process for selecting participants and using semi-structured interviews is given, along with an explanation of thematic analysis. Finally issues of trustworthiness, validity, and ethical considerations of the research are discussed. This theoretical framework is informed by my personal experience, existing theory and previous research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Theoretical positioning

Epistemology is described as the theory of knowledge: “how we know what we know” (Davidson & Tolich, 2003, p. 25). In my experience of working with young people, I have come to believe that quantifiable academic grades, statistics and profiles only give a superficial level of understanding as to how students engage with their education. Working with adolescents and their whānau is a very human endeavour. As such, it requires an approach which seeks to understand human behaviour and the subjective meaning of actions and interactions. This epistemological approach is underpinned by my relativist ontological beliefs. Ontology is concerned with the nature of being and existence (Hammond & Wellington, 2013). These assumptions dictate how we see the world. As opposed to a realist ontology, which assumes reality to exist independent of the human mind, relativists deem reality and truth to depend on the meaning attached to it. In educational research, this conception of reality is concerned with the very nature or essence of the social phenomena being investigated (Cohen et al., 2011).

Thus, the current study assumes a constructivist position. This assumes social phenomena and categories are social constructions, suggesting people see and construct meaning as they engage with the world (Creswell, 2014). My assumption as a researcher is that in order to understand how pastoral middle leaders support school engagement, the subjective interpretations, perceptions and experiences of those middle leaders are central. Constructivism and interpretivism share the view that people are meaning makers, and that we occupy a world which requires us to seek out

meaning rather than partake in a world where meanings are fixed (Hammond & Wellington, 2013).

An interpretive paradigm is concerned with how people perceive their world and construct reality from their experience (Cohen et al., 2011). This paradigm assumes there are multiple interpretations of reality (Merriam, 2009) and that social research should be sensitive to the special qualities of people and the social institutions they occupy (Bryman, 2012). In their unique position with complex responsibilities, Deans build relationships with students and other members of the school community that make them privy to the various aspects of school life which affect student engagement. Furthermore, Deans experience the institution of education from different perspectives – they are at once responsible for the care and wellbeing of their students, while also accountable to wider school goals of achievement for example. Through interpretive research, their perspectives offered rich insights into their practice and the social context of their schools. Furthermore, this focus on experience stems from a humanistic perspective, where people's emotions, understandings, views, and concerns are validated (Newby, 2014).

The interpretive paradigm is justified by the topic. From differing epistemological and ontological assumptions, student engagement can be seen as either an objective or a subjective phenomenon. There are many positivist quantitative studies on student engagement which show it to be measurable and objective (Christenson et al., 2012). While these have added to current understandings of the concept, student engagement is essentially a social construct, substantially dependent on social conditions, relationships and the meaning attached to experience. Moreover, Deans, in their pastoral and academic care role, make sense of student engagement and student needs contextually and personally, as they relate with students. The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of Deans in relation to their role in improving student engagement. This study and the outcomes are necessarily subjective. As Cohen et al. (2011) assert, positivist research is much less able to explore the complexities of schools, where human behaviour and social phenomena are complex, elusive and intangible. The next section outlines my values and perspective as a researcher.

Researcher values and the critical perspective

Research is not value-free (Bryman, 2012). In the tradition of qualitative research, I attempted to be open about my influences and the philosophical assumptions which frame my research (Mutch, 2005). This research was underpinned by a critical perspective. Critical researchers are influenced by their concerns, such as my concern for the social consequences of inequality, and driven by an ultimate goal of change (Newby, 2014). They acknowledge the cultural, historical, and political context in which phenomena occur. As previously noted, I choose to work in education because I view the world through a critical lens and I believe in the emancipatory power of education. This research assumed that effective teachers and leaders respond to the needs of students (Robinson, 2011), and that the lives and work of teachers and students are inherently political. In the institution of school, the personal, social, and political intersect.

While an interpretive approach was taken throughout the data gathering and thematic analysis stages, a critical perspective both guided the initial research topic and added a layer of analysis to the discussion. Cohen et al. (2011) note that critical educational research regards the interpretivist paradigm as incomplete due to its neglect of the influence of political and ideological contexts on social behaviour. Critical qualitative researchers take a humanistic approach (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2012), as in interpretive research, but they also assume a pre-social reality. This influences people's meaning-making, and can only be understood through subjective interpretation. It is noted that an interpretivist approach has been labelled 'uncritical' (Crotty, 1998) and is often defined as separate from a critical approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Mutch, 2013). Yet there are opponents to dichotomising knowledge, assumptions and theory (Bryman, 2012; Cohen et al., 2011; Freire, 2000). As Gunter and Ribbins (2003) assert, seeing educational leadership from different knowledge provinces encourages breadth, scope and depth in our questioning and understanding. The humanistic approach is important for this research as it seeks to gather and theorise from the experiences of leaders. A critical perspective invites us to question whether issues of power and structures impact on these experiences, and consequently effective leadership (Gunter & Ribbins, 2003). I saw the interpretive paradigm and inductive analysis as complementing critical theory, as it empowers and

stays true to the voices of the participants. The critical perspective meant interrogating the data, seeking to understand the influences and effects of the meanings or representations expressed (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In this way, critical theory is more a commitment to the logic of critical reflection than a methodology (Hammond & Wellington, 2013).

All qualitative research is in some respects critical. It is critical in that it is essential, that it depends on scrutiny, and, stemming from critical theory, it is situated in the middle of power and politics (Steinberg, 2012). In this research, there was an underlying question of how we, as educators, can interrupt the mindsets and structures that maintain inequitable realities. Increasing student engagement and the ability of leaders to work towards this are essentially critical acts. A critical research perspective in education forefronts a concern with how school structures may perpetuate and favour the interests of some members and classes of society over others (Merriam, 2009). As White (2015) states, the ultimate hope of exploring phenomena through a critical qualitative lens is for transformative social justice, through subsequent advocacy and activism. In this study, the critical lens was applied in order to advocate for change which may better serve both the participants and the students they work with.

The underlying purpose of my research was to contribute to knowledge which can be used to create educational outcomes that are fairer, support the potential of both educators and students, and empower our students and their whānau with opportunity, choice and voice. To do this, we must raise critical consciousness, as asserted by Santamaría and Santamaría (2015). Raising awareness of the lived experiences of the people who work to support students may just help raise the conscious awareness of all of us within the system of school. This includes our often unconscious positions as the 'oppressed' and the 'oppressors', to use the language of Friere (2000). My perspective is critical because of the need to address the inequities within our system. While change may not be the goal of any one piece of research, the overarching purpose of critical research is to expose the need for change (Newby, 2014).

Qualitative research

This research took a qualitative approach. Qualitative research accesses the richness of the internal and external worlds we exist in (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It focuses on “meaning in context” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 2). The interpretative paradigm lends itself to qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2011) and the critical perspective values its subjective, collaborative and contextual nature. The leadership work of fostering student engagement in school, as studied in this research, has many attributes that lend itself to qualitative, rather than positivist approaches: it is multi-layered and complex; contextually dependant and hence fluid and evolving; and can best be examined through the eyes of participants rather than the researcher (Cohen et al., 2011). As Youngs (2011) asserts leadership is a contextually-rich complex social phenomenon, hence is often more suited to qualitative research. Qualitative research emphasises “wholeness and detailed connections between our social worlds, emotional and cognitive processes and economic circumstances” (Newby, 2014, p. 104). This is exemplified in my collected data where the Deans’ perceptions and lived experiences provide a level of detail, nuances and complexity that quantitative studies would miss.

Qualitative research is also considered most appropriate when little research has been done on a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Given the paucity of literature on the work of Deans and how they support students, this study requires theory to follow research which implies an inductive approach (Mutch, 2013). Qualitative research inductively builds rather than test concepts, hypotheses, or theories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose of this study was to get a contextual understanding of the work Deans do that may increase student engagement, as well as the challenges they face in supporting this. The participants’ accounts and descriptions of their lived experiences led to emerging themes and ideas (Mutch, 2013). Understanding was attempted through making sense of patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This then lent itself to theorising and recommendations for further research and practice. The methodological approach influenced the methods and design of this study which are discussed in the next section.

Research design

Methods

I undertook a basic qualitative study as outlined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) as probably the most common form of qualitative study found in education. This involves a generic approach to collecting, describing and interpreting data, and then identifying recurrent patterns in the form of themes (Merriam, 2009). This method was employed after consideration of more specific qualitative approaches outlined by Creswell (2014): ethnography, grounded theory, case studies, phenomenological, and narrative. Aspects of each of these approaches appealed, especially phenomenological research where the lived experiences of the participants are particularly important, but this is true in most approaches (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The main goal of my research design was to seek insight into the human experiences, motivations, beliefs, values and social processes which occur in leading the pastoral care of students, with a primary focus on student engagement. Hence, I used a pragmatic, flexible method that validates the voices of Deans.

I decided on semi-structured interviews with Deans to collect the data for thematic analysis. Open-ended questions were ideal as they gave the participants an opportunity to share their views. Social constructivists assume that people seek understanding of the world they live and work in (Creswell, 2014), and open-ended questions can reveal such understanding and insights. I used semi-structured interviews which consisted of a set of prepared questions followed in a flexible open-ended manner. According to Bryman (2012), this enables the researcher to keep an open-mind, while gearing interview questions towards the main research questions. I saw this as an advantage in a small-scale time-bound study. The main disadvantages of interviews are that they are time-consuming, and hence allow for far less participants than questionnaires, and that it is a highly subjective technique with potential for bias (Bell, 2005). However, I saw critical advantages in the ability to yield rich, detailed responses (Bryman, 2012); check and encourage depth in responses (Kvale, 2007); and be open to patterns which were unanticipated as well as expected (Stake, 1995). Critical researchers also have a commitment to more collaborative approaches such as this (Hammond & Wellington, 2013). The inductive coding structure often used with

semi-structured interviews also appealed, given I sought a deeper understanding of the common and varied experiences of the participants. The next section further explains and justifies the methods used in the process of data collection and analysis.

Sample and participant recruitment

Sampling is a crucial element of research which must be well-considered early in the planning stages (Cohen et al., 2011). Miles et al. (2014) outline important criteria to consider in sampling plans. The following were considered in this study: relevance to questions, likeliness of phenomena to appear, generalisability, feasibility in terms of time and access, believability, and ethical participation (Miles et al., 2014). As detailed in the literature review, the sample in this study consisted of secondary school Deans, for whom there has been very little research to date (Joyce, 2013; Murphy, 2011).

Hence purposive sampling was used. Qualitative research often calls for participants to be purposefully selected to best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question (Creswell, 2014). There are no clear rules around the number of participants in a qualitative study (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Cohen et al., 2011) and “researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in depth” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 13). A non-probability purposive sample of six participants was chosen as it was decided to be manageable, allowing me time to fully immerse myself in the data, and sufficient to generate clear themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Purposive sampling is often used to access “knowledgeable people” (Cohen et al, 2011, p.157), so only Deans with a minimum of one year of experience were included. Three schools were chosen to aid in thematic generalisability, as well as to note any marked similarities or differences due to setting. The responses from multiple participants at three different schools offer a level of triangulation by using multiple data sources (Bryman, 2012). The ability to generalise from one case to another was deemed important thematically (Miles et al., 2014), while this sample is too small to suppose generalisation to the wider population, and contextual meaning was of more importance.

To recruit the participants, I used convenience and snowballing purposive approaches by asking former colleagues, who now worked at different schools, as well as another professional contact if they knew any Deans who might be interested in participating.

The contacts I approached were selected both because I have good relationships with them, and because they either worked at or had contacts at quite different schools. The schools where the participants worked are distinct in terms of decile, size, and social and ethnic community groups. While, I see the diversity as a strength, this was somewhat by chance, based on the colleagues I approached and the participants who responded first.

Deans who were interested in participating were given my email address by my professional contacts. The participants then contacted me by email and I replied by email, attaching the university-approved Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B) and Consent Form (Appendix C). The interview participants were selected based on those who first agreed to volunteer. I politely emailed other potential participants to thank them for their offer and inform them I already had two participants from their school. In the case where three Deans from one school volunteered, I chose the two Deans who were least like my other participants. While samples did not need to be overly-representative (Miles et al., 2014), I had the opportunity to choose so I selected to provide a greater range of gender and ethnicity. An overview of the participants and their school context is presented in Chapter 4 and in Table 4.1. The next section outlines the collection of data.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews

Interviews were conducted with two Deans in each of three secondary schools. Semi-structured interviews were used rather than unstructured interviews because of the clear research focus on Dean's work with regard to student engagement. Indicative questions for the interview were prepared in advance (Appendix D) and taken along to the interview. This method still allowed me to respond to the situation, the emerging views of the respondent and to any new and unanticipated ideas, as noted by Merriam (2009). Flexibility in data collection was a key feature here. The questions were open-ended and designed to be neutral and non-interrogative which enabled a focus on what the participants deemed important in relation to the topic. The flexibility also allowed for non-verbal prompts and encouragement, as well as follow-up questions to clarify or invite elaboration.

Prior to the first interview, a pilot interview was done with a colleague who is a Dean at my school. I had read and noted Kvale's (2007) suggestions for successful interviewing, and this allowed me to practice some of these without pressure. I received some useful constructive feedback from my colleague as well as insights from personal reflection. My main response to this feedback and reflection was to talk as little as possible in the interviews, which I found encouraged participants to talk more and potentially allowed for more organic responses.

Prior to the interviews taking place, I made both logistical and ethical considerations. I emailed just ahead of the interview to confirm and ensure a suitable place. Interviews were between 45 minutes and an hour to allow time for rapport to grow, ideas and thoughts to generate, and not so long as to cause fatigue or impact on the participants' valuable time. The interviews were conducted onsite at the school where each participant worked, in a venue determined by them.

The ability to quickly build trust and rapport is essential for effective qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Such interactional skills are also an essential part of being a Dean, and my insider position certainly helped with gaining trust. In all interviews, the Deans seemed relaxed and happy to share their perceptions and experiences. However, notably, some participants refrained from giving too much personal information about their students or colleagues at times, which was likely an indication of their care and professionalism.

Before the interview began, I referenced details in the initial Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B) and discussed the Consent Form (Appendix C) to clarify the intent and process of the interview. I used this conversation to set a casual and friendly tone, to build rapport, and to help focus the interview. I found that asking some participants to choose a pseudonym and choose any important details they deemed important for their description was a good way to start them talking and empower them in the collaborative process.

Note-taking during and immediately after interviews allowed the perceived nuances and non-verbal communication to be recorded as data. As Bryman (2012) notes, what people do and how they say things, can be of as much interest as what they say. This immediacy also allowed for contextual intuition and some of my analytical insights to

be recalled at a later date. This is good practice in qualitative research where data gathering and analysis occur together, and the observations and intuitive understandings from being in the field are used to build theory (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The amount of data to transcribe and then analyse can be seen as a disadvantage of interviews (Cohen et al., 2011). Bryman (2012) notes the benefits of researcher-transcription and hence I transcribed four of the audio recordings myself. However, due to time constraints, I had two interviews professionally transcribed by a university-recommended transcription company, who assured confidentiality (Appendix E). To immerse myself in the data, I also listened to the audio recordings several times, often repeatedly listening to sections to ensure I had the correct understanding or to compare with other participants' responses. I started making notes and analysing in my record book immediately after the first interview, which helped develop an early understanding of potential themes.

Interviewing, as with any form of data collection, has some disadvantages. As Cohen et al. (2011) indicate, the information was filtered through the views of the participants, my presence may have biased responses, and not all participants were equally articulate. I attempted to minimise these limitations through my interviewing technique and encouraging demeanour. The interviews also required that I arrange one hour of time with already busy people. This required flexibility and some rearrangements on my behalf to best accommodate and respect the requests of the participants. However, for most part, the data-collection process was a positive and straight-forward experience. The next section discusses the process I used to analyse the data.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis is possibly the most widely used method in qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Inductive thematic analysis aims to generate an analysis from the data and is not shaped by existing theory (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I used the data to search for repeated patterns in a "constant comparative" manner with the aim of finding thematic categories (Mutch, 2013). The process was time-intensive and required dealing with a large amount of written and audio data. There was

considerable effort in reducing information to comprehensible and manageable proportions while retaining the integrity and quality of the data (Cohen et al., 2011). However, I observed the advice of Coffey and Atkinson (1996), who state that qualitative data analysis “is not about adhering to any one correct approach or set of right techniques; it is imaginative, artful, flexible, and reflexive. It should also be methodical, scholarly and intellectually rigorous” (p. 10).

