Researching and evaluating secondary school leadership in New Zealand: The Educational Leadership Practices Survey

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Abstract

This research study investigates the use made of the Educational Leadership Practices Survey (ELP) by a sample of New Zealand secondary schools. The paper presents an overview of selected literature on leadership for learning and distributed leadership principles. The study's methodology and contexts of three case study schools are then outlined, together with findings that reveal variable use of the ELP by school leaders in accordance with each school's priority development needs. The discussion raises implications for leadership practice in regard to student input into decision making; teachers' pastoral/ academic roles; interpretive support for the ELP; and professional learning for the range of school leaders.

Keywords: *Secondary school leadership; leadership evaluation; school improvement*

Introduction

The challenge of evaluating school leadership effectiveness is considerable, particularly in attempting to gauge the extent to which principals are promoting student learning. Often, leadership evaluations have tended to focus on general management knowledge and skills rather than on specific leadership behaviours that bring about school-wide improvements in both teaching and learning. As a consequence, there have emerged various evaluation tools such as the OECD Improving School Leadership toolkit and, in New Zealand, the Educational Leadership Practices Survey (hereafter referred to as ELP).

The ELP was formulated from the combined results of the school leadership Best Evidence Synthesis (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009) and the framework of the Kiwi Leadership for Principals (Ministry of Education, 2008). Wylie, Cosslett and Burgon's (2016) commentary on the quality of New Zealand school leadership indicated that the ELP was intended "to provide both a 'smart tool' for formative use in schools and, by aggregating individual school-level results periodically, to provide national data on the quality of school leadership on the dimensions it covered (Wylie, 2011)", (cited in Wylie et al., 2016, p. 284). These dimensions comprised the following scales to assess educational leadership:

- *Goal Setting*
- *Strategic Resourcing*
- *Curriculum Quality*
- *Quality of Teaching*
- *Promoting and Participating in Teacher Learning and Development*
- *Safe and Orderly Environment*
- *Educationally Powerful Connections with Families, Whānau and Community*
- Māori Success
- Principal Leadership.

The ELP's leadership scale was built on the first seven scales of school leadership. It was found that two additional scale items, Māori Success and Principal Leadership, could be used as separate scales in view of their respective homogeneities (Burgon, Ferral, Hodgen et al., 2011).

The present research study was carried out in 2014 in response to questions raised in the New Zealand literature about the school leadership Best Evidence Synthesis applicability in more complex secondary school contexts (Notman, 2010; Thrupp, 2010; Youngs, 2011) and, subsequently, the capability of the ELP to work effectively in a secondary school environment (Wylie et al., 2016). This paper begins with an overview of the research study's conceptual frameworks, with links to Australasian literature on secondary school leadership and to the ELP survey itself. The study's key research question is then framed, together with the mixed methods approach guiding the investigation. The contexts of the three case study secondary schools are outlined, followed by a report of findings that focus on schools' priority uses of the ELP, and respective opportunities and challenges arising from the ELP's implementation. The paper concludes with a discussion that examines the variable use made of the ELP tool, and implications for secondary leadership practice.

An overview of literature and research

Conceptual frameworks

There are two conceptual frameworks from the international literature that inform this investigation into school leadership: leadership for learning, and the diversity of distributed leadership.

Establishing influential links between educational leadership and student learning outcomes has been something of an "elusive search for an association" (Witziers, Bosker & Kruger, 2003, p. 398). Few studies have targeted secondary school leadership in this area, with a predominance of attention on primary/elementary schools and on joint education sector research. Secondary-focused studies include Dinham's (2005) Australian research described below; Foster and St. Hilaire's (2004) English study of leadership in secondary school improvement; and a range of work in the USA, e.g., Valentine and Prater (2011) and Leithwood's (2016) review of 42 empirical studies of department heads' contributions to secondary school improvement.

There have been expansive, cross-school sector research projects which have reviewed best evidence to support direct and indirect links between student learning and leadership dimensions, e.g., Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009). In the UK, a number of publications have emanated from the most extensive empirical study of primary and secondary school leadership in England (Day et al., 2009; Day et al., 2011). Results suggest that school leaders improve the quality of student learning through their change management and improvement strategies, and also by virtue of who they are – their values, dispositions and personal leadership competencies.

