

**DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP AND ITS IMPACT ON
TEACHING AND LEARNING**

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Summary

Distributed leadership has been the subject of considerable educational research and discourse in recent years. This thesis explores how it is understood in the Irish post primary school context, with particular reference to its impact on teaching and learning. A study of distributed leadership is particularly timely, as a number of international studies have highlighted the need for leadership to be distributed throughout the organisation with a view to improving student outcomes.

Following a preliminary study in one school, the research focused on a study of three schools. As the issues emerged, it became evident that by moving beyond case study to cross-school participation there would be a richer dialogue, participants would learn from each other and impetus would be created for further action. Therefore, three different cross-school focus group discussions were held: one with principals and deputy principals, one with teachers holding posts of responsibility and one with teachers not holding posts of responsibility.

Although holding very different positions of leadership in their schools, principals, deputy principals and teachers shared a common understanding of distributed leadership. The term was understood to incorporate four dimensions: leadership roles (which may be formal or informal), individual traits (particularly those related to influencing others), having a sense of belonging to the school organisation and supporting the development of leadership capacity in individuals.

While this study revealed that in general, teachers in each of the three schools perceive distributed leadership to be necessary and positive, this is not always matched by their experience of leadership practices.

Principals acknowledged their role in leading learning and in developing leadership capacity among teachers. They highlighted two key areas: a more intentional focus on

teaching and learning within the post of responsibility and subject department structures; and the development of individual leadership skills and talents among teachers. These provide opportunities for the exercise of leadership in informal as well as formal roles and actions.

Participation in this study was part of a journey of leadership development in each school and is a stepping stone to further action. This research points to the usefulness of distributed leadership as a lens to analyse teaching and learning and presents hypotheses on leadership practices that could form the basis for empirical research.

Chapter One

Distributed Leadership and its Impact on Teaching and Learning in Post-primary Schools

1.0 Introduction

This introductory chapter outlines the aim of the thesis and explains the author's perspective on the research. It places the research topic in the context of the current situation in post-primary schools in Ireland and outlines some of the reasons why the research is relevant at this time.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the concept of distributed leadership and the influence and impact leadership practices have on teaching and learning. In researching these questions with teachers, deputy principals and principals the thesis aims to support schools in becoming more aware of their own leadership perceptions and practices, with particular reference to the possibilities offered by distributed leadership to positively influence teaching and learning. The outcome of the thesis will hopefully provide useful insights to advance leadership practices in Irish post-primary settings. The study is set within three post-primary schools, specifically chosen because of their previous engagement with professional development for school leadership. While this is not a large enough sample to be a representative one in a scientific sense, it is considered that many of the issues explored in depth are typical of the three kinds of school.

“I'm not a leader, I'm just a teacher”.

This comment was made by a teacher to the author on the first day of a professional development programme for middle leaders of post-primary schools in Ireland. While many teachers would not agree with this statement, it captured the imagination of the author and prompted questions about the work she was involved in: leadership development for schools (see Appendix 1). In similar professional development work with principals and deputy principals the basic assumption that they were in leadership roles was not questioned. However, when the programme was extended to teachers, it was evident that not all teachers saw themselves as leaders, even if they held designated posts of

responsibility in their schools (See Appendix 2 for description of the Post of Responsibility structure in Irish Post Primary schools). This prompted the author to explore the idea of leadership as it is distributed throughout the school. As the programme in which the teacher quoted above was participating had the express intention of helping participants to develop their leadership, it was important that they would acknowledge their potential for leadership. What became apparent was that, although many teachers engage in significant leadership activities, leadership rarely featured in their educational discourse, thus leading to lack of clarity about what it means to be a teacher and a leader, when not holding the position of principal or deputy principal.

The approach taken by the author is based on the assumption that a teacher's leadership role begins in the classroom with the influence they have on their students but extends beyond the classroom to working collaboratively with colleagues. The thesis, therefore, examines the issues related to the teacher as learner, professional development among teachers, and the extent to which teachers engage in dialogue with colleagues, introducing and sharing new ideas and working as part of a team. Looking beyond the individual classroom, a teacher's leadership role may extend to their contribution to the school climate and culture. Leadership at this level may be 'positional' or not; teachers may hold a post of responsibility or an agreed position outside the post structure, e.g. subject co-ordinator. On the other hand, they may hold no formal position but may be influential with their colleagues. Leadership at this level, being located close to the site of student learning, may have a significant and direct influence on teaching and on the general learning environment.

Distributed leadership has been interpreted in many different ways, but incorporates many of the concepts outlined above such as teachers as learners, influence over colleagues and contribution to school climate and culture whether or not in formal positions of leadership. Chapter Two analyses and critiques the literature on distributed leadership and includes a definition of it that is used for this thesis.

1.1 Research Questions

The first research question of this thesis will address principals', deputy principals' and teachers' understanding of distributed leadership and compare this with the definition arising later from the literature review. That first question is:

1. *How do teachers and principals understand the concept of distributed leadership?*

If the key features of distributed leadership are seen to contribute positively to the school, then how are these features encouraged and supported and how is leadership capacity developed throughout the school? Believing that the moral purpose of school leadership is leading learning, the focus of the thesis is on leadership activities that enhance learning. If one accepts the evidence from the literature that effective schools have a collaborative culture, encourage the development of team work and develop leadership throughout the school (Mulford et al 2003, Grant 2006, Muijs and Harris 2007), then one sees the teacher as a central link in the process of leading learning, not just in their own classroom but also among their colleagues. This leads to the second question being asked in this research:

2. *How does the concept of distributed leadership, as understood by the teachers, principals and deputy principals, link to teaching and learning?*

A further reason for carrying out this research arose from concerns expressed by many principals that they were finding it difficult and challenging to be educational leaders. Their time seemed to be dominated by issues of an administrative or managerial nature, necessitated by the current culture of compliance and accountability. While the principals' influence on student learning may be indirect, nonetheless the literature shows that their influence on the learning environment is significant (Southworth et al 2004). In particular, their work with (and through) the teachers can have considerable implications for student learning. This includes delegation, distributed and shared leadership. Different leadership practices will impact in different ways. The principal and/or deputy principal may set up structures that enable teachers to work together. Through the vision and values articulated

by the principal and deputy principal, teachers may be encouraged and empowered to be innovative and creative and to work collaboratively with colleagues, parents and other members of the school community. On the other hand, if there is no shared vision or no support from principal/deputy for innovation or teamwork, then the potential for the development of leadership throughout the organisation is likely to be diminished. This leads to the third question to be addressed in this thesis:

3. *To what extent do the principal's / deputy principal's own leadership practices enhance teaching and learning in the school? Do these practices include distributing leadership?*

1.2 Contextual Factors

A study of distributed leadership is particularly timely, as a number of Irish and international studies have highlighted the need for leadership to be distributed throughout the organisation and the possible advantages in terms of school improvement and enhanced learning. (NCSL 2004, LDS 2007, OECD 2008, Mulford 2008). The contextual factors in Ireland, outlined below, currently impinge on schools and support the idea that leadership should not reside solely with the principal but should be spread across the school as an organisation. The concept of distributed leadership as an appropriate response is explored in this thesis.

“Improving School Leadership” - OECD 2008

The OECD report *Improving School Leadership: Policy and Practice