The first stage of analysis was the essential reading and familiarisation with the data – a process of immersion whereby the researcher becomes intimately familiar with the content and begins to notice things that may be relevant to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Analysis of the interviews began as soon as the first pieces of data were collected, as part of the non-linear process of qualitative research. I listened and read the transcript of the first interview, making notes, comments and memos; and then did the same with second, comparing that to the first – a process recommended by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). My observations, research notes, listening, and readings of transcripts contributed to some initial emerging codes or themes. From some of these initial ideas early in the interview schedule, I was able to clarify or seek further understanding from other participants in subsequent interviews. This was a way to check ideas and gather more valid data. I took Mutch’s (2005) advice on data analysis: I wrote many comments and memos to myself about ideas I generated and about what I was learning.

To ensure methodical analysis, I used coding to identify similar information. A code is simply a label given to a piece of text that contains a relevant idea or piece of information (Cohen et al., 2011). I initially printed the first transcripts on landscape paper, double-spaced with a large margin to the right of the text for annotations. I highlighted key words or concepts and applied codes or categories to each piece of information. I then highlighted some on the computer, which I found neater. While it is important to code consistently, I also changed or developed the labels and groupings as I gained more data more insights. I tried out different codes, categories and themes on subjects, before deciding on the most important and representative labels for each of the research questions. I then visually mapped out codes to see how they fit or related to other codes. For example, concepts such as knowing students, engaging whānau, and manaakitanga were initially prevalent. These eventually merged into the

meta-theme 'relationships'. While immersed in the data, I took time to 'play' with concepts, metaphors and analogies, as recommended by Mutch (2005), which added insight and possibility to the emergence of themes and interpretation. There was still some overlap, with examples of manaakitanga exposing the very human side of the work, eventually themed under 'special people', and knowing students, for example, contributing to the concept of responsive pedagogy. Eventually combinations of codes were grouped and the broad and meaningful patterns became themes, which led to deeper analysis.

Miles et al (2014) note the importance of typical and representative instances, as well as the importance of negative or disconfirming instances. Going after negative or atypical instances is healthy as it may suggest the sample is too narrow or the need to clarify concepts. In my analysis, I found commonality but I also paid attention to pertinent perceptions and experiences of individuals or only shared by a few participants. Furthermore, while I was guided by the research question, I followed Newby's (2014) advice and endeavoured not to be blind to what else the data might be saying.

After identifying recurrent patterns, I sought to develop rich descriptions of the predominant themes, following Braun and Clarke's (2013) recommended process. By providing many perspectives on each theme, the results became more realistic and richer, which also contributes to the validity of the findings (Creswell, 2014). Once I had identified key concepts, I was able to make links to interpret the data with reference to other research findings, concepts, and theory. These findings are discussed in Chapter Five.

Trustworthiness and validity

Trustworthiness is now often used as an alternative conceptualisation of research rigour to the traditional, more positivist, notions of reliability and validity (Bryman, 2012). Validity in qualitative research refers to the accuracy in the findings assured by employing certain procedures, and qualitative reliability indicates a consistent and clear approach (Creswell, 2014). Trustworthiness implies integrity and confidence in the researcher and the research (Hammond & Wellington, 2013). Equally, validity and trustworthiness depend on ethical research (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell,

2016), which is discussed here and further in the next section. Trustworthiness refers to research which is confirmable, credible, transferable, and dependable (Hammond & Wellington, 2013).

Reliability in the positivist sense is not possible in interpretive research, where the existence of multiple realities and researcher presence are core components (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Instead reliability is replaced by the assurance that research is dependable and trustworthy (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I achieved this by considering all stages of the research process, particularly data collection, analysis and interpretation, as well as how findings are presented, as recommended by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). To ensure dependability in my research, records of the research phases were kept in an accessible manner. While I did not have others check these, my supervisor was privy to the process, and I was easily able to reconsider aspects of the data and process at any time. Documentation of the process in the appropriate sections of this thesis facilitate readers' trust in my processes and findings.

Credibility is said to parallel internal validity (Bryman, 2012). One of the limitations of this study is due to researcher, me, being human (Merriam, 2009). This means that the validity of my research was in some ways limited to my integrity as a researcher. To minimise bias, I first built rapport with the participants so they felt comfortable with me, kept questions open, and positively encouraged the participants to share their views. In the initial recruitment documents, I had addressed my experiences and challenges in the role, which I hoped assured participants that I was not there to negatively judge them, but to give them a voice in the research. As the participants are in the same role as me, there was no obvious power difference. I had also assured confidentiality through the university's ethics procedures, which aided in gaining the participants' confidence to share more honestly and openly. To minimise my perspectives influencing participants, I remained focussed on one of the most important parts of interviewing - listening (Bryman, 2012). The interviews were recorded to allow repeated listening and transcription. The credibility of the analysis and findings is supported by the triangulation of the multiple perspectives gathered from the six participants, from three different schools.

Confirmability is strongly related to credibility (Hammond & Wellington, 2013). Confirmability acknowledges complete objectivity is not possible in social research but

expects that the research and findings are not swayed by personal values and inclinations (Bryman, 2012). This is of particular concern in insider research where the phenomenon must be understood from the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I have explained my prior assumptions, experiences, theoretical orientation and worldviews in the sections above, which may enable the reader to understand how I may have come to particular conclusions. While my research focus was determined by personal factors, I did my best to ensure objectivity in the collection and interpretation of the data. While I saw my prior knowledge of the role as a benefit, in terms of building trust with participants and a deeper level of intuition, it was important I remained unbiased both in conducting the interviews and in the analysis. Reflexivity is the critical reflection on the research process as a researcher, and in my case, an insider. Hence, I recorded my personal responses and feelings, and reflected on these in an attempt to uncover potential biases and discriminatory practices (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I also discussed any potentially biased assumptions with my supervisor to give more credibility to ideas and emerging themes. I spent significant time analysing and immersing myself in the words of the participants and endeavoured to see from their perspectives. Braun and Clarke (2013) state reflexivity is vital for better, more inclusive research, to ensure equality and equity, to ethically 'do no harm' to the participants, and to produce the best possible knowledge.

Transferability parallels external validity which is concerned with how generalisable findings are (Bryman, 2012). Generalisability is not a focus of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). A lack of generalisability and breadth is the trade-off for depth and contextual understanding, especially in a small qualitative study (Cohen et al., 2011). Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Mutch, 2013) state that the burden of transferring results is placed on the reader, who decides whether the settings and circumstances are alike enough to warrant 'safe' transfer. In the hope such reader judgements were possible, I attempted to include the most relevant "rich accounts" and "thick description" (Bryman, 2012, p. 392) as well as clarity in the specific context, setting, participants, and circumstances of the study (Mutch, 2013). Comparisons with previous studies in the discussion chapter also give credence to a degree of transferability (Hammond & Wellington, 2013).

Throughout the research process, I remained cognisant of ensuring trustworthy research. Even though, we often deal with complex phenomena in qualitative research, “we have ethical obligations to minimise misrepresentation and misunderstanding” (Stake, 1995, p. 109). It is said that validity is present when the research is ethical, and rings true to the participants, the researcher, and the reader (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The trustworthiness of this study was established by ensuring a process which consistently strived for research that was confirmable, credible, transferable, and dependable. The next section presents the ethical considerations relevant to this research.

Ethical considerations

Doing research in Aotearoa/New Zealand requires one to be aware of our unique context (Mutch, 2005). The three principles of the Treaty of Waitangi – participation, partnership and protection – were considered throughout the study. These important principles, and all other ethical matters, were outlined in detail prior to ethics approval from the Auckland University of Technology (Appendix A). This included the five key ethical principles outlined by Tolich and Davidson (2011): voluntary participation, informed consent, do no harm, avoid deceit, and confidentiality or anonymity. These were considered and adhered to throughout the research process.

Participation was assured in this study was in the sharing of personal experiences and perceptions, in the data gathering stage of the research. I ensured that participation was well-informed and voluntary through the Participation Information Sheet (Appendix B). This sheet included full information about the purpose, conduct, and possible dissemination of the research. Some participants chose their own pseudonym for the report. Participants could also read their transcripts to acknowledge the researcher had a true representation of their words and meaning. They were given the opportunity to approve or question the content, giving them the power and autonomy to make changes if they felt there were errors, though none chose to do so. Participants were acknowledged for their participation and time by being thanked at the interview stage, a later confidential email expressing gratitude, and a small koha as a sign of gratitude and respect. Gratitude for the participation of

Deans is also acknowledged in the final thesis. I also offered to send a summary of the findings to the participants and make them aware of how to access any subsequent research.

A partnership with the participants was crucial, especially in the data collection stage of the research. The intent was for the interviews to be mutually beneficial, in that they were empowering experiences whereby the participants were heard and able to have voice within their area of expertise. The benefits of the research must be clear in order to fulfil the 'do no harm' ethical principle. I remained aware of my place to listen to the voices of the participants and value their experience without adding my own assumptions. A partnership of trust and respect was important so the participants felt at ease talking about their experiences and perspectives. My experience in the same type of role as the participants aided in developing rapport and mutual respect. Participant autonomy was respected by ensuring voluntary participation and further enabled by using a semi-structured interview approach. I ensured I listened with respect, an open-mind, and compassion. This was helped by employing reflective-type interviewing skills. I also attempted to maintain the integrity of the participants' intended meaning when analysing the data. Any manipulation to 'fit' the research question or purpose would be unethical (Hammond & Wellington, 2013).

Protection of the participants was ensured by researcher integrity, their right to withdraw without consequence, as well as a confidentiality agreement with the transcriber and myself. There was no need for any form of deceit, harm, or coercion in this study. This research did not take place at my school and the participants were not known to me prior to the research, which minimised any unintended coercion or conflict of interest (Mutch, 2005). Anonymity was not possible due to the nature of face-to-face interviews but participants were protected by confidentiality. This was done by using codes for schools and pseudonyms for participants, ensuring any identifiable features were not included in the analysis of writing stages. The transcripts and draft reports were securely stored and these and other details of the study were only shared with my supervisor. The confidentiality agreement between the researcher and the participant was a promise to not make the connection public.

This research was ethical not just in the procedures followed but also in the spirit of respect shown to others, the purpose of the research, who it benefits, and how it has been reported (Hammond & Wellington, 2013). This research was undertaken in line with the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. In this spirit, I have respected the diversity of culture, backgrounds, and experiences of the participants. Throughout this research, I have acted in good faith and with integrity. The underlying resolve of this research has remained focused on improving the lives of those who engage with our education system.

Summary

Given the philosophical approaches and the methods used, this research, as both a process and a product, is deemed to be an interaction between my own interpretations, the interpretations of the participants, and existing academic theory. An interpretive paradigm within a constructivist worldview is assumed. A critical lens was also used to add depth and critical questioning to the understanding of the phenomenon and contextual issues. The method relied on semi-structured interviews as data. These were analysed inductively, using a process of thematic analysis. The next chapter presents the findings of my research.

Chapter 4: Presentation of findings

This chapter presents the findings from six semi-structured interviews with secondary school middle leaders in a pastoral role. The interviews examined the perceptions and experiences of their role in supporting student engagement to improve social and academic outcomes for students. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the participants and the three schools. The findings are then presented under the four subsidiary research questions, along with summary tables and participants' quotes. Finally, the four main themes that emerged are presented in a summary table at the end of the chapter.

Research participants and schools

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants, whereby I asked some of my professional contacts to suggest participation to their colleagues who met the inclusion criteria. I interviewed six pastoral middle leaders in total, two each from three quite different secondary schools. In two schools, the participants were called 'Deans' and were responsible for a specific year group cohort which they were expected to follow through to the completion of their schooling. The Deans interviewed were each individually responsible for Year 9, Year 10, Year 12, and Year 13, respectively. All had also been Deans at other levels. At School 3, the participants' title had recently been changed from Dean to 'Head of House'. They were responsible for students in vertical form classes from Year 9 to Year 13, each having one other co-Head of House to share the role. One of these Houses was a Māori unit and operated as a 'school within a school', hence it is labelled 3b in this thesis. 'Dean' is used as the generic term in this thesis.

All participants held other positions in the school, including a substantial amount of teaching hours, most commonly teaching three classes a day. School 2 was considerably smaller than the other two schools, with just over 400 students. The participants there held other significant leadership portfolios: Mr B combines Year 13 Dean with Careers Advisor, and Ms Scott is also a Head of Department. Ms Lang, at School 3a, had only been Head of House for a year but had previously held leadership roles including Head of Department and Specialist Classroom Teacher.

Table 4.1 Overview of participants

Participant pseudonym	School	Decile	Years of experience:		Number of students in care
			Dean	Teaching	
Mr Henry	1	3	2	5+	200
Ms Tea	1	3	2	5+	200
Mr B	2	6	15+	30+	60
Ms Scott	2	6	3	20+	90
Ms Lang	3a	8	1	10+	450 (shared)
Ms Em	3b	8	4	10+	200 (shared)

The participants represent a range of ages and experience, as detailed in Table 4.1. However, there were only two males, and the Head of House of the Māori unit at School 3b was the only non-Pākehā participant. While a greater diversity of participants may have been desirable, these were the participants who volunteered, and the sample is fairly indicative of teacher demographics in secondary schools.

Findings

Research question 1: What do Deans perceive to be the most important aspects of their role?

The number of responses in Table 4.2 below represents the number of participants who named this aspect as either the *most*, or *one of the most* important in their role. All the participants thought all these aspects were important.

Table 4.2 Deans' perceptions of the most important aspects of their role

Sub-themes	Number of responses
Engaging in positive relationships	6
Attending to student wellbeing, care and support	6
The multi-faceted, complex nature of the role	5
Fostering a positive culture and experience for positive school and life outcomes	4
Monitoring attendance, behaviour and academic results	2

Engaging in positive relationships

All participants regarded relationships as a foremost aspect of their role, with the need to build positive relationships with students deemed paramount. Relationships with students were prioritised because they form the basis for all other care work, as noted by Ms Scott:

Ms Scott: That relationship is the key thing for me because without that relationship with the kids, they're not going to come to you.

All participants recognised the need for support with their care role from a number of people, where all stakeholders worked together with a shared interest and commitment, as Ms Lang succinctly noted:

Ms Lang: I guess the most important thing in my view is really relationships because that covers all aspects of it: with students, with their families ... and with the staff, is number one. And, when that's going well, then things can move forward in whatever way we need them to.

Interestingly, none of the Deans mentioned having persistent poor relationships with any students. While challenges were discussed, there was a view that these could be resolved with enough perseverance, even when a student presented as quite “unlikeable” [Ms Tea]. Instead, the common frustration was not being available enough to *all* students, due to time pressures, which meant having to carefully prioritise students and their needs. Deans emphasised the need to really “see” and “know” the individual:

Mr Henry: As you persevere with these young people, you peel back the layers and you uncover these talents, passions or interests, that you wouldn't have discovered if you had simply written him off as a naughty kid. That reminded me to see the individual and not the behaviour, as a mantra, that some days you have to repeat more regularly than others.

Attending to student wellbeing, care and support

Similarly, there was a priority focus on student wellbeing, care and support, and being a central contact, “their go-to person”. Deans realised that care and support required seeing the “big picture”, understanding the needs of individuals and a particular year group or house, and attending to both the immediate and enduring problems of the students in their care. Mr Henry noted:

Mr Henry: Monitoring the wellbeing of my year group is a really important part of my job, because secondary school can be such a disconnect, siloed, isolating place.