Distributed leadership has also been a recurrent theme in the literature of educational leadership and administration. It should be noted that the concept can assume a number of different terms, ranging from MacBeath et al.'s (2005) 'shared leadership' and 'collaborative leadership' and Youngs' (2014) 'distributed forms of leadership', to Spillane, Camburn and Lewis' (2006) 'parallel leadership'. A useful generic description of distributed leadership is cited in Harris (2005), whereby "a large number of people are involved in the work of others, are trusted with information, are involved in decision making, are exposed to new ideas and are participating in knowledge creation and transfer" (p.165). On the other hand, no one form of distributed leadership is likely to link to improved student outcomes (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010), thus revealing its possible limitation as a general concept (Youngs, 2009, 2014).

Selected Australasian research on secondary school leadership

The distribution of leadership has become an increasing theme in Australian research activity. A major aspect of Dinham's (2005) research focussed on the role of the principal in leading for outstanding

educational outcomes in Year 7-10 in New South Wales government secondary schools. However, the success of distributive leadership principles to include deputy principals, heads of department and teachers would move the author's thinking from the impact of one individual leader to "the importance of delegation, collaboration, trust and empowerment being increasingly recognised" (Dinham, 2005, p. 341).

In a further emphasis on the impact of different levels of leadership in Australian secondary schools, Gurr and Drysdale (2013) concluded a decade-long study of three middle-level leaders in Victorian secondary schools. Findings revealed unrealised potential on the part of middle secondary school leaders, due to factors such as a lack of understanding of the middle leader role by senior personnel; a lack of professional leadership development by individual middle leaders; and underdeveloped levels of professional knowledge and leadership capability.

Similar foci for research investigations have been followed in New Zealand studies, particularly in regard to the function of leadership teams, curriculum leadership and role tensions respectively. Cardno (2002) surveyed team practices among 460 primary and 69 secondary schools and reviewed the leadership practices of one large secondary school's senior management team. Results revealed some tension between a low emphasis on team review and development, and a high demand for internal and external accountability. Curriculum leadership was the topic for Feist's (2008) investigation of six faculty heads in three large New Zealand secondary schools. Findings also suggested bureaucratic pressures at work, to the detriment of curriculum leadership, whereby "the pull of expecting to fulfil an organisational management role may cause a shift in focus away from a faculty head's subject leadership disposition, with reported tensions between competing managerial and professional demands" (Feist, 2008, p. 60).

This theme of New Zealand middle leaders' experience of role tension was replicated in a following study by Fitzgerald (2009). This three-school empirical project indicated that secondary management tasks dominated middle leaders' work, prompting one respondent to comment that "the tyranny of bureaucracy leaves little time for leadership" (Fitzgerald, 2009, p. 51). Similar role tensions were identified in Cranston's (2007) study of senior secondary school leaders in Auckland, and in Slowley's (2009) study of secondary school leadership in New Zealand. Slowley advocated that contextual forces outside the principalship were such that secondary school leadership was not necessarily a cognitively defined process but rather a situationally contingent process. Parsons (2012) also pointed to a need to maintain a balance between managerial imperatives and the impetus for leading learning: "The recurring theme from data obtained is, in a nutshell, that it is not only very difficult to lead learning when the 'business side' is not under control and manageable, but completely energy sapping and soul destroying when it is not" (p. 30). Such role conflicts within the New Zealand secondary education context of self-managing schools are not unique, and are interwoven throughout the international literature, as exemplified by Bennett, Woods, Wise and Newton (2007).