This also meant they could respond to a range of separate school behaviours, such as truancy or property damage, in terms of the deeper affective or out-of-school issues affecting students. This enabled them to provide care and support while also dealing with discipline issues. Ms Tea stated this clearly:

Ms Tea: You are an advocate for your students and you liaise with all the grownups in their lives.

The multi-faceted, complex nature of the role

Five participants emphasised the wide-ranging, multi-faceted aspects of their role, even though they were not prompted to discuss this. Three participants used the same phrase, with the two male participants stating they were or were expected to be, “All things to all people” and correspondingly:

Ms Tea: You can't... be all things to all people.

Five participants stressed the difficulty in measuring or defining the role:

Mr Henry: A lot of what I think is most important is not easily measurable. It's not the types of things that I think are able to be easily observed or measured against any sort of performance work.

Ms Lang: It isn't black and white, it's actually a lot of grey. So... how do you write down all of those nuances?

Fostering a positive culture and experience for positive school and life outcomes

Creating a positive school experience and culture for students was seen as essential by most participants. Ms Em discussed the importance of school culture through establishing and maintaining “buy-in” to the kaupapa of the House, by students and whānau. Establishing a culture of care was also important:

Mr Henry: [I] try and create culture within our Year group...to build some cohesion and help them understand the importance of supporting one another and kind of being there for each other... If I think about the most important thing to us, it's our kids and their experience of school. Having someone who knows about them and does everything they can to look after them, and then also having someone who does their best to create a great environment for them to be in.

Related to this was a focus on the social and emotional outcomes for their students. Ms Scott has made *hauora* the Year 12 theme for the year which she incorporates into assemblies, form classes, mentoring activities, and assemblies. Mr B emphasised the need for positive experiences in school, especially for those who were “literally surviving school”:

Mr B: My role as a Dean is to send out good citizens. That's my measure of success at school. Whatever it takes to do that. Be it academic, be it social.

Monitoring attendance, behaviour and academic results

All participants discussed their core responsibilities for attendance, academic tracking, and behaviour management. Attendance, for example, was often a daily task, which Ms Lang linked to systems to inform practice. However, when asked about the most important aspects, this was not a focus. Rather, the ‘core tasks’ were closely linked to the social and emotional aspects of their role:

Ms Tea: It is inherently quite relational... but then you've also got the sort of indicators which are like attendance - and behaviour obviously is what everyone wants you to deal with - and um the sort of admin side of things as well.

All Deans placed high value on the academic success of their students, but only one participant overtly stated attendance and academic results as the *most* important aspect of her role:

Ms Em: So for me personally, as a Dean, attendance is key.... Academic mentoring is a huge component of our job. We are results driven... It's part and parcel, achievement and attendance.

Research question 2: In what ways do Deans define and understand student ‘engagement’?

Table 4.3 Perceptions of student engagement

Sub-themes	Number of responses
Student engagement is multi-dimensional	6
Most students are engaged though a significant proportion are not	5
Perceptions of factors that affect student engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Relationships with teachers- Co-curricular involvement- Culture and background- Home-life and financial stressors- Mental health and personal issues- Family engagement and commitment to education- Undiagnosed learning difficulties	6 6 5 5 5 5 4

Table 4.3, overall, suggests that Deans have a thorough understanding of student engagement and how it is fostered and hindered.

Student engagement is multi-dimensional

The participants had similar ideas in regard to defining student engagement, emphasising both engagement with academic work and the wider life of the school, as well as a student’s feelings toward school. This indicated a sound understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of student engagement. Mr Henry also noted the role of the school here:

Mr Henry: I think it means feeling connected, and it means feeling interested in the work that you’re doing... having strong relationships with peers and with staff... [and that] a school is responsive to each young person in whatever way that makes sense for them, culturally, emotionally, spiritually - their interests.

Most students are engaged though a significant proportion are not

Five participants thought most students were engaged but a significant number were not. There was a clear perception that external barriers influenced a cycle of disengagement:

Ms Tea: I think that most students are engaged in at least some of those ways, but there's probably quite a significant, not huge, but a significant proportion who have barriers to engagement in one or the other... The flow on effect of that is those students aren't very well up for learning in the classroom so they become disengaged.

Ms Lang was quite emphatic about students being more respected for their high level of engagement:

Ms Lang: I think students are engaged in school to be honest... Kids get a bad rap, but actually look at what some of them are doing, because it's really cool... they are engaged, they're socially conscious, they're doing stuff.

Some Deans also worried students could be “too engaged”, experiencing increased stress levels and anxiety due to the constant demands of NCEA.

Perceptions of factors that affect student engagement

Deans listed a variety of factors they perceived to affect student engagement, with most being barriers rather than enablers. Notably, many of these factors are long-term, systemic and persistent, which presents a challenge for pastoral leaders. However, the importance of relationships with teachers was considered critical:

Mr Henry: For us, relationships is number one. We still have plenty of staff who really struggle with that. I think relationships, or a lack of meaningful learning-focused relationships, is a massive barrier to engagement.

Co-curricular involvement was discussed as both an enabler and an indicator of engagement. While some students in School 2 “only come for sport” and some students were overly-involved, all agreed wider school involvement was important. For example at School 3b:

Ms Em: The kids that are committed to kapa haka don't have so many issues, 'cause they're engaged. All the ones that we're having the most issues with, well, they're not in sports teams... there's no extra-curricular stuff.

Students' backgrounds and culture were viewed as impacting on engagement; the impact depended on school culture and context. Most Deans inferred the presence of negative stereo-typing or deficit thinking based on culture, while the cultural differences between staff and students was deemed particularly critical at School 2:

Mr Henry: We have a predominantly Palangi teaching force, teaching a predominantly Pacific student population... I think in a very tangible way, it also represents a significant mismatch of priorities, of values and of expectations... It's no wonder they're disengaged, if every day they're coming up against rules, norms and expectations that are fundamentally different to how they would expect to behave.

In contrast, at School 3b, Ms Em found being Māori like her students helped her break down barriers and esteem students. She acted as an academic role model and ensured high expectations and self-belief. She could have open conversations and even challenge students because of their shared cultural identity:

Ms Em: I know them, I'm Māori... It's bad but I say to them, "Do you want to be another statistic?" I want them to succeed. I want them to achieve. It's hard work.

Mr B said immigration and transience was a challenge in their "migrant suburb". Interestingly, even though School 2 was the most ethnically diverse school in the study, culture did not seem to affect their work; in a small local school with such diversity, responding to individuals in all their uniqueness was more of a focus. Both participants noted culturally-responsive systems such as mentor groups for Māori and Pasifika students respectively, and placing new students with at least, "one person that they have something in common with" [Mr B].

Ms Tea discussed a "self-efficacy spiral" as a barrier where some students would rather not hand in work than try and risk failing. She saw her role in helping students build more academic resilience:

Ms Tea: They don't like being out of their depth... I don't think a lot of students have the confidence and resilience to like try and make mistakes and know that that's okay. And I don't know if the teachers always remind them of that because there's so many other things to remember.

Participants often noted barriers related to students' home-life, with issues such as finances, uniform, family responsibilities, and parents' absence, varied work hours or resignation from educational concern. Mr Henry believes "poverty has a significant impact on levels of engagement within our school". However, some students did well to be somewhat engaged despite these barriers. Ms Tea noted student's home stressors can easily be regarded as defiance or disorganisation, and have a cyclical effect on both behaviour and motivation:

Ms Tea: They're here and sometimes that's a big step for a kid, to actually be at school... They're already having to work so hard to even be at school that when they get here and they're in trouble for this and that and that, they're kind of like, oh, why do I bother? And that can be quite demoralizing.

Mr Henry was adamant financial barriers, cultural norms, families' lack of understanding about learning support "bureaucracy", combined with teachers' subconscious prejudice, critically affected students' access to learning support services, which affected their ability to be their "best selves". This was too often dismissed as part of "a narrative about Pacific underachievement", and resulted in students opting out or becoming disruptive, and hence underachieving. In contrast, Ms Lang noted:

Ms Lang: We are lucky....in our demographics that a lot of them have the finances, generally speaking, to get Ed Psych reports and things like that. A large number of students will have that, and we'll know what their needs are, and that helps.

Participants at all schools noted students' personal and guidance-support needs could be a barrier to learning and engagement. Ms Lang in particular perceived student stress and mental health needs as an increasing concern.

Research question 3: What practices do Deans report using to improve student engagement and associated outcomes for students?

The practices Deans perceived to positively affect student engagement and outcomes mostly involve the relational aspects of education, as the themes presented in Table 4.4 suggest.

Table 4.4 Reported practices

Sub themes	Number of responses
Building trust and relationships with students and staff	6
Engaging and involving whānau	6
Responsive pedagogy for behavioural issues	6
Motivating, tracking and mentoring	6
Supporting, leading and sharing responsibility	6

Building trust and relationships with students and staff

The perception that trusting relationships are central to both being an effective Dean and fostering student engagement dominated most aspects of reported practice. The Dean-student relationship was deemed critical to helping students feel safe and supported:

Ms Scott: You are hopefully that safe person they can come to talk about social issues that are going in their classroom, or any issues that they're having with teachers or friends or home or what... So, I work hard to try and be that person for the kids.

To foster relationships, all six participants emphasised the importance of “being visible” [Ms Lang]. Ms Em had just been to a debating evening, while Ms Scott couldn’t make a Drama production, so she sent chocolates to the cast, “That is just me saying, ‘I notice you. I see you’.” Deans saw valuing the whole person as critical:

Mr B: Because we know that some students don't have academic strengths and have got those sporting or cultural strengths. So supporting that... and seeing students in a different light.

Four of the six participants emphasised the need for communication with staff and students that was honest, respectful and caring. Interestingly, four participants said they preferred face-to-face or at least phone conversations with staff as it was “more personal” than email. Building relational trust with staff included assuring confidentiality, and following-up on issues, even if it was not resolved:

Ms Lang: I guess just being open and honest about it going, “Yeah, I know this student is really still annoying you and misbehaving. This is what I’m doing, this is the progress we’ve made, but hey, how can I help you out; do you want me to visit the class and help out a few times?”

Engaging and involving whānau

Similarly, all participants said they worked with or attempted to involve whānau, as Ms Em noted, “Getting the whānau on the waka is huge”. Knowing students and knowing whānau are viewed as connected:

Mr Henry: We’ve got 200 kids in our year group and I try to know them, know their families; try to understand as much as possible the family’s expectations. Then when we meet with families, we’ve got an idea of how to meet their needs.

Most contact however is reactive, often after an incident and used as an “incentive” or to work together to improve behaviour. Yet, whānau connection was deemed

inherently valuable, and especially for students who were struggling in some way. Even in complex cases, when there is no easy solution, there can be positive outcomes:

Ms Lang: I think the most important thing is that they felt listened to, they felt respected, they felt that we were going to do some things, and we were open about it... Things weren't solved but they came out feeling respected and listened to, and I think that made it successful.

Responsive pedagogy for behavioural issues

A substantial component of the Deans' job is reacting to student issues and behaviour. The term "it depends" was common and relates to the practice of responding to a range of student issues with a holistic "big picture" perspective, emphasising the need to understand and work with the underlying reason for the behaviour, rather than adhering to rigid disciplinary processes. The ability to do this depended on taking the time to listen and knowing the kids well, and often uncovered deeper issues. Ms Lang explained:

Ms Lang: It means every case is different, because students come with so much stuff. You can't just have a rule book going, 'If this happens - you do this; if this happens - you do this,' because that actually takes out all that family side and all the background to it all... We don't get someone just being naughty... for want of a better word, just because they're being naughty; there's always a reason. So, what is that reason, how can I negate that in some way or change that?

The four participants from Schools 1 and 2 all highly valued restorative practices when mediating teacher-student conflicts. This was deemed essential to repairing harm in relationships as well as ensuring all parties understood their responsibility and were held accountable for their behaviour, as the Deans explained:

Ms Scott: If I've got a student referred to me for misbehaving in class, I want that student to have a conversation with that teacher because ultimately there's no point [otherwise]... Because it's not going to make any difference to that relationship in that class.

Mr Henry: Making sure that the student's mana is restored in such a way that they feel like they can go back to class again... [However] feeling heard has to come with an understanding that they can identify when their behaviour has crossed the line...[but] until they feel like their mana has been restored, they can't begin to. A lot of these kids will dig their heels in, and they'll feel like whatever they said or did to that teacher is completely justified, because of what they did to them.

Depending on the situation, Deans also acknowledged that fair and direct consequences or a student just apologising to a teacher was often sufficient, and a necessarily more time-efficient process.

Motivating, tracking and mentoring

Motivating, attendance and academic tracking, and mentoring were core tasks of all Deans. These had two clear intentions: academic success and building life-skills. Academic tracking of senior students usually means ensuring students are meeting NCEA and course entry requirements. Mr B described the experience of convincing senior students they could and should achieve, through a process of “trying to give them measurable goals” and encouraging “small steps.” According to Ms Scott, at times they are “pushing them through the year” which can involve organising alternate courses and assessments to achieve their NCEA Level. Several participants said they closely tracked and prioritised their most “at risk” students, which was necessary due to time constraints, while Ms Em noted the importance of keeping track of and mentoring all students, including “our excellent students, the ones that are going for endorsement.”

Mentoring to build social-competence and life-skills was also widely viewed as an important pastoral practice:

Ms Scott: I coach the kids on how to manage relationships, and I coach them on how to manage teachers. Because they have to learn that everyone's different and the way you deal with people is different, and sometimes I have to coach them how to apologize. I have to coach them around what to say and the way to say things... That's a life skill.

Mentoring and supporting also involved protecting students from being overwhelmed, through helping them organise their own study workload, or from doing too much outside of academic work. Ms Em noted, “Sometimes it's the same kids...they need to be at school”. Ms Lang was concerned about unhealthy stress which could cause a “fight or flight” response. Again positive relationships were deemed essential for effective practice:

Ms Lang: Sometimes I have to say to them, “I'm not going to let you do that... it worries me how much you've got on.” It's having those relationships to be able to have those discussions with those kids as well.

Supporting, leading and sharing responsibility

An important aspect of the Dean's role is co-ordinating and enacting necessary student support. Ms Tea called Deans the "pivot point", while Ms Lang used the word "triage" several times - a metaphor that reflected another common phrase, "ambulance at the bottom of the cliff". Mr Henry said they are "definitely the conduit... the one that connects kids up to those different services". Communication and good working relationships with other student-support staff were widely reported. Ms Lang described their fortnightly "wrap-around meetings" as essential to holistic student care:

Ms Lang: Heads of House/Deans, meet with learning support, the counsellors, and our Deputy Principal who we report to, and we discuss any students we are concerned about for whatever reason. Often these students, there's a lot more to it. It's not just a discipline thing. They've been to the counsellors, there could be learning needs... That helps inform our practice and think about the best way looking forward.

While the overall and first responsibility usually fell to them, all participants recognised a need for shared responsibility and worked closely with form/tutor teachers, other mentors and classroom teachers. Deans reported leading classroom teachers in the academic and pastoral care process in a variety of ways including: meetings; conversations; regular reporting; the use of "motivation and encouragement" daily report cards for challenging students; and "achiever's boards" with photos and weekly credit updates in the staff room for priority students. Ms Em believed it was her "job to encourage our colleagues to contact" whānau, which she said some teachers found daunting. Participants believe supporting pedagogical practice ultimately means better support for students:

Ms Lang: Part of that is leading by example, by showing them how to be a good form teacher, and what that looks like. For some people that's really natural, and for others, they actually need training. Some of them you want to be... I guess subtle about how you're doing it as well.

Some Deans also reported supporting teachers by giving them some relief from difficulties with students, either temporarily removing the student or teaching their class for a lesson. Three pastoral leaders also reported placing the trickiest students in their own mentor or tutor group, to both support them, and lessen the load on other staff. Mr Henry had also encouraged and modelled good practice by creating a culturally-responsive activity for the whole year group.

Research question 4: What challenges and enablers do Deans experience in their practice with regard to fostering student engagement?

Deans reported a comprehensive list of challenges and enablers. This section specifically relates to factors Deans experience as affecting their ability to be effectual in their practice, which upon analysis merged into the six sub-themes listed in Table 4.5. These factors directly enable or compromise Dean's efforts to mediate perceived barriers to engagement, as outlined under Research Question 2, and to accomplish the perceived effective practices outlined under Research Question 3. 'Time and workload pressures' are a challenge while 'aroaha and a sense of purpose' is an enabler. All other sub-themes can be challenges or enablers and are highly contextual.

Table 4.5 Challenges and enablers

Sub-themes	Number of responses
Time and workload pressures	5
School values and kaupapa	6
Resourcing, experience and training	6
Collegial relationships and responsibility	6
Whānau and community responsiveness	6
Aroha, respect and a sense of purpose	6

Time and workload pressures

Lack of time to achieve a large and complex workload was revealed by five participants as the most pervasive challenge. Ms Tea's description portrays the indefinite, ever-expanding nature of Deans' work, with perhaps a bursting point ever on the horizon:

Ms Tea: Deaning is such a big nebulous bubble of responsibility.

Interestingly, participants usually acted as if mentioning time or workload pressures was clichéd, often laughing at how trite they sounded each time they did. Ms Scott simply added this at the end of the interview:

Ms Scott: I guess I probably should have talked about the paperwork and the insurmountable amount of tasks and duties and tracking and everything that's expected. Ha! It just gets beyond ridiculous sometimes.

Mr Henry gave the most candid account of the frustrations, which echoed the sentiments of others:

Mr Henry: I think if we were given more time to do our jobs, I think it would be a lot more realistic and fulfilling. When you're teaching three classes a day, and you've got uniform, attendance, discipline, assemblies to organise, and phone calls home to make and family meetings to organise... forget about it! You're always chasing your tail, and you're never able to get on top of things. I think it's a real shame, because I think Deans do some of the most important work in our secondary schools, but until they're given the time to do their jobs properly, it's always going to be a fairly thankless and frustrating experience.

Only Mr B did not refer to the challenge of time. Notably, he had considerably more experience, less students and less teaching time. For all others, time was deemed the main obstacle to performing their role, as emphasised by Ms Lang:

Ms Lang: It's the lack of time to do it sustainably and properly is the number one. If you want to have real change where it's permanent and lifelong, then it takes time, but you don't have the time to do it. Sometimes you end up with a quick fix and sometimes you end up triaging... If I wrote a list of all the students that needed me for whatever reason; gosh that would be an awful list... and I can't do that. I'm going to say, 'time, resource and time.' I'm going to put a stab in the dark, that says whoever you ask is going to say that.

There was a clear indication Deans attempted to manage their workload and associated stress, some by setting boundaries, but this too could be challenging:

Ms Em: I made a complaint at one of our meetings, "When I have lunch I want to have lunch please. Please don't refer, don't have conversations about kids while I'm eating please" ... but for them, because they see me, they want to talk.

Learning to accept the personal and professional limitations of the role was a necessary challenge, especially given the persistent nature of some of the factors that hinder engagement:

Mr Henry: [Realising] how entrenched this behaviour is and how difficult it is for us to actually do anything about it, and so that can be a difficult thing to grapple with. It's also an important thing to acknowledge upfront, that your job isn't to save these kids or to really expect to fix the problem.

Such acceptance and the need for balance and self-care was something about which several participants were mindful:

Ms Lang: You've got to be okay with that for your own well-being, and if you can't then you're just putting yourself in their position, aren't you?... I'm really mindful of how am I working in my practice, what stress am I putting on myself?

The participants were also conscious that time and workload issues were a challenge throughout their schools, which had a flow-on affect to Deans. While sometimes frustrating, most also respected the impact of this wider issue on teachers and senior leaders alike:

Mr Henry: I think they are conscious that their role is probably very much the same. I think when you're in it, there's really little sympathy to give, because rightly so. I think SLT work extraordinarily hard... Our Principal has acknowledged to me that she appreciates how challenging our job is, but what hasn't matched the rhetoric is any tangible change in number of responsibilities, or size of tasks or anything.

Notably, Mr Henry, who is held in high regard by staff and students alike, had just decided to leave the teaching profession:

Mr Henry: I loved being a Dean, but it was just taking its toll on me personally and my responsibility to my family, and so I can't do it anymore.

Another Dean had also considered not continuing the role next year due to her overall workload and family commitments, but had decided to stay for her Year 13 cohort, "They've had a different Dean every year of their school here... I can't leave them." She also gave an interesting perspective on the two main middle leadership roles which she discussed as very different but with an equivalent workload:

Ms Scott: It's a shame because I actually love deaning more than I love HoDing... [But] money, management units, and potential for future development. So if I want to go on and be a Deputy Principal at some point, I'm better going there.

School values and kaupapa

The participants each referred directly to both their school's values or kaupapa, which was usually seen as an enabler when shared by all staff. Ms Em valued the special character of School 3b which esteemed Māori language and culture. Ms Lang also valued the "kaupapa of our school" and the "autonomy into how we run and what we think is important" within her House. She said School 3a takes pride in their motto "life-long learners" and valuing diversity and inclusion. Ms Lang believed their lack of uniform was indicative of this:

Ms Lang: We're lucky at this school, because a lot of those barriers that students have at other schools, aren't here at this school. So we don't have a uniform... so, straightaway students can be treated as an individual and respected as an individual.

She said at a previous school, students were removed from class for incorrect uniform, which left her “morally at odds, because you were disadvantaging the students that actually probably needed that education the most”. This exclusionary practice and sentiment was echoed by others. At School 1, to minimise the issue, Deans had taken to buying spare shoes and socks for their office, with the appreciation that this could also inform other practice:

Ms Tea: I make them buy the socks off me for like a dollar. And I'll use that to go buy more socks haha!... But actually, it can be quite a good indicator of, “Things are not going well for me because my life is such a mess at home that I can't find anything”.

Related to this, the kaupapa around how schools deal with discipline and behavioural issues clearly impacts on the Dean's role. Schools 1 and 2 were both appreciated, at least historically, as “restorative schools”, with the Deans stating they operated restoratively but wished this was more embedded and validated by professional development. Both participants at School 2 said they fundamentally disagreed with their new Principal's detention policy, indicating how the values of leaders can impact on Deans and school culture:

Ms Scott: Our new Principal that just came in is not keen on restorative and has brought back detentions. Much too - I hate it. Yeah, I totally disagree with it. I think they're pointless.

While agreeing with the other participants that punitive policies were largely ineffective, Ms Lang at School 3 said they had some “standard” discipline policies, such as detentions for truancy run by Deputy Principals, which meant clear and fair systems. Notably she had the autonomy to decide whether a student's absence was justified or not. Evidently, a kaupapa which enabled flexibility in managing student behaviour was seen as an enabler for Deans who all preferred to focus on the reason behind poor behaviour. Yet, all participants understood the need for discipline and consequences. Only Mr Henry noted struggling with the dual role of caring adult and disciplinarian, mostly because some students found it confusing. At times decisions could understandably be complex and difficult. Ms Lang said she endeavoured to act with integrity from anyone's perspective:

Ms Lang: How would this look as an outsider? I have this rule: if it hits the 6 o'clock news, what would my role look like in that? That is, I guess, my gauge.

Student support systems embedded in schools were also deemed enablers, such as the mentoring groups at School 2, and the House homework centre and peer-mentoring tuakana-teina programme at School 3b.

Resourcing, experience and training

Experience was highly regarded by all the Deans, with participants lamenting the high turnover of Deans at all three schools, both because it meant a lack of consistency for students, but also a loss of “collective experience and knowledge” specific to a role for which “you’re never given any training” and, according to Ms Lang, must rely on “your beliefs and instincts... [which] may or may not be right”. Ms Tea said she “found it really hard in my first year” but has learnt with experience. She wondered if the turnover was because they were “burning out”.

Mr Henry, who like others believes “restorative justice is hugely significant in terms of maintaining engagement”, is frustrated there are no resources or professional development allocated to this. Additionally, learning support, alternative education, and mental health support and resources were deemed helpful but sorrowfully inadequate in schools and communities, which was a challenge and frustration for Deans:

Ms Lang: I'm trained as a teacher; that mental health side is really really tricky... I feel I've done my best, but I don't feel we've served them particularly well either.... There's a shortage of skilled people, there's a shortage of facilities, there's a shortage all of the show...The preferred model would be their health needs are addressed, so their learning needs can be addressed.

The participants from the smallest school described the challenge of providing for disengaged Year 12 and 13 students, which could become a frustration for all parties. Ms Scott tried to cajole some students into alternative courses or work before they were “kicked out”. Mr B’s vast experience, contacts, knowledge of his students, and joint Careers role were enablers in helping students find meaningful opportunities. However, he saw a wider issue and believed older students needed more options:

Mr B: *[We can't] actually put together a meaningful programme within the school environment... We don't have a technical institute close at hand... In the past, they would be students who would have gone off for apprenticeships or whatever else. And they should, but they come back to school.*

Collegial relationships and responsibility

It was evident from all the Deans that they valued the work, support and collegiality of their colleagues, which was enabled through relationship building. However, working with staff also posed a range of challenges. Half of the participants reported the challenge of teachers who did not work to foster or repair relationships with students. Ms Scott said she has “to coach quite a lot of staff” how to have restorative conversations, and recalled times teachers would “rehash” rather than engage restoratively even when students were apologising. Often talking to teachers worked but sometimes it created a challenge:

Ms Tea: *If a student doesn't think their teacher believes in them, they stop trying. [If] you can't change a teacher's mind about a student, you have to get the student to change enough that they're changing the teacher's mind off their own bat.*

Colleagues' expectations of Deans are a challenge, especially the perception that Deans are supposed to “fix” problems or that they are responsible for “everything”. Mr Henry noted:

Mr Henry: *Teachers are pushing issues up to you, and then you've got SLT pushing issues down to you, so often you can feel like you're just the whipping boy or girl, because people just shovel their problems on to you for you to deal with it.*

Balancing loyalty to teachers and student welfare was a common consideration, as noted by Ms Tea:

Ms Tea: *So how do you navigate getting what you know is the best-case scenario for the student as well as keeping, you know, not undermining the authority of the teacher in their classroom or anything like that?*

The difficulty some staff had in comprehending and appreciating the Deans' role was also apparent, and the persistent nature of this was a cause of “overwhelm” for some. Some believed it would be helpful if staff were “more aware of what the responsibilities of Deans were or what kind of stuff we're doing” and less “grumbly or presumptuous” [Ms Tea]. Participants expressed their frustration at student issues seen as “the Dean's job”, even when there was school policy teachers should first follow. However, as busy

teachers themselves, they often expressed empathy for the challenges their colleagues faced, even when they posed challenges:

Mr Henry: I don't want to understate how challenging it can be for some people to have to develop a relationship with a young person who may see the world very differently to how see the world.

Ms Tea: I often think that, you know, if teachers were always in the best head space they could possibly be in and... full of energy and life, they'd be able to deal with stuff in a restorative way... But, you know, teachers are run off their feet all the time. So you do end up dealing with stuff.

Most participants commented on the importance of support and a good working relationship with their Deputy Principals, especially their direct line manager. Their experience and advice could be particularly helpful when dealing with moral dilemmas or “tricky” staff. Ms Em also felt she could easily raise wider school issues which was important. Ms Scott believes this relationship is “massively important”. She compared her current challenges to the excellent relationship she had with a previous Deputy Principal, revealing issues of hierarchy:

Ms Scott: The bigger picture is if they jump in too early, then where is it going to escalate to? It can't go anywhere... So her communication is not great. My Deputy Principal jumps in on top of me. Yeah, doesn't tell me what she's done, doesn't give me any information... [But] I keep her friendship close because if I got on the wrong side of her, sure enough, I'm sure she'd make my life hell.

Whānau and community responsiveness

All Deans reported attempts to positively engage whānau as a potential enabler. However, this could also be a challenge. Ms Scott said there were “two extremes” of parents:

Ms Scott: Where possible I try and get the parents involved, but I know the kids. Sometimes you know that it's not worth it... actually it's just going to make it worse... But then you've got other parents who are outstanding and happy to come in and... to be informed on the phone.

Ms Tea felt the biggest challenges were factors which she perceived as “beyond the scope of the school” or her control, such as not being able to influence the family or the home environment:

Ms Tea: Probably one of the hardest things is when there's no way to contact anyone at home... it's kind of sad because it's like, well someone should be worrying about what you're doing. So I find that quite hard. And you can't fix the situations.

There was a perception that some parents simply left academic care and support to the school. Even within the whānau-oriented kaupapa of School 3b, Ms Em reported frustrations with some whānau not engaging but also gave note-worthy reasons for this, including whānau beliefs and a lack of educational experience and success themselves:

Ms Em: When you talk about academics, it's around literacy... tracking their kids homework. What is the barrier? They struggle themselves. They don't understand.

Both participants at School 1 wanted more community involvement and responsiveness, which needed to be prioritised to suit the current demographic:

Mr Henry: Our school is built on White structures. In its early years it was filled with Pākehā students... it's now filled with predominantly Pacific students. The bones of our school haven't shifted, and the staff and the way we do teaching hasn't shifted to match the shift in our demographic, and that impacts engagement.

Aroha, respect and a sense of purpose

Perhaps the strongest enabler of the Dean's role is the aroha and respect afforded to their students, within a bigger purpose of supporting them to grow into successful adults. The Deans love their job, but they often balanced their expression of this with an acknowledgement of the challenges:

Ms Lang: I love a challenge. I love getting the most struggling kids, and making a difference to them, but it takes time.

Ms Em: I love my job. It's hard work because you want everyone to succeed. You do. I know these kids... [Sometimes] I can't help but think, have we done them a disservice?

The aroha and care Deans bestow on their students is comparable to that of a good parent, whereby they are at once authoritative and caring, and are committed to their success - however that is best defined for each individual. Mr Henry, for example, inferred unconditional care and a sense of responsibility, as did Ms Scott, who tells her students she is their "school mother":

Mr Henry: Especially in the type of school that I work in and in the context that I work in... you just have to always persevere, show up and be that solid presence for those young people that rely on you to be there.

Ms Scott: I tell them, "I'm your mum in school. I am your school mother because I'm going to tell you stuff you don't like. I'm going to pull you up for stuff that you don't like but I'll have your back all the time. I'll always support you. I will always back you up. But if you do something wrong, I'll come down on you as well."

Above all, it was apparent the Deans love working with their students, and find a sense of purpose in the role they play in their lives:

Mr B: There's somebody who I meet in 10 years' time who says he got a job, they've got a family and they are a productive member of society, and they're not sitting in a prison somewhere.

Ms Tea: It's a big responsibility, but it's cool... It's cool to be an expert on lots of young people and see them grow up into cute things. It's a privilege but bloody hard work.

Ms Scott: Deaning - it's a little bit like teaching isn't it? It's not a job, it's a vocation. You can't Dean unless you love kids. Yeah, so you've got to love kids. Otherwise you can't Dean because that's the whole point.

Summary

This chapter has used thematic analysis to present sub-themes under each of my four research questions. Upon further thematic analysis, using these sub-themes and assessing the most pervasive aspects of the Dean's role in improving student engagement and school outcomes, four main themes emerged. The themes are: relationships are paramount; multi-faceted 'middle-ness'; special people; and the pervasive nature of context and culture. Each of these themes consists of a range of challenges and enablers that have been identified in the findings. These are presented in Table 4.6 and are the basis for the next chapter, Discussion of findings.

Table 4.6: Challenges and enablers of the Dean's role in improving student engagement and successful outcomes for students, organised by main theme.