The theme of professional education of school principals has also attracted attention in the New Zealand literature, although instances of specific reference to secondary leaders are only occasional, e.g., Cardno and Fitzgerald's (2005) research of 80 secondary principals and their ability to sustain professional learning following a management development programme. Most examples of research and writing on New Zealand school leadership development comes in the form of cross-sector reports, reviews and programme evaluations. As examples of programme evaluation, Piggot-Irvine and Youngs (2011) evaluated the National Aspiring Principals Pilot (NAPP) programme in five New Zealand regional locations. While feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, the authors did note that primary-sector participants rated course facilitation, online learning and "relevancy of the course for principal development" more positively than their secondary counterparts (p. 13). Similarly, Cardno and Youngs (2013) noted positive respondent feedback in their evaluation of the Experienced Principal Development

Programme, highlighting that development is still an important personal factor for experienced principals, as well as for those who are categorised as aspiring or first-time principals.

Linking literature to the ELP

A key area to emerge from the selected review above revolves around effective leadership in context-specific circumstances. In this case, the contextual focus lies within the under-researched area of secondary school leadership. The need to contextualise leadership strategies and practices is well summarised by Hallinger (2011):

> We need to obtain better information not just about "what works" but "what works" in different settings. This research will require both quantitative and qualitative studies that describe successful leadership practices across different school levels, at different points in the "school improvement journey" and across different cultures. (p. 138)

The ramifications and opportunities for this research project have been drawn from questions raised about the appropriateness of the educational leadership Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) for secondary schools, due to most of the research in the BES being based either in New Zealand primary schools or U.S. elementary schools (Notman, 2010; Youngs, 2011). Thus, there is a need to ascertain whether or not the ELP incorporates sufficient secondary school contextual detail in its design. This direction is supported by Burgon et al. (2011), who recommended to the Ministry of Education the need to explore "the ELP's specific validity in relation to secondary school educational leadership" (p.xvi).

Research design

Aims and questions

A key intent of the ELP is to provide informed understanding of school-specific contexts to principals and other leaders in their schools, particularly in relation to raising student achievement (Burgon et al., 2011). What is unknown, to some extent, is how secondary school leaders are interpreting and applying the results of the ELP in their particular school context. The research reported in this article was guided by the following key research question:

> How have secondary schools utilised the ELP to help inform school planning and development over the last one to four years?

Mixed methods approach

The research study was dual-phased using a mixed methods approach. Base-line data were collected via an on-line questionnaire designed to ascertain to what extent secondary schools applied the ELP to their school planning and utilisation of data, particularly in the areas of the nine ELP scales where secondary schools have tended to score lower than overall national norms. Questionnaire data provides, for the first time, a general picture of the applicability and usefulness of the ELP for a small sample of New Zealand secondary schools. The second phase of secondary school case studies occurred after the base-line data collection phase. From the larger questionnaire sample, three secondary schools from the southern region were purposively selected as case study schools. These case studies reflect individual characteristics and school context, and helped illustrate how each secondary school understood the purpose and the applicability of the ELP.

Quantitative base-line data were collected via an on-line Survey Monkey questionnaire to illustrate how principals utilised the results of the ELP in their school in terms of school planning and staff professional development, particularly in relation to raising student achievement. Qualitative data were collected via open-ended responses from the questionnaire and from the case study schools. In these schools, data were collected through individual principal interviews and focus group interviews with curriculum and pastoral middle leaders.

Data derived from the base-line questionnaire involved uni-variate quantitative analysis along with qualitative analysis of open-ended responses. For Likert-scale related questions, a six-point scale was used with zero corresponding to "disagree" at the left-hand end of the scale and five corresponding to "agree' at the right-hand end. Open coding and subsequent thematic analysis informed the qualitative analysis of individual and focus group interviews. The combination of findings from the base-line questionnaire with findings from each case study provided opportunity for methodological triangulation to inform emerging themes. Generalisation from this study cannot be made to the wider population of all New Zealand secondary schools. However, the case study findings do offer a unique perspective into the leadership and learning context of the respective schools.

Context of case study schools

School A regards itself as a small, family-oriented school. It is a year 7-13 co-educational school situated in a semi-rural area. On account of its size, the school maintains a strong ethic of care, whereby students are supported in their learning, both individually and in small tutorial groups. A searching ERO review some years previously had put the school on a more focused pathway in terms of teaching and learning. Successive principals had made internal structures more democratic with less of a focus on systems and a greater emphasis on people. This is evidenced by shared decision making in staff and Deans' meetings, and by more active participation by head students at school assemblies.