Theme	Challenges	Enablers
Relationships are paramount	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perseverance to "peel back the layers" and see the whole person - Effectively involving and engaging whānau - Overcoming whānau's personal barriers to engaging with school - Lack of school responsiveness to community and culture - Managing dual loyalties to staff and students - Staff unwilling or unable to engage in fostering and restoring relationships with students - Unrealistic staff expectations of the Dean's ability to solve problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aroha and respect - Knowing the students - Being trusted by students - Being visible - Parent-like care - Supporting student's socio-emotional competence - Fair and holistic approach to discipline - Effective Restorative Justice practices - Authentic whānau engagement with child's education and school - Manaakitanga, inviting and personal conversations - Honest, respectful & authentic communication - Seen to "walk the talk" - Respect for colleagues' challenges
Special people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-care and wellbeing - Learning to accept the limitations of the role - Setting workplace boundaries - Remaining resilient - Perseverance - Lack of professional development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moral and ethical in purpose and action - Relational skills - Emotional intelligence - Leadership skills - Aroha ki te tangata (respect) - Mana - Experience - Optimism and positivity - Sense of humour - Open-minded
Multifaceted middle-ness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time - Resourcing - Dichotomy of loyalties - "All things to all people" - "Triaging" rather than making substantial change - Dealing with complex, multi-dimensional issues - Ill-defined and vast areas of responsibility - Being OK with not doing everything 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Holistic view of student behaviour - Responsive management of care & discipline - Boundary-spanning role - across departments, levels of hierarchy, external providers, and student, home and school. - Engaging colleagues in pastoral care - Wide & direct influence on teaching & learning - Shaping the culture of the school - Delegating when possible
The pervasive nature of context and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Mismatch" of ethnicity and culture of staff and students - Lack of support services - Over-worked/stressed teachers - Socio-economic status of demographic - Stressful home environments - Cultural-capital - Educational culture of family - Student's negative past experiences of school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Culturally responsive pedagogy - Community & whānau involvement - Building a bridge between school and home - Effective student support systems and services - Student-centred kaupapa of school - Pastoral roles embedded in the school culture - Supportive colleagues & leaders - Flexible and responsive school approach to discipline

Chapter 5: Discussion of findings

This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter Four in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The discussion is framed by the research aim - to critically examine the ways in which Deans perceive and experience their role in improving school engagement to improve social and academic outcomes for secondary school students. Four major themes emerged from the data analysis. These provide the main headings for this chapter: relationships are paramount; multi-faceted 'middle-ness'; special people; and the pervasive nature of context and culture. Each theme is discussed in terms of the challenges and enablers experienced in the Dean's role in improving student engagement and outcomes for students as shown in *Table 4.6* at the end of the previous chapter.

Overall, my findings showcase the important role of pastoral middle leaders in secondary schools, who play a substantial role in their schools and the lives of the students in their care. They are special people who act with moral purpose, respect and love, and demonstrate a high degree of emotional intelligence and professionalism, whilst fulfilling a complex and multi-faceted role, and working to lessen the barriers to student engagement which may lead to further inequity and inequality. They have the potential to substantially impact the engagement and life outcomes of their students but face considerable challenges in doing so.

On analysis of *Table 4.6*, it is apparent the most pervasive challenges Deans face are tangible, such as a lack of time or professional development, ill-defined roles, and a lack of money and resourcing to support young people in Auckland. In contrast, most of the enablers are intangible, such as aroha, emotional intelligence, relationship building and moral purpose. Undeniably, Deans face concrete challenges that are not being addressed by concrete enablers. Good pastoral practice is personal and responsive to both individuals and context; it takes time, resourcing and support. The findings suggest that Deans should be highly valued within the educational system and better enabled to fulfil both their leadership potential and their role in engaging and supporting students.

Relationships are paramount

The participants clearly experience their role as primarily relational, realising that ensuring positive and productive relationships across the school makes the core tasks of their role possible. This reflects Bishop's (2011) assertion that, at every level, "classroom, school or system, relationships are part and parcel of everyday activities that seek to improve student outcomes" (p.31). Furthermore, the critical role of relationships is emphasised by writers in a range of fields relevant to the Dean's role - pastoral care (Best, 2014; Grove, 2004; Purdy, 2013); middle leadership (Cardno, 2012; Cranston, 2009); classroom teaching (Bishop et al., 2009; Hattie, 2009); and student engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004; Wentzel, 2012).

Foremost, Deans focus on their students and their needs. They ensure their students know they care about them personally and will support their learning, wellbeing and school experience. Such support has been found to significantly impact the range of behavioural, cognitive and emotional engagement in high school students (Wang & Holcombe, 2010). Additionally, Grove's (2004) model of pastoral care emphasises the need for relationships that have a "high level of trust so that there is the strength within the relationship to weather the 'storms' that are part and parcel of human interaction" (p.34). This supports the Deans' common belief that trusting relationships are paramount if students are to approach them with issues or concerns, and essential to effective academic mentoring and behaviour management. In this dual care and discipline role, the Dean's relationship with students can be considered 'parent-like', whereby students know they will be cared for even when they make mistakes but expect to be held accountable for such mistakes. This aligns with Robinson's (2011) assertion that care, along with a fair and holistic disciplinary approach, are important to school engagement.

Relationships are especially important when students' backgrounds mean they do not have a good school 'fit' (Appleton et al., 2008). Similar to the mentors in the *Check and Connect* programme (Wylie & Felgate, 2016), Deans regularly check in with their students' attendance, behaviour, and achievement, and help equip them with necessary competencies, while communicating the value of school. A critical part of this is Deans' work to build academic competency beliefs and foster resilience and persistence with school, found to mediate risk factors (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). It is

apparent such effective pastoral relationships help young people feel safe, cared for, and valued, hence fostering affective engagement - including school identification, connectedness and belonging - which may precede and influence other types of engagement according to Reschly et al (2017). Furthermore, the Year 12 and 13 Deans' experiences reflect research that finds student engagement is generally lower and less malleable in later school years (Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Gemici & Lu, 2014; Wylie & Hodgen, 2012). However, they knew their students well which helped them find ways for less engaged students to have positive outcomes. Deans are influential adults who persevere and get to know a young person beyond their behaviour or "unlikeable" persona, which perhaps makes a key difference in their lives.

The findings underpin the importance of responsive pedagogy. Deans nurture relationships by showing aroha and respect, providing academic and pastoral care, and through genuine interest in students' interests, family and background. This type of relational focus reflects the responsive pedagogy evident in the *Te Kōtahitanga* initiative (Bishop et al., 2009). Its success is largely accredited to shifts in the ways teachers relate and interact with their students; particularly in regard to teacher beliefs around deficit theorising, high expectations, cooperative learning, and the need for students' culture and identity to be reflected in their learning (Bishop et al., 2009). Furthermore, the concept of *whānaungatanga* implies establishing and maintaining reciprocal relationships and a sense of relatedness and shared experiences. This further aligns with the Deans' efforts to be known and "visible" to the students as well as their clear emotional investment in the school lives and success of their students. When students have strong relational bonds and feel that their individuality, culture and learning are valued, they feel a sense of belonging and are more likely to engage in school activities, which in turn promotes school-attachment and achievement.

Further to this, it was evident Deans' support of students extends to building their social competence, so they can manage the relationships necessary for learning. Hattie (2009) found this to be a critical factor in school engagement and success. Wentzel (2012) refers to Bronfenbrenner's (2005) assertion that social competence is facilitated by contextual supports which both communicate to young people and provide for the development of personal attributes and behaviours that are expected by the social group. Such prosocial and socially responsible behaviour are essential for developing

relationships with teachers and peers, and are associated with a range of academically-related outcomes including performance (Wentzel, 2012).

Accordingly, Deans are aware of the necessity of positive teacher-student relationships, especially with students who may be at risk, and hence undertake the important work of promoting positive teacher-student relationships, especially after conflict or frustration. Deans experience restorative justice processes to be very effective when there are relationship breakdowns or behavioural issues in a classroom. Macfarlane and Margrain (2011), explain restorative practice as underpinned by responsive pedagogy, to require both care and accountability, and to value relationships as of central importance to learning. The challenge is when teachers do not share restorative ideals or are unwilling or ill-equipped to engage in such practices. The Deans, especially at the two lower decile schools, would have liked more support and professional development around restorative justice, and for it to be more embedded in the school. The findings reinforce the belief that teacher-student relationships should be at the forefront of teaching and learning, as well as being an integral part of school-wide student care (Purdy, 2013).

Deans also emphasise the importance of relationships with colleagues. Working with and through others is an essential leadership practice and, as Fairman and Mackenzie (2015) assert, building and nurturing trusting relationships is central to the ability of a leader to have influence. However, as alluded to above, there can be the dual challenge of advocating for students while also being a loyal staff member. Murphy's (2011) research concluded that dealing with teacher shortcomings was one of the biggest challenges Deans experienced in their role. While not quite as prominent in my findings, participants did feel this. Specifically, they experienced varying degrees of comfort when engaging in difficult conversations with staff. Such conversations are deemed to be an important but difficult job of leaders and, according to Robinson (2011), must be done with care. It is apparent better school-wide support for the role and ethos of pastoral care, as well as leader support and professional learning around managing staff, would be helpful. This is one good reason experience amongst the Deans and Deputy Principals is so highly valued. Research attests to the value of experience and support to increase capacity (Bush, 2010; Crawford, 2014; van Velsor et al., 2010), and the need for better support for the needs of middle leaders (Cardno

& Bassett, 2015; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013). Clearly Deans' relationships with senior leaders are important. Respect, understanding and practical leadership support for the Dean's role are enablers, while control, poor communication and mistrust can negatively affect Deans' work. Notably, Deans spoke of their respect and support for teacher colleagues. While not always possible, it was clear they endeavoured to collaborate, foster strong collegial relationships and a community with a shared vision. This is the work of effective leaders according to Hayes et al. (2004), who also advocate for leaders to establish a 'culture of care' whereby the personal and professional wellbeing and morale of staff is prioritised. It is clear that Deans attempt this, but it is essential they too are being cared for by their colleagues and leaders.

Deans are the traditional link between school and home (Lodge, 2006) and it was clear Deans perceived home-school relationships to be inherently valuable, even if it could be a challenging part of the role. The effective involvement of whānau as an enabler for student engagement and success is well-supported in research (Louis et al., 2010; Robinson, 2011; Tamati, 2011). However, the Deans' relationships with parents can mostly be described as reactive casework. Proactive whānau engagement was valued by some, yet seemingly limited. The findings suggest either Deans lacked the knowledge of how best to engage especially disengaged whānau and what types of parental engagement were most effective, or they simply did not have the time or resources. Robinson (2011) highlights the fact some parent communities are more difficult to engage than others but also points to research which can support leaders to create high-quality parent-involvement programmes. Schools must learn to better engage all parents and communities. This is especially important given that research suggests family variables account for as much as 50% of the variation in school achievement (Hattie, 2009) and are hence considered a high leverage option for schools and leaders (Leithwood, Anderson, et al., 2010). These findings suggest that for schools to be more responsive to their community, school leaders should be made aware of such research, and that Deans are well-placed to implement more proactive and authentic home-school partnerships. It is building relationships with those families that are not engaged that could potentially benefit all parties the most.

The pervasive nature of context and culture

This theme focuses on the contextual and cultural factors perceived to act as barriers to engagement and challenges to the Deans' role in supporting students. Each contextual factor identified overlaps and impacts on the other, suggesting a need for both school and social-political reform for substantial improvement to student outcomes. This theme has two sub-themes: what is valued and building a bridge. These are discussed together as 'what is valued' impacts greatly on a Dean's ability to 'build a bridge' to mediate issues that affect student engagement, which can be complex and pervasive.

Overall, while all Deans experienced similar challenges in their roles, it seemed those in School 1 and School 2 perceived their challenges as more pervasive and entrenched than in School 3. Notably, School 3 is located in a higher socio-economic demographic, but equally apparent, School 3a and 3b presented to be less entrenched in the traditional Western paradigm of education and highly responsive to individuality and culture. The newly-titled 'Heads of House' also reported more autonomy and seemed to be more highly esteemed in their role. This was not intended as a comparative study, and these factors would require more investigation to make any conclusive statements. However, when viewed through a critical lens, the differences reflect sentiments touted in recent New Zealand literature around the problematic reality of entrenched educational norms and social division (Haque, 2014; Ings, 2017). The findings certainly support an argument that school context has wide-reaching implications for both students and staff.

The wider values and kaupapa of the school appeared to differently impact the Deans and students. This is most evident in regard to 'disciplinary' values and the 'fit' between school and student. This finding is supported by Wentzel's (2012) work on student engagement, where she discusses the importance of a balanced fit between the goals, needs, and expectations of young people and those of the broader educational environment. The challenges were mostly reported in terms of a lack of cultural and community responsiveness, teachers' inability to see past students' "naughty" behaviour, a mismatch of behavioural or cultural norms and ideals between staff and students, and a narrow focus on academic goals over pastoral care by some staff. Critically, all participants knew that school should be a place where cultural identity is

valued and esteemed, as argued in the literature (Berryman & Eley, 2017; Bishop et al.; Taleni et al., 2017; Webber, 2012). However, their school context seemed to dictate whether this translated into school-wide practice, most notably in the contrast between schools 1 and 3b. The assertion that deficit theorising based on cultural group was to blame for some Pasifika students' undiagnosed learning difficulties exemplifies the difficulty for Deans with such sensitivities to make a difference without the support of wider school values and notably, resources. In contrast, School 3b, which values 'Māori learning as Māori' as espoused by several Māori researchers including Berryman and Eley (2017), has a culturally relevant kaupapa that was perceived to contribute to higher levels of engagement and academic attainment. The participants' beliefs align with the recent Ministry initiatives (Ministry of Education, 2013, 2017b) which are specifically based on the recognition that esteeming culture and competence through culturally-responsive teaching and values, rather than expecting assimilation to Eurocentric ideals, are vital to increasing the engagement of Māori and Pasifika students. These initiatives and the Deans' perceptions align with studies showing: international evidence for a more prevalent pastoral focus on adapting the environment to suit the child (Lodge, 2006); the importance of belonging (Ryan & Deci, 2017); the role of student-environment fit (Wang & Eccles, 2012); and a call to educate for empowerment (Mulford, 2013; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2015). Even students who do not know their culture well can suffer from deficit theorising and stereotyping, which may be countered by ensuring high expectations and positive role models. The evidence here indicates that the school a student attends makes a difference to how they are treated and hence engage, even when they have equally capable pastoral care leaders.

There is also strong evidence the disciplinary climate is significantly influential on student learning (Leithwood, 2011). As behaviour management is a traditional task of pastoral middle leaders (Best, 1999; Calvert, 2009; Lodge, 2006), Deans have both responsibility and influence on this. How safe and cared for students feel at school is directly related to engagement, according to Robinson (2011). Furthermore, rules, boundaries and discipline are inherently valuable for both individuals and a functioning society, which Deans realise. In terms of response to issues, it seems Deans act on a mix of their own values and the pressure to uphold school policies. Here, the issue of

uniform is a clear example of the impact of contextually different school values. The assertion that an absence of uniform in School 3a disabled barriers to engagement and indicated respect for individuality was in stark contrast to the experiences in the other two schools, where Deans expressed frustration and realised punishing students was often incongruent with engagement strategies. In this case and others, Deans value their autonomy to make decisions based on their knowledge of a student and broader concerns, and found staff expectations of more retributive or rigid discipline policies could be a challenge. This stance is supported by Finn and Zimmer (2012) who found a key condition of the school setting that promotes engagement is fair and effective disciplinary practices, while negative school sanctions and discipline perceived to be too harsh are associated with disengagement and drop-out. Behaviour management is not an easy task, especially when dealing with disaffected youth, and while there is no easy answer, a context that sets clear boundaries but also ensures care and support for underlying causes of behavioural issues is critical. This is further reinforced by research on the *Student Engagement Initiative* (Devine et al., 2013) where exclusion processes were perceived to be demeaning and confusing, whereas restorative justice processes were reported to result in a dramatic decline in school suspensions. Building a bridge for disengaged students requires all educational leaders to reflect on their values and beliefs to ensure they place students and their needs at the centre of a school's values and disciplinary policies. This is another argument for schools to ensure school-wide responsive pedagogy.

Many of the barriers and frustrations reported by Deans can be attributed to the well-established link between under-achievement and both socio-economic status and cultural capital. Teacher support such as that offered by Deans can be a powerful mediator, as previously discussed. However, a recent study (Quin et al., 2018) warns against an over-emphasis on teachers' ability to overcome any barrier as adolescents are highly influenced by their past experiences, prior engagement, and family and community context. They argue for addressing the student-environment 'fit' within a comprehensive ecological framework which acknowledges individual's protective and risk factors. Cultural capital, as defined by Bourdieu (1986), is one such risk or protective factor which must be considered. As Haque (2014) asserts, "For those with less cultural capital, the institution of school feels alien, unhelpful and disconnected

from their actual lives and lived experiences” (p.26). The cultural match or “mismatch” between staff and students is a challenge. Yet, efforts to help students adopt academic behaviours and beliefs are evidence that Deans take on the responsibility to ‘build a bridge’ between what students present with and the necessary school values and student behaviours for school success. However, the current study questions whether schools most value enforcing the dominant cultural capital on all students or changing the ‘capital’ that is valued to suit the community they serve. The findings, and my own experience, suggest New Zealand schools and the Deans within them, are stuck somewhere in between. The reality is we must teach young people how to ‘behave’ in schools for them to succeed within them. However, without delving into a philosophical discussion about what intrinsically good values schools and society should promote, to appropriately and effectively engage all our students, a diverse set of knowledge, culture, and values must be recognised as valid, and hence incorporated into the fabric of our schools. To not do this, is to accept education as a form of ‘social reproduction’, as Bourdieu (1986) theorised, and to accept the disengagement of those for whom school does not ‘fit’.

Hence, building a bridge between home and school is widely recommended by cultural educational leaders such as Tamati (2011), who states leaders should focus on including whānau, hapu, and iwi in an authentic and empowering way. The Dean’s experience of seeing a direct relationship between the whānau who are engaged and the most engaged students is a correlation well-supported by research (Hattie, 2009; Leithwood, Anderson, et al., 2010). Furthermore, Ms Em’s stated beliefs, for example, as to why some whānau do not engage with their child’s education offer insight and further reflect issues of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Haque, 2014). Robinson (2011) asserts that most parents want to be involved, but they need to know *how* they can support their children’s education. When they have limited understanding of this or have personal barriers due to their own lack of education or negative experiences of schools, this poses a substantial challenge for all stakeholders. Deans at School 1 wished there was more community responsiveness and involvement; they were acutely aware the dominant Western traditions that formed the school culture did not reflect the mostly Pasifika community. Research tells us that to break down the pervasive gaps in educational achievement, schools must actively validate cultural

identity in schools (Webber, 2012), incorporate indigenous ways of knowing (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2015), and learn from each other through engaging whānau (Tamati, 2011). These middle leaders seemed to know this but also perceived it to be a much wider problem and, despite good intentions and some good practice, were unsure how to break down the barriers to affect substantial change. Tellingly, two participants directly stated they believed they had little or no impact on their students' home circumstances. While schools cannot influence the critical socio-economic factor – though the government should – there are family-related variables that are open to influence (Hattie, 2009). Deans are positioned, for example, to have more substantial influence on family's academic expectations and understanding of academic pathways.

Teachers and leaders can and do make a difference, and this must be at the forefront of educators' minds. As Bishop et al. (2009) argue, we cannot accept socio-economic status or culture as an excuse for people, and indeed, populations underachieving; effective teachers believe all students can succeed. This belief is reflected in the attitudes of the Deans, whose work primarily focuses on the most "at risk" students to ensure they are afforded the educational opportunities and outcomes they deserve. The critical work of Deans 'builds a bridge' by encouraging attendance and behavioural engagement, and by working with the emotional and cognitive factors that affect engagement, such as building self-belief, academic resilience, and empowering students through high-expectations and a sense of ownership in their achievements. Increasing student engagement through support and interventions can overcome the obstacles associated with socio-economic status and academic risk factors (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). While this is not an easy task, the effort is critical.

Notably, all educator efforts would be enhanced if wider support and services were available to all young people. While different contexts sometimes meant participants focused on different issues, the uniting element is a lack of money and resourcing. In a very tangible way, this reflects wider socio-political values. If our society continues to underfund and under-resource health, mental health, learning-support, social services, and schools; and to undervalue the impact of poverty and its associated stressors, even the best teachers and educators cannot justly serve all our young people.

Multi-faceted ‘middle-ness’

This theme refers to the multi-faceted nature and range of tasks, responsibilities and practices the participants reported; the centrality of their mediating and boundary-spanning influence; and Deans’ place in the positional hierarchy of schools. This theme has two interrelated sub-themes: all things to all people; and a holistic, big picture approach to care. Overall, the findings are evidence for a substantial role whereby Deans are the only people to hold both a close and big picture view of students’ issues, engagement and outcomes across the school.

All things to all people

The findings depict a role of ‘middle-ness’ whereby Deans are positioned in the middle of almost every aspect of secondary schooling. The multi-faceted and central nature of the role is well-supported by recent studies on pastoral middle leaders in New Zealand (Fraser, 2014; Joyce, 2013; Murphy, 2011). These studies, along with the current study, align with Lodge’s (2006) finding that the similar Head of Year role in Britain had been steadily increasing in pressure and responsibilities; and now includes a sharper emphasis on improving academic results and changing the school to meet the needs of its students. While there is lack of empirical research on this specific role, the findings substantiate Joyce’s (2013) chosen thesis title, “Everything to everybody”. To the students, Deans are the “go to”: the central agent in supporting, co-ordinating and managing their school lives and support needs. For the school and its goals, they are the central adult who checks and ensures students are well, engaged, and achieving their potential, holds central responsibility for any behaviour that negatively affects teaching and learning, supports teachers in their relationships, teaching and care of students, and who is the main link between school and whānau. This multi-faceted account echoes the only known definition of the role (Ministry of Education, 2017a), thereby suggesting that the mediating influence and broad overview Deans have are indicative of the expectations of the role.

Such an all-encompassing role is evidently difficult to quantify, appreciate, and fulfil. The participants’ perceptions reflect Joyce’s (2013) finding that Deans work well outside their prescribed job outline, and concur with Murphy’s (2011) finding that

many believed the multiplicity of the role would be difficult to capture in a job description. This aligns with Calvert's (2009) assertion that changes to both the meaning and practice of pastoral care means it is highly unlikely that staff who are now working in schools understand pastoral care and its objectives. Additionally, Gurr and Drysdale's (2013) study identified a lack of understanding of middle leader roles by senior leaders as a critical reason for their unrealised potential, which amounts to a missed opportunity to make a difference in schools. In this seemingly boundary-less role, Deans are widely regarded as the person to whom all student issues are both referred and deferred; hence Deans are overburdened with persistent and often low-level reactive casework. While student care is somewhat distributed to others, issues are too often left to the Deans, along with unrealistic expectations of their ability to "fix" problems. These experiences are consistent with Murphy's (2011) finding that staff perceive Deans as the people to give things to as they "catch all problems" (p.116). Participants lamented the fact they could not adequately support *all* students and often had to "quick fix" or "triage" rather than affect substantial change. While acknowledging the necessarily reactive nature of dealing with student issues, Deans are frustrated at not being able to be more proactive and effective in their work.

Evidently, Deans cannot be "all things to all people" and the biggest challenges experienced are time and workload pressures. This challenge is emphasised in all reviewed research on middle-leaders, who are often found to be overwhelmed with managerial tasks, rather than leadership, and an ever-increasing workload (Cardno, 2012; Fitzgerald et al., 2003; Louis et al., 2010; Notman & Youngs, 2016). This also, according to Louis et al (2010), amounts to a great waste of potential. Deans are in the middle of a necessarily relational role – with all the associated complexities and nuances – while also managing an "insurmountable" array of tasks and administrative duties, a heavy teaching load, and the constant and various demands of students, teachers, parents, and other leaders. I share Murphy's (2011) concern over the wellbeing and stretched capacity of Deans, something the participants were also aware of. As Cardno (2012) argues, middle leaders must be well-supported so they are not overwhelmed by the challenges of today's schools. Clearly, a less tangible challenge of the role is learning to accept one's own limitations. However, it is the pervasive tangible challenges that must be addressed.

It would not be out-of-place to suggest the expectations put on Deans, by both outside forces and themselves, are unrealistic and unfair to both Deans and those they attempt to support. The high turnover reported; the finding that some participants were or were considering leaving, despite their stated “love” for the job; and the admission that others struggled to find balance even with concerted effort, speaks of the need for much better support and recognition of the realities of the role. This unfortunately reflects the New Zealand *Teachers of Promise* study (Cameron & Lovett, 2015) which found most teachers with management duties struggled to maintain high standards which led to lower levels of job satisfaction. This point is not made to attribute blame to equally busy senior leaders, but rather to recognise a need for systemic change. It is certainly a concern if the over-burdened workload and time of educators has now been demeaned to a truism.

A holistic, big picture approach to care

Much of the effective work Deans do is enabled by being positioned to see the bigger picture. Foremost, they seek to respond to student issues in terms of the deeper and beyond-school issues affecting students and their ability to engage and learn. A holistic, big picture approach to care means “seeing the whole person” and responding in due regard, while also considering the needs and expectations of society and their school. This can be a challenging task. Deans are often the advocate and middle person when it comes to ensuring students are treated fairly, behaving well, and well-supported in both their wellbeing and academic learning. Hence, Deans are positioned in the sometimes-dichotomous roles of carer and disciplinarian; pastoral care worker and academic mentor; and as previously mentioned, both student advocate and supportive staff member. Perhaps surprisingly, the findings indicate such ‘multi-faceted middle-ness’ is mostly an enabler to the Deans’ impact on student engagement and outcomes. As in other studies (Fraser, 2014; Joyce, 2013; Murphy, 2011), the Deans seemed accepting of the dual carer-disciplinarian role. In contrast to many of Fraser’s (2014) participants, no one mentioned the need for instilling fear in students. They were most concerned with ensuring supportive adult-child relationships were maintained and felt consequences should be fair, well-understood, and implemented to affect change and pro-social behaviour, rather than in retribution or by means of fear and force. All participants believed there are usually reasons for “naughty” or unproductive

behaviour. This focus is supported by Calvert (2009) who notes that while traditional pastoral leadership structures had a strong disciplinarian component, simply off-loading discipline matters to middle-management cannot compensate for contextual problems or a breakdown in interpersonal matters. Hence the best way to respond is to first understand the person and situation – as is well-supported in engagement research (Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Reschly et al., 2017; Wylie & Hodgen, 2012).

Equally apparent in the Deans' perceptions is the notion that pastoral and academic care ought to be regarded as inseparable, as agreed in the reviewed literature (Calvert, 2009; Hearn et al., 2006; Lodge, 2006; Notman & Youngs, 2016). Hearn et al (2006) discuss this in terms of their complementary effect on learning and developmental outcomes, including resilience, empowerment, and self-efficacy. While there is limited literature specific to Deans, the findings are evidence for a practice that incorporates and unites academic, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural support – akin to the defined components of student engagement (Appleton et al., 2008; Fredricks et al., 2004). Furthermore, research attests to the inextricable links between motivation, engagement, wellbeing and success (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Through a combination of academic and pastoral care, Deans can have a direct influence on a student's wellbeing, capacity and motivation to learn, self-efficacy, goal-oriented behaviour, and foster a sense of belonging and a belief in future potential and possibility – ultimately positively affecting school engagement and outcomes.

Having a big picture view and being in the middle of 'all things' and 'all people' also positions Deans in a uniquely influential role within the school. This resonates with Louis et al.'s (2010) assertion that leaders are in a unique position to create synergy across multiple variables which influence student learning. While evidently Deans take on the bulk of the pastoral work, they are aware that it should be a united effort. The *Te Pakiaka Tangata* (Ministry of Education, 2017a) report on student wellbeing asserts student care is most effective when shared, as do prominent researchers in pastoral care (Best, 2014; Purdy, 2013). Deans communicate and relate with people across the school and community, sharing their strong ideals and garnering support for a more cohesive, student-centred approach to care and teaching. Such work to foster a sense of shared responsibility and values is well-evidenced as a critical act of leadership in schools (Bolden et al., 2016; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Hayes et al., 2004; Louis et al.,

2010; Notman & Youngs, 2016). While participants recalled some more challenging cases with staff, on the whole, most reported staff as supportive and empathetic once they had explained a student's situation or that they were working with the challenges of a student. These relationships emphasise the direct influence Deans can have, which is reflected in Brundrett and Rhodes' (2010) assertion that middle leaders "are closer to students and can transmit strategies for inclusion, student engagement and high expectations for student achievement via their working relationships" (p. 162). Effective student care in our schools relies on central people influencing others to share in the pastoral care priority of our young people. Equally, it relies on such efforts to be well-supported.

The wide-reaching and big picture responsibility of the Dean's role suggests a unique and fundamentally different role to that of curriculum leaders. Given that most of the middle leadership research is on Heads of Departments, this is an important note. Unlike curriculum leaders, pastoral leaders work across the school ensuring academic success and relational support for all their students in all departments. The findings here correspond with Murphy's (2011) suggestion that while Deans were increasingly responsible for academic outcomes, there was no evidence Heads of Department were taking on more pastoral responsibility. Of note also is the perceived lower hierarchical rank of Deans, which was inferred as a challenge at times. While perceived to be equivalent in terms of workload, the salary difference and perceived career-prospect to senior leadership is considered to largely favour the curriculum role, a finding that aligns with case studies in Britain (Best, 1999). Despite this, however, it was also clear the participants felt valued within their schools and that there was a strong mandate for pastoral care. This perceived value perhaps needs to translate into better recognition and remuneration of Deans. The findings here offer some support for Joyce's (2013) recommendation that schools reassess how these roles can better meet today's educational context. Indeed, the comparative middle leader roles would be a worthy topic of further study. Overall this research reiterates a need to better understand the nature, practice and impact of middle leadership in secondary schools (Cardno & Bassett, 2015; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013).

Special people

It was apparent to me as I interviewed each of these six pastoral middle leaders, that they are very 'special people' and that this enabled their work. I am aware of my bias as I work in this role and have some very special colleagues. However, upon careful analysis, this point could not be ignored. Gurr and Drysdale (2013) insist that leaders have special qualities that make them successful leaders, and that their qualities, characteristics, competencies, values and attitudes affect their influence. While none of the participants spoke of their own strengths or character, these were evident in both what they said and the way they said it. According to Bryman (2012) such researcher observations from interviews can be just as revealing and should be noted. Foremost, the Deans I interviewed were highly relational and I could sense the genuine care and concern they had for their students. Some of their frustrations were palpable, but I was most struck by their conscious, honest and reflective thoughts, while often also enjoying their easy-going nature and sense of humour. Unfortunately, this is not fully conveyed in the written data. On analysis, I found many of the participants' 'special' qualities fit within the four key leadership qualities listed in the Ministry of Education's (Ministry of Education, 2012) core documents on leadership: *manaakitanga*, *pono*, *ako*, and *āwhinatanga*. These Māori concepts express leadership in a way unique to Aotearoa/New Zealand. As a Pākehā, I use these concepts as respectfully and appropriately as possible to discuss this theme.

Manaakitanga is a leadership principle translated as leading with moral purpose in the care of others (Ministry of Education, 2012). It also means welcoming and incorporates the values of trust, integrity, and equity. This was evident in the Deans' great respect and care for students, whānau and colleagues alike, and their clear commitment to the task of bettering the lives of their students. The empathy, insight, intellect, and interpersonal skills evident cannot be overstated as fostering *manaakitanga*. Furthermore, none of the participants blamed the students outright for any poor behaviour. Instead these leaders are acutely aware of the influence of other factors, which according to Brundrett and Rhodes (2010) is an essential awareness of learning-centred leaders. Their moral purpose was built on the very real need to counteract such barriers to engagement, and hence, as authors such as Raelin (2011) and Tamati (2011)

promote, they exhibit leadership through contribution and responsibility as and when it is needed.