Like many secondary schools in New Zealand, School A developed school-wide initiatives in literacy and numeracy from the impetus provided by the ELP, for example an additional fourth class in mathematics for years 7 and 8 and an additional Board-funded reading programme in years 7-9. Another data-driven outcome from the ELP survey indicated that the senior leadership team played a vital role in the analysis and application of ELP data. For School A, a need was identified for greater transparency from the senior team in the way the school operates. As a result, the senior leadership team now publishes all teacher budget requests and department budgets.

School B is an urban girls' school of approximately 350 students and covers Years 7-13. It has a family-like atmosphere with close support and monitoring in terms of pastoral care. It is a special character school which promotes a traditional focus on academic achievement and aspirational life goals. Respondents indicated that a recent change in principal had produced a "breath of fresh air" to a quite conservative school environment. As a result, staff collaborative relationships have been encouraged through a growing culture of professional learning together.

In School B, use of the ELP had been restricted to the principal's experience of it during the first-time principals' programme. As such, the accrued benefit has been limited to the principal's professional growth and knowledge about her new school: "It highlighted what I didn't know about the school which was a lot. It also highlighted the differences between what the staff knew about the school and what I knew". Having been in her leadership role for six months, she used the ELP for setting personal goals as part of the annual appraisal process. Members of the senior leadership team did note that, since the new principal's arrival, staff were much more aware of goal planning and where the school was heading in the future.

School C is a Year 9-13 co-educational school of 550 students who come from rural and urban catchment areas. It adopts a collegial and democratic approach to its school culture. Respondents noted an enhanced sense of community within the school and a focus on building teacher-student relationships since the arrival of the current principal three years ago. There is a friendly atmosphere in the staffroom which some respondents believe is supported by the principal's non-confrontational style of leadership.

The senior leadership team had undertaken the ELP survey on two occasions: five months after the principal's arrival at the school, and then a year later. Some senior leaders were unsure if the ELP had a strong influence on what were longer-term projects already happening within the school e.g., restorative practice and teacher effectiveness training, a behaviour management programme, and He Kakano, a school-based professional development programme

to ensure Māori learners' educational success. The ELP did prove useful for staff in providing leadership data to be considered in a transparent way. For example, the topic of staff morale was identified as a factor to be addressed. One leader commented on the ELP's impact: "That's probably been beneficial, even just as a reflection tool for staff".

Research findings

Demographics

The questionnaire was completed by 22 principals. They and their schools demonstrated the characteristics presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Demographics of principals and schools

Gender	Female	6
	Male	16
Number of years employed in secondary schools	Less than 10 years	4
	10-19 years	5
	20-29 years	6
	30-39 years	6
	40 years or more	1
School decile rating	1 or 2	1
	3 or 4	3
	5 or 6	13
	7 or 8	5
	9 or 10	0
Type of school	Composite	7
	Secondary	15
School roll	Less than 851	16
	851 to 1200	3
	1201 or more	3
Percentage of Māori students	Under 8%	0
	8% to 15%	6
	16% to 30%	3
In which leadership development programme did you and your staff complete the ELP?	First time principals	15
	Experienced Principals' Pilot	7
In which year were ELP results received?	2010	5
	2011	7
	2012	12
	2013	5

Principal responses and school priorities

The secondary principals generally viewed the ELP as a tool to develop: the senior leadership team (12 responses); leadership development across the school (11); their own leader development (10); and as a tool to inform school planning (8). There were two instances when the ELP evoked critical self-reflection, once in the questionnaire where the principal only realised the wider scope of the ELP while completing the questionnaire, and in one of the case study schools where the principal had used the ELP to help understand their new school context. Principals were also asked to specifically identify and rate areas using the Likert scale where the ELP had contributed to their school improvement. These areas were aligned to the areas used in the ELP tool and the results from our questionnaire, as shown in Table 2, identify lower ratings similar to those evident when school results are pooled nationally (see Burgon et al., 2011).