Pono means having self-belief but also has connotations of having integrity, being genuine, rightful and honest. These leaders are faced with complex issues in the lives and education of often hundreds of students in their care, while also managing the adults in their lives. It takes special people to do this work every day and maintain the optimism, resilience and perseverance these Deans displayed. Their energy and commitment were inspirational. Furthermore, some of their humility and willingness to voice their own flaws in the interviews showed genuineness and self-awareness, while also conveying confidence that most of their work was effective. The pursuit of rightful action in challenging circumstances was also evident. Some Deans discussed moral dilemmas in their advocacy role, but tried to check from multiple perspectives that their actions were right. Furthermore, the Deans gave evidence for high-level professional capacity and high expectations of themselves and others, which are qualities found in successful middle leaders (Gurr & Drysdale, 2013). The Ministry document (2012) states *pono* in leadership also means having work-life balance, which for most participants was an ongoing yet conscious challenge.

Ako means being a learner. This is most evident in the Dean's responsiveness to students, by both getting to know them and by listening and really trying to understand their perspectives circumstances. The desire to understand and validate other cultures was notable. The Deans were well aware of the need to continually develop their skills, acknowledging that their role is complex and highly nuanced. There was real value placed on the experience of others, as well as their own growing repertoire, and a commitment to sharing knowledge. Moreover, the Deans realised their limitations, and some referred to de-briefing and consulting with colleagues as part of their learning process. Crawford (2014) asserts effective leaders embrace a commitment to reflective practice and both personal and professional development, as these Deans clearly do.

Awhinatanga means guiding and supporting. The Deans intuitively understand that people are the most important resource (Bush & Middlewood, 2013). As leaders, they realise the need to work with and through others to make substantial differences to student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2010). The Deans work of guiding and supporting students clearly extends to their colleagues which requires high emotional intelligence

and leadership skills. Even when describing challenges and frustrations with other staff members or parents, there was an acknowledgement of the difficulty in fulfilling their respective roles, spoken in an empathetic tone. In particular, most participants voiced an appreciation for the frustrations and workload pressures of their colleagues – teachers and curriculum and senior leaders – presenting an ability to see issues from multiple perspective, another effective leadership quality (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Several Deans described leading and supporting teachers with their professional needs and building staff capacity, as deemed effective leadership (Brundrett & Rhodes, 2010; Hayes et al., 2004; Louis et al., 2010; Robinson, 2011). The leadership act of ‘buffering’ (Leithwood, 2007) to protect teachers, their teaching time, and their capacity to teach, was also evident. Again, the humility and integrity of the participants was evident in their descriptions. They simply saw this as a way to support colleagues and contribute to a better school environment.

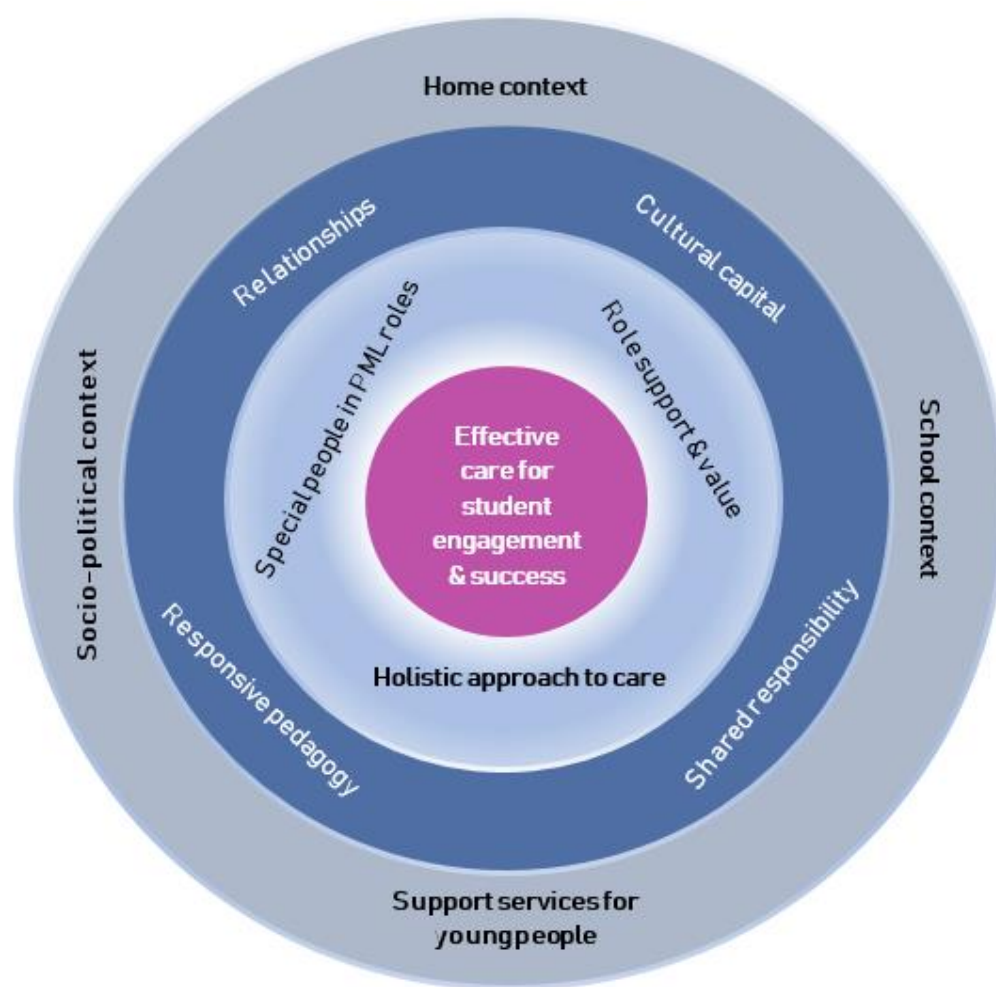
It is evident that the Deans both directly and indirectly influence teaching and learning through their personal and professional skills, attributes, and values which they incorporate to increase staff commitment, specifically to pastoral care and more positive teacher-student relationships, and more supportive working conditions. This theme has implications for both training and recruitment, whereby senior leaders should seek out those with highly developed personal skills and clear moral purpose for the role of Dean, and seek to equip and support them to use these attributes to the highest effect. In line with distributive leadership ideals, researchers have asserted that both personal and organisational potential are realised when teachers are empowered in areas of importance to them (Brundrett & Rhodes, 2010), and aptitudes and expertise are best matched to school challenges (Dufour & Marzano, 2011). It takes ‘special people’ to be a Dean, and this role should be reserved for those teachers who most value student care but also have the balance and aptitude to cope with the challenges.

Clearly a challenge for these special people is self-care and ensuring their own well-being, while the challenge for their leaders should be adequately supporting their capacity and development. While Deans display a high degree of emotional intelligence, challenging circumstances certainly have the potential to break their resilience. These people find their job immensely challenging, but they love it. This

reflects Dufour and Marzano's (2011) claim that the best leaders are "in love with the work they do" and "demonstrate a palpable passion for moral purpose" (p.194); yet, as they state, this is necessary but not sufficient. Schools cannot continue to overload and rely on the special characteristics of people who choose to do this unique role without questioning whether they are enabled enough to fulfil their potential within the pressures and constraints of their role. As in Cardno and Bassett's (2015) study, the capacity of these middle leaders may be limited due to insufficient attention and a lack of training from senior leaders and the Ministry. Furthermore, Haque (2014) argues, fully supporting staff and their personal and professional development is a moral responsibility as well as a cost-effective alternative to high attrition rates. To not address the systemic issues around workload, value and care is to limit potential, and undermines the work and roles of good people along with the potential difference they make to young people's lives.

A model of effective pastoral middle leadership

Careful analysis and reflection on the key components of pastoral middle leadership for student engagement culminated in the creation of Figure 5.1. The findings called for a model of pastoral middle leadership for student engagement that reflects the multi-dimensional nature of the two concepts and integrates interpersonal factors with wider contextual factors. The model situates the key aspects of the Dean's role in improving student engagement within the wider contextual forces that affect both the role and student engagement. It has similarities with the influential developmental model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (2005), and is supported by literature which calls for student engagement to be understood contextually (Fredricks et al., 2016; Reschly & Christenson, 2012) and within a socio-ecological framework (Quin et al., 2018; Wentzel, 2012).



Key:



Figure 5.1: Factors affecting effective pastoral middle leadership for student engagement and success

In the model, the inner circle, effective care for student engagement, is surrounded by the key enablers of the Deans' role, the second inner circle. Deans' work involves and is supported by the main personal and interpersonal factors within schools, in the third circle. This comprises of relationships, cultural capital, shared responsibility and responsive pedagogy, as have each been discussed as central to mediating and improving student outcomes. These interpersonal and personal elements conceptualise how Deans, students and staff interact together and with the contextual

forces in the distal circle. The distal circle represents the main contextual aspects which are central to student engagement and impact how schools and Deans operate. These external aspects are persistent and tangible, interact with each other, and depend on factors mostly outside of the Dean's control.

The socio-political context, for example, directly influences the resources student support services receive as well as the financial wellbeing of the population and hence students' homes. Equally, the school context may respond to the home context of its students as well as wider social and political pressures. Thus the model assumes interaction across and between the layers, and is based on the premise that mediating factors both affect and are affected by context. The findings have shown that Deans work to mitigate negative external influences through personal and interpersonal factors. Yet, they are frustrated by both these external influences and the lack of tangible enablers of their role in schools. Factors at each level of the model interact to determine the care students receive, impacting on their success and ability to engage with their education.

Summary

This chapter has critically examined the four themes that emerged from the findings. The four themes: relationships are paramount; multi-faceted 'middle-ness'; 'special people'; and the pervasive nature of context and culture were discussed in terms of the challenges and enablers presented in the findings. The discussion of each theme was based on the perceptions and experiences of the participants and analysed in regard to the wider implications for Dean's practice, pastoral care and student engagement. This led to the presentation of a model of effective pastoral care for student engagement. The key conclusions and recommendations from this study are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and recommendations

Chapter six presents the three key conclusions from this study. These are discussed in terms of the broader implications for schools and government policy, and lead to critical recommendations. The strengths and limitations of the study are also outlined, along with recommendations for further research. My personal reflection on this research is presented in a poem, which precedes my final conclusion.

The aim of this research was to critically examine the ways in which pastoral middle leaders perceive and experience their role in supporting school engagement to improve social and academic outcomes for secondary school students. This critical qualitative study involved interviews with six pastoral middle leaders from three distinct secondary schools. Overall, this study provides unique insight into the role of pastoral middle leaders in secondary schools and the enablers and challenges they face in fostering student engagement and success. It also illustrates the array of barriers to engagement that students face from the perspective of their Deans.

Secondary schools can be disparate places. This study shows Deans have a crucial role in bringing congruence and holistic support amongst the subject silos. Given the range and complexity of factors that impact student engagement and outcomes, an intricate awareness and holistic view of young people's needs and motivations are necessary, making Deans and their central role inherently valuable. They oversee almost every aspect of their students' education and work to support their success academically and socially, in the hope of developing healthy competent students and ultimately citizens.

Key conclusions

Relationships are paramount

The most prominent finding is that relationships are paramount. Relationships with students are the cornerstone of a Dean's role. Deans also emphasise other teacher-student relationships as essential to student engagement, especially for less engaged students. In their dual care-discipline role, Deans seek to understand and mediate the underlying cause of the behaviour, while also working to ensure consequences are fair and understood. Equally, in their dual pastoral-academic care role, Deans work to

ensure students have the best opportunities to succeed. These roles are only possible when Deans know their students and relational trust exists.

Current literature is saturated with evidence for the role of teacher-student relationships in successful school outcomes (Best, 2014; Bishop et al., 2009; Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Hattie, 2009; Margrain & Macfarlane, 2011; Purdy, 2013; Robinson et al., 2009). The findings in this study offer a unique perspective on how and why relationships are central to pastoral middle leaders' work. Essentially, the positive relationships the Deans establish with and between all members of the school community have the potential to mediate the barriers to student engagement by promoting: students' sense of belonging and relatedness at school; a safe and supportive environment; a shared responsibility for pastoral and academic care as an integrated concept; and more student-centred and responsive pedagogy.

Deans work to mediate barriers to engagement

Deans show an acute awareness of the barriers to engagement that their students experience. As expected, these can mostly be understood in terms of demographics, socio-economics, resourcing, mental health, learning difficulties, and cultural differences. In this respect, the under-resourcing of support services for students' health and learning needs was perceived as a frustrating barrier over which Deans had little influence, as were students' financial circumstances and challenging home-lives. Furthermore, there is evidence that aligns with research that despite reforms, students still suffer from negative stereotyping based on culture (Berryman & Eley, 2017). Deans in this study also have a sound understanding of student engagement as a multidimensional construct that includes active participation in class and the wider-life of the school, valuing academic success, and a sense of belonging. This reflects the behavioural, cognitive and emotional dimensions of engagement defined in the literature (Appleton et al., 2008; Fredricks et al., 2004). Deans work to enhance the academic and social behaviours that support school success, while also acknowledging the importance of students feeling valued for who they are, and the need to promote a good student-school 'fit', as is deemed critical in engagement literature (Appleton et al., 2008; Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Wentzel, 2012). Family commitment, concern, and involvement in their children's education and lives was also perceived as a critical

component of student engagement. As such Deans view whānau involvement as inherently valuable and seek to communicate with them. However, this presents challenges both in terms of Deans' time to be proactive and a perceived lack of cooperation from some families. Some Deans lack the skills and support to effectively engage whānau. This highlights the need for professional learning and school-wide commitment to authentic family involvement and community responsiveness. Overall, while Deans are not saviours or a single solution, it is clear students are well-served by their efforts. However, the extent to which even the most effective pastoral middle leaders can counter pervasive socio-economic and socio-political barriers is uncertain.

The critical role of Deans is unacknowledged

A Dean is a “conduit” for care, a leader, and a support person who acts out of moral responsibility and commitment to their students. Yet they have no official training, endure unrealistic expectations from a range of people, a heavy teaching load, a vast and increasing workload, and as one participant described it “a big nebulous bubble of responsibility.” Deans “love” their job and find reward and pride in their care of students, especially those in most need, but they can be overwhelmed by the “insurmountable” tasks. Time was identified as the most pervasive challenge to fulfilling their role. This means they are often reactive rather than proactive in their care, have to prioritise some students over others, and can struggle to effect substantial change. Deans work with many persistent tangible barriers while experiencing few tangible enablers. It is an indictment on the education sector that educators have accepted time and workload pressures as so widespread and deeply entrenched in schools that they are deemed beyond anyone's immediate control.

While most Deans feel their role is appreciated, there is also evidence Deans experience their role as of lower rank in the leadership hierarchy. This can affect their influence on wider school policy, contributes to a high staff turnover, and indicates less value in a teacher's career path. This idea is substantiated by both the lower remuneration and the silence in the literature. Yet, Deans occupy a central position which offers a close and broad cross-curricular view of school and student realities, especially in comparison to Heads of Departments and other further removed leadership roles. The central position of Deans enables them to lead and influence

other staff towards a more pastoral, relational, and student-centred school through their influential leadership and boundary-spanning role. Senior leaders would do well to take notice of their considerable personal attributes, potential, insight, and influence.

The role of Deans is established and now needs resourcing and recognition. Substantial commonalities in the roles of Deans exist both across schools and within the research literature. Context does make a difference, particularly in terms of school values and kaupapa, autonomy and support in the Dean's role, and the student issues and barriers to engagement on which the Deans focussed. However, given the different characteristics and settings of the three schools in this study, the similarities are decisive. Variations in terms of reported roles and responsibilities between participants, mostly reflect a lack of definition and boundaries of the role. This, like most of my findings on the Deans' role, reflects the findings of three recent theses which focused more precisely on the role of Deans in New Zealand (Fraser, 2014; Joyce, 2013; Murphy, 2011). The cross-school commonality of the pastoral middle leader role calls for a validation of this role in both government documents and educational literature, where currently it hardly exists.

Recommendations

Responsive student care is critical

Students deserve to be better supported. At a school level, this requires pedagogy that is responsive to both cultural and individual needs; and integrated academic and pastoral care from all staff, whereby the development of socially and emotionally competent young people is valued as much as their intellectual development. Teachers must value their role in the relationships and socio-emotional world of a young person which affects their sense of connectedness, school-value, competence, and ultimately the student-environment 'fit', essential for student engagement, and subsequent life success. An academic-pastoral divide does not serve students. Care for the 'whole child' needs to be considered an integral part of being a teacher.

Furthermore, culturally responsive teaching must become a norm in our schools. This should start with integrating te ao Māori (the Māori world) into our knowledge base,

which is both a moral and professional responsibility in respect to the Treaty of Waitangi and the New Zealand Curriculum. It is clear, despite well-intentioned initiatives and Māori concepts scattered through our curriculum, that Euro-centric knowledge, kaupapa, and 'capital' persists at the top of the cultural hierarchy in many schools. This contributes to the disengagement of students, and their whānau, who remain alienated and culturally oppressed. Valuing and esteeming te ao Māori is a step towards bi-culturalism, which is at once a step away from mono-cultural dominance and towards opening the way towards authentic multi-culturalism, and pedagogy that is responsive to *all* our young people.

School leaders must authentically respond to students, whānau and community. Given the evidence for disengaged young people in New Zealand (Wylie et al., 2008), persistent rates of absenteeism (Ministry of Education, 2018), and an achievement gap which exists across schools (May et al., 2016), it is critical our school leaders create an environment with which students and their whānau want to engage.

Deans must be valued and supported

The work of secondary school Deans has vast potential. To achieve this, tangible enablers must be set in place; Deans require time, proper support, development, and resourcing. Deans cannot continue to be "all things to all people". To be effective, the most critical aspects of their role must be prioritised. This means senior leaders need to protect Deans from time-consuming low-level or administrative workloads and act as a buffer so they can best fulfil their core role, just as Deans do for the teachers they support. The relational aspect of the role, and Deans' time and personal investment in this, must be better acknowledged as a primary aspect of their work. It is by knowing the students that enables Deans to respond appropriately, and to coordinate wider support as needed. Given time is deemed the biggest challenge to Deans' effectiveness, greater time allocation for the interpersonal and socio-emotional aspects of pastoral care work is recommended. Deans are special people positioned in a central position of influence and insight; better respect for this along with the development of their capacity through professional learning and support would be highly beneficial.

Considerably more value and attention needs to be given to middle leaders in secondary schools from both senior leaders and the Ministry (Cardno & Bassett, 2015;

Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Louis et al., 2010). Management units need to increase in both number allocated to schools and in monetary terms, so that leadership roles such as Deans are more highly esteemed. This may also decrease the turnover of Deans, and hence increase the highly valued experience and longevity with their cohort. Given the current climate with an unprecedented teacher shortage, and a seemingly more sympathetic, or at least concerned, media and public, the education sector must take up the fight to ensure our young people are taught and cared for by teachers who are able to bring their “best selves” to their roles. Under-valuing educators equates to undervaluing the development of our children.

Policy and action for equity

The government must acknowledge the pervasive influence of a students’ context beyond school. They must enact policy that ensures all young people are equipped and supported with the resources and services needed for them to reach their personal potential. There is no doubt variables external to schools have substantial influence on school outcomes. Even the best teachers cannot teach students who are not present, and it is an enormous task to engage students at secondary school who present with the cumulated effects of poverty, prior academic failure, low self-esteem, deficit theorising, inadequate learning support or ill-health. This research shows educators do help students overcome barriers but that wider influences are persistent. Thrupp (2017) has long criticised this country’s “politics of blame” whereby teaching is over-emphasised as a variable in student outcomes: “One of the most serious shortcomings of the National-led Government has been its enthusiasm for seeing teachers and schools as the problem instead of acknowledging the impact of wider socioeconomic issues” (p.6). Accountability and responsibility lie well beyond the school gate.

An optimistic recommendation would be that our society display their espoused concern for the welfare of our young people through comprehensive resourcing of social, health and educational services. I agree with Haque (2018) that we need sustained, coordinated and comprehensive support for communities and whānau at a governmental level, and – if somewhat tentatively – share his hope that the current government may be more inclined to take action. I also agree that schools can and do make a difference, despite the odds (Haque, 2014). Pedagogy and teachers matter but

they cannot fix wider student issues nor should they have to compensate for an inadequate and inequitable system.

Recommendations for future research

The limited empirical knowledge and recognition of the Dean's role in both literature and government documents indicates a large gap in our understanding of how secondary schools operate and how students are cared for. Further research on this pastoral middle leader role is required. Similar research in different contexts or with a different focus, such as pastoral middle leadership for student wellbeing, would be valuable. Comparative studies of Deans who work in vertical or horizontal pastoral systems, or those who work with different year levels, as well as comparative studies of the two main middle leader roles, curriculum and pastoral, could clarify the similarities and differences in these roles and uncover a need for a range of possible changes and reconsiderations. Studies that incorporate student voice to understand how students experience the work of Deans would offer a different perspective and a broader representation of Deans work. Research into how pastoral care is perceived by teachers and other leaders would also be worthwhile.

This study also calls for more research that portrays the complex reality of educators' work and how this impacts on teaching and learning in secondary schools. Worthy topics would be teacher or middle leader wellbeing, for which there is scarce research, and perceptions of support and value for middle roles. Additionally, longitudinal studies that follow students through school that seek to understand the in-school and beyond-school influences on their engagement could have more focus on how pastoral support systems and leaders mediate. Finally, research on student achievement and 'success' should take a broader view and incorporate the socio-emotional aspects of human development. Engagement research naturally lends itself to such research.

Strengths and limitations

All studies have limitations (Mutch, 2005). The small sample size and qualitative methodology used in this study means the findings cannot be widely generalised. Rather, this study offers theoretical, analytical, or 'naturalistic generalisations' which can be seen as a step towards theory (Stake, 1995). While I see the inclusion of three

quite different school contexts as a strength, the selection process of the participants is a limitation. The Deans volunteered through mutual professional acquaintances and could feasibly represent a group who are most committed to the role - one participant noted she viewed her participation as a professional duty. Equally, given they were interviewed late in term three, which is a busy time in all secondary schools, they may be the Deans who are least overwhelmed by their work. The influence of factors such as these is difficult to assess in a study of this nature.

A further limitation could also be found in the potential for researcher bias in the interpretation of the data, as is possible in thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, this study does, to the best of my knowledge and ability, accurately represent the perceptions and experiences communicated by the six participants. Furthermore, it is hoped the findings are transferable by way of readers finding an element of shared experiences in the descriptions provided (Creswell, 2014).

Finally, the concern for understanding the shortcomings of the school system and the potential for something better, typical of critical theory (Hammond & Wellington, 2013), was applied when discussing the findings and making recommendations in this research. This is a strength in that it uncovers issues and offers suggestions, but I am aware it may also underrepresent the positive work of our schools and wider society. Yet, this study builds on other research and, while offering a unique angle, reflects many other findings in key areas which validate the conclusions and recommendations made.

A reflective poem

Trajectories

*The work is never done
That of 'fixing' kids
They always come with more trouble than -
They're worth it though
See that sullen kid get his first certificate
As fickle as awards can be*

*I see him crossing the street 10 years on
Two kids in tow, a worthy dad
Says he likes his job, trains others now
I smile
Allow myself to believe
I played some small hand
In his
Trajectory*

*The work is never done
Measures are distant and vague
Care is a currency the government can't trade
No one values what they don't know
The cost of your comfort zone
So we live with 'debts' and 'gaps'
Allow our kids to slip through
Their predetermined
Trajectory*

*I see Her on TV
A new hope, says she cares
Red and Green are to fix it all
Society will now strive
To play a hand
In fixing the lives
Of those we espouse to value most -
A child storms out of class
Another sits still, stomach tight
The work is not done*

*Trajectories flow
Whakamana, manaakitanga
are the call!
Yet the workers are done –
Strike through essays, forgetting we care
Hold pickets instead, remember why
we're here!
No one values that they don't know
Break down those barriers
See and believe
Together we can change
Trajectories*

*Look up!
There's work to be done –*

Final conclusion

This research has critically analysed the work of Deans in supporting student engagement and outcomes in secondary schools, using the perspectives of Deans, as pastoral middle leaders, as data. There are complex variables and constructs to consider yet there are some clear findings. Evidently, it is how we as schools, educators and a society choose to respond and minimise barriers to engagement that matters most. Deans, along with other teachers and school leaders, do much good work to support student engagement and success, but they too must be adequately supported to fulfil their potential, and better valued to ensure special people are retained in this role. Moreover, school contexts, home contexts, and culture matter, and every aspect of schooling sits within the wider socio-political context – a fact that cannot be understated. From a critical perspective, I am concerned with how resources and services are used and valued in our democracy, and notably our neo-liberal context. If as a society we value education enough to provide it as a public service, and even a human right, this education has to work for everyone. It concerns me greatly that our current system still serves mostly to reproduce social and cultural capital.

This study is evidence that Deans attempt to ‘build a bridge’ between what is valued at school and what students value, between home and school, between the past experiences students bring with them and a positive school experience, and between a myriad of other barriers and active school engagement. Yet, there is more work to be done. While most young people are engaged at school, there is not enough support for the substantial number of students who are less or disengaged. We know young people need support to develop; we know they need to feel valued and connected; we also know some can have big problems and some can make big mistakes. As a society, we either value the care and resources it takes to respond compassionately and effectively, or we choose to accept that a large proportion of our young people are disengaged from school, and quite possibly follow a concerning trajectory of disengagement from competent and active citizenship.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics approval

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Appendix C: Consent form

Appendix D: Indicative interview questions

Appendix E: Confidentiality Agreement

Appendix A: Ethics approval

4 July 2018

Alison Smith

Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Alison

Re Ethics Application: **18/245 Critical pastoral middle leadership for school engagement.**

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

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 4 July 2021.

Standard Conditions of Approval

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

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

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

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

Yours sincerely,



Kate O'Connor

Executive Manager

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc:



Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:

18 May 2018

Project Title

Critical pastoral middle leadership for student engagement

An invitation

Kia ora, my name is Davina Dean. I would like you to participate in a research study on secondary school Deans. The main research question is: "How do Deans, as academic and pastoral middle leaders, support students' school engagement to improve social and academic outcomes for students?" I have been a high school Dean for 5 years and I know some of the great efforts and challenges my colleagues and I experience. I see this role as critical in schools yet there is very little research on Deans and no known research on this particular topic in New Zealand. With your help, I would like to contribute to that.

What is the purpose of this research?

This research will help develop an understanding of the Deans' role and how student engagement can be improved through pastoral middle leadership. I would like the voices of Deans to be better represented in the literature with the hope of more recognition and understanding of the Deans role and experiences of facilitating better school engagement. This research is also of benefit to me personally as it will help me understand the work of Deans in other schools, assisting my journey as an educational leader. On completion of this thesis I will also fulfil the requirements of the Master of Educational Leadership. The results of this research may also be used for the purpose of professional development, a conference presentation, and published journal article.

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

You have been invited to participate as a member of my existing professional networks, and as having at least one year's experience in the role of Dean, or equivalent role.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If you would like to participate in this research, please email me. I will then reply with an email to arrange a time and place at your convenience. Before the interview, you will have an opportunity to clarify and ask questions. I will then give you a Consent Form for you to sign before the interview begins.

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

What will happen in this research?

You are invited to a confidential 45 to 60 minute face-to-face interview. This will consist of open-ended questions as I invite you to share your thoughts, perceptions, and experiences. The interview will be digitally-recorded and then transcribed by me or an AUT approved transcriber. You will be able to clarify, add or remove any information before data analysis begins. The data will only be used for the purpose of this research, and possible conference presentations and journal article. The results may also be used to help with professional development. At all times, your identity will remain confidential.

What are the discomforts and risks?

It is unlikely there will be any discomfort to you beyond the perhaps unfamiliar experience of being interviewed. Again, while unlikely, you may experience some distress if this interview should bring up the emotions of past experiences in your role. I cannot guarantee anonymity because as the interviewer I will know who you are. I can ensure confidentiality as outlined below; however, there is some possibility that people who know you well may be able to identify you if they also know you took part in the study.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms and only very generic descriptors will be used in the final report. You have the option to review and change your transcript up to a week after you receive it. The intent is for these interviews to be empowering experiences which enable your experience to be voiced. I will listen with compassion and respect in order to make this experience positive.

What are the benefits?

This research will benefit the wider community of current and aspiring educational leaders as it helps to fill a gap in the literature about the nature of a Dean's role, specifically in respect to the critical issue of student engagement. This may contribute to a greater appreciation of the role, more support and more role-specific professional development. It is hoped this will benefit you as a participant by enabling you to voice your experience in the research literature. This study is of personal benefit as I will learn more about how others experience this role in other schools, adding to my professional knowledge. This will also enable me to complete the qualification of Master of Educational Leadership.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your privacy will be protected throughout the research process. Only my academic supervisor and I will have access to your interview. Hard copies, data analysis, and consent forms will be stored for six years at a secure location at AUT and then destroyed. Electronic copies will be stored on my personal password-protected laptop and memory stick and deleted after six years. Your identity and that of your school will not be disclosed in any of the research documents or subsequent publications.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There is no monetary cost to you. The only cost is your time, which I appreciate is valuable. The interview should take 45 minutes to an hour to complete. You may also spend about 30 minutes reading and checking the subsequent transcript.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You have one week to consider this invitation. Please let me know if you accept or decline the offer by the end of the week.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

I can send you a copy of the summary report findings, either electronically or as a hard copy, on request.

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

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Alison Smith, email: [REDACTED] phone: [REDACTED]

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, email: ethics@aut.ac.nz phone: [REDACTED].

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:

Davina Dean, email: [REDACTED]

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Alison Smith, email: [REDACTED]

Ngā mihi

Davina Dean

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 4 July 2018, AUTEK Reference number 18/245.

Appendix C: Consent Form

Project title: Critical pastoral middle leadership for student engagement

Project Supervisor: Alison Smith

Researcher: Davina Dean

-
- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 18 May 2018.
 - ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
 - ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
 - ☐ I understand that my confidentiality will be protected by the researcher. My name and the school will only be recorded, referred to, and reported as a code or pseudonym. These documents, however, may refer to some characteristics of the school or myself that may make me identifiable.
 - ☐ 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):

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Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 4 July 2018, AUTEK Reference number 18/245.

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

Appendix D: Indicative interview questions

Research title:

Critical pastoral middle leadership for student engagement

Research aim:

The aim of this research is to critically examine the ways in which Deans perceive and experience their role in improving school engagement to improve social and academic outcomes for secondary school students.

Indicative interview questions:

- I. What do you see as the most important aspects of your role as a Dean?
- II. What do you understand by the term school engagement; or how would you define it?
- III. How would you describe the school engagement of students at this school?
- IV. What do you think are the main factors that affect student engagement or disengagement with school and school work?
 - a. Can you think of any examples? (Repeated throughout interview as appropriate).
- V. What impact do you think Deans have on the engagement and associated social and academic outcomes for students?
- VI. How do you, as a Dean or as a group of Deans, attempt to improve engagement, when school engagement is lacking?
- VII. How successful are these initiatives or practices?
- VIII. What are the main issues, frustrations, or challenges you face in trying to better engage students with school?
- IX. Is there anything you think could be done to enable you to be more effective in your role?
- X. In general, what do you think could be done better to engage students in school?
- XI. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix E: Confidentiality Agreement

Project title: Critical pastoral middle leadership for student engagement

Project Supervisor: Alison Smith

Researcher: Davina Dean

-
- ☐ I understand that all the material I will be asked to transcribe is confidential.
 - ☐ I understand that the contents of the tapes or recordings can only be discussed with the researchers.
 - ☐ I will not keep any copies of the transcripts nor allow third parties access to them.

Transcriber's signature:

Transcriber's name:

Transcriber's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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Date:

Project Supervisor's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 4 July 2018, AUTECH Reference number 18/245.

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