Table 2: ELP results and their contribution to areas of school improvement

Statement	Mean
Developing new school-wide initiatives aimed at improving student achievement	3.44
Less reliance on applying quick-fix and non-sustaining solutions	3.26
Confirming the effectiveness of existing school-wide initiatives aimed at improving student outcomes	3.00
Improved embedding of school goals for ongoing use and evaluation	3.00
More time spent by senior and middle leaders focused on pedagogical leadership	3.00
Senior and middle leaders more directly involved in teacher learning and development	2.94
Collecting and analysis of student views on feedback to teachers	2.37
Improved outcomes for our Māori students	2.16
Collecting and analysis of student views in relation to school safety	1.89
Improved outcomes for our Special Needs students	1.84
Improved outcomes for our Pasifika students	1.65

Associated written responses from principals revealed the idiosyncratic nature of how the ELP can provide triggers for focused development. Written responses from six principals provided further specifics of their school's foci for development and all six were significantly different. These contextual differences were also evident in the three case study schools where one school used the ELP as impetus to multiple areas of development and review, another where it was restricted to a new principal's development around strategic planning and understanding the school's socio-cultural context, and the other where it was used as a continual reflective tool for all staff to consider future directions. The application of the ELP survey appears to be eclectic and somewhat determined by the context of the school at the time of administering it. Despite this, other data from written questionnaire responses when grouped together reveal that, in some schools, the ELP can also contribute to:

- A greater degree of coherence with school development;
- Checking alignment between ELP data and school strategic priorities;
- Reviewing how a leadership culture is developing; and
- Helping identify staff areas of need.

Conversely, there was some evidence to suggest that the drop-off in staff response rates after the second year of administering the tool could render some results as less reliable. Thus, it is possible to consider that the ELP may have a limited time period of usefulness, and this is an area which requires further research investigation.

Dissemination and discussion of ELP results

Principals were asked in the questionnaire to what extent their school's ELP results were discussed across the school. The most common group were the Senior Leadership Team (18 responses); Board of Trustees (15); most teaching staff (11); curriculum middle leaders (9), pastoral middle leaders (8); and student groups (2). This indicates how ELP results tended to stay in the realm of senior leadership and governance groups with some trickle-down to middle leaders and teachers. The low numbers engaging directly with students reveals the dissemination and discussion of ELP results tend to be adult-centric and exclusive of the largest group who make up the within-school community. This, however, does not imply these schools are not student-centred but perhaps is an indication the ELP is only given to adults to complete.

Two of the three case studies revealed a theme of transparency where all ELP results were made available to staff. This was particularly evident as well in the questionnaire data, especially within Senior Leadership Teams. Some of these teams appreciated the clarity and reassurance the ELP results provided in relation to their school priorities; this was particularly the case where the questionnaire had been completed by a principal who participated in the pilot Experienced Principal Development Programme rather than the First-time Principals programme. On the other hand, several principals perceived the ELP did not help their Senior Leadership Team because the results were not enacted, were too broad or deemed to be of little use. Even though the ELP is explicit in stating school leadership does not solely equate to principal leadership, the principal of School B explained that differentiation within the ELP would help bring further alignment to secondary school leadership contexts by distinguishing even more between senior and middle leadership, curriculum leadership and pastoral care leadership roles. This would allow greater specificity of feedback about individual leadership components operating within the school.

Opportunities and challenges arising for secondary schools

Principals were asked to identify barriers that prevented the ELP results being applied in a way they had hoped, as well as identifying any areas not covered in the ELP they believed should be there. The most common response in terms of barriers was sufficient time to follow through on the ELP results, due to a reluctance to add more work related to initiatives to staff who were already busy. One principal responded: "It was not prudent to attack all of these [areas of development] at once," while another stated: "Sometimes we just run out of time and personnel to carry out tasks that we would like to do". For other principals, they pinpointed how externally mandated change can "interrupt the good work we were doing".

The findings from the questionnaire and case study schools highlighted four areas for further consideration, either directly within the context of the ELP tool or indirectly in its administration and follow through. First, principals identified a mismatch between the intention of the ELP tool to include statements about student voice and well-being and then excluding them from the ELP sample. They appeared reluctant to rely solely on what adults perceived of students and recognised the need for direct student voice in areas of school development.

Second, this concern around student-centredness was also reflected in comments related to pastoral care. Two of the three case study schools had mentoring systems in place, where teachers were explicitly relying on student voice. In the case of School A, the Assistant Principal interviews each student in Year 11-13 classes to link possible career pathways with appropriate subject choices. Form teachers, Deans and the leadership team have identified that some senior students are drifting and need life direction. In order to address this pastoral situation, the school instigated a mentoring system for groups of six senior students that emphasise goal setting and goal achievement throughout the year.

Data from these case studies and the questionnaire emphasised how principals and schools tended to see pastoral care as not independent of learning, with the result that any depersonalisation of achievement data would be minimised. In summary, there was a perception the ELP tool could reflect even more integration and profiling of pastoral care with student learning. As well as having a greater focus on including actual student voice, there were suggestions by principals to include community voice as well. It may be challenging to include such a wide range of participants in a tool such as the ELP, but this nevertheless reveals how some schools are looking to critical input beyond their staff.

A third area for schools to consider was in the area of interpretive support with understanding ELP results. Across the three case study schools, this was explicitly mentioned in 15 of the 16 individual and focus group interviews. In particular, schools believed the opportunity to have an external advisor helps mediate the interpretation of results, brings a degree of objectivity, and helps prevent convenient avoidance where data results simply cannot be ignored. One of School C's leaders acknowledged the isolating role of leadership and the need to link with the objectivity of others external to the school: "I think sometimes you do just need someone to say 'How do I deal with this?' in a way that you can get some honest advice that's impartial".

The fourth consideration is one of context, where it is crucial the ELP is not used as a one-size-fits-all, blunt instrument. Concern was expressed about the overuse of the ELP survey tool. In one case, there was a significant drop-off in staff completion rates when the survey reached its third iteration. Care also needs to be taken when the ELP is applied in a very small school. One principal commented that the demographics of a very small school made the results less reliable and realised "having a couple more staff [complete the ELP] could have shifted that dramatically". The timing of the ELP was also a consideration for principals. Some principals who were administering the ELP in their new schools because they were part of the First-time Principals' Programme gave the impression the survey could have been administered too early, due to not being in the school long enough to understand and connect with the socio-cultural context of the staff. Finally, as stated earlier, there was a general concern across a number of principals that there was too little time to follow through on all ELP findings, thus raising the importance again of understanding the context of the school in terms of priorities and areas of greatest development need.

Discussion

This research study has reported findings of a small-scale investigation about how a sample of New Zealand secondary schools have engaged with the ELP to help inform school planning and development. Those findings will now be discussed in relation to the variable use made of the ELP tool, and in regard to implications for secondary leadership practice, all of which will be located within the extant literature.

The research findings were notable for their exposure of schools' flexible use of the ELP survey, according to particular leadership development needs at the time. These needs focused variously around the principal's own professional development, that of the senior leadership team, school-wide leadership development, and as a tool to help inform school curriculum and strategic planning. For Schools A and C, the ELP also served as an ignition point for staff to instigate mentorship for student learning. This varied use of a leadership evaluation tool reinforces the important concept of contextually responsive leadership, whereby school leaders are 'contextually literate' through their capacity to understand, and respond to, challenges presented to them by the environment in which they work. This is aptly demonstrated by School B's principal who identified that different contexts of leadership within her school (senior/middle/curriculum/pastoral) would require some differentiation in the ELP format. The mediation of variable contextual influences is a pivotal leadership skill that underpins school improvement (Notman, 2015) and underlines the importance of school leaders being sensitive to their context of work. This relies on each school leader's ability "to read the complexities of their context, especially the people, the problems and issues, as well as the culture of the school and the community in which it is located" (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2016, p. 200).

In terms of implications for secondary school leadership practice, the study's findings point to four areas for further interrogation and research. First, to what extent might student input into the ELP survey assist the veracity of feedback and the development of subsequent educational leadership strategies? Bolstad and Gilbert (2012) support the concept of increased student inclusivity and responsibility for future-oriented teaching and learning, but acknowledge the lack of clarity of such engagement:

> One reason may be simply that, traditionally, students', parents' and communities' needs and views have not been central to professional discourses about curriculum and teaching, and so the question of how to incorporate these into shaping teaching and curriculum is genuinely challenging for people on both sides of the school walls. (p. 29)

In this regard, there is an evident need to move beyond the 'surface' involvement of secondary students in their opportunities to lead (e.g co-curricular activities, membership of a student council or Board of Trustees) to 'deep-level' involvement of leadership contribution rather than mere participation. Bolstad and Gilbert (2012) contend that the challenge is not about student-centredness but thinking about how teachers and learners might work together in a "knowledge-building" learning environment:

> This is not about teachers ceding all the power and responsibility to students, or students and teachers being "equal" as learners. Rather, it is about structuring roles and relationships in ways that draw on the strengths and knowledge of each in order to best support learning. (p. 43)

A second question is offered for consideration: Can teachers' pastoral care and academic support for students now be viewed as a duality rather than discrete modes of operation? The evidence from this study's findings would support the increasingly interwoven nature of the two student-oriented tasks. Youngs (2014) notes that a review of recent national Education Review Office reports (2014a, 2014b), related to New Zealand secondary schools, reveals two key factors' contribution to achievement improvement: "The first identifies a school-wide approach that cohesively integrates curriculum, pastoral and careers systems and staff, and the second identifies individualised responses to students based on their individual needs and aspirations" (p. 91).

A third question is put forward: Do secondary schools need interpretive support from an external agent or facilitator to assist with ELP data analysis and subsequent pathways to implementation? Study findings would indicate that there is a groundswell of support for this external leadership role to increase the effective follow through of any subsequent change management processes. The concepts of an external agent or facilitator or 'critical friend' are well-canvassed notions in the literature, particularly in relation to principal development, in support of principals' critical reflection of leadership theory and practice, and identification of personal and professional development needs (Robertson, 2005; Notman, 2008).

The fourth question area centres on implications for professional development of school leaders in the broadest sense. Given the findings that highlight the part now played by middle and teacher leaders in their combined pastoral/academic roles, what professional learning do they need to perform their myriad roles effectively? Cardno and Bassett (2015) contend that there is a paucity of leadership development that specifically targets middle-level leadership in New Zealand secondary schools: "In fact, there is evidence that middle-level leaders are currently experiencing role expansion that has been bequeathed to them from leaders in the tier above without recognition of the associated challenges" (p. 30). In addition, the focus also turns to the ongoing professional learning of secondary principals, as they confront the need for increased distributed leadership practice within their schools, and also external challenges now posed by system and network leadership required to support localised Communities of Learning (COLs). In such circumstances, the complexities of leadership in multiple contexts at multiple levels justify calls in the literature to emphasise professional learning over professional development (Parsons & Beauchamp, 2012; Timperley, 2011).

Timperley (2011) recommends that a clear distinction be made between higher order professional learning and lower order professional development. Her argument is germane to the circumstances above, where an increased depth of professional knowledge "may challenge existing beliefs, attitudes and understandings" (p. 4).

Conclusion

Universal trends towards greater participation in education and the advent of self-managing schools in New Zealand have brought about increased demands for the democratisation of leadership in the form of distributed leadership and shared decision making among staff; a greater impact of student voice in school life; and gaining community support for the school's philosophy and direction setting. These change processes have been reflected in this study's research findings about secondary schools' implementation of the ELP survey. These findings have signalled to policy makers and educational leadership providers that multiple layers of leadership responsibility and skills are required on the part of principals, senior leadership teams, curriculum leaders, pastoral leaders and students to bring about effective responses to valuable data supplied by the ELP. This, in turn, demands alternative ways of strategising and supporting new professional learning activity across these diverse leadership groups.

Acknowledgements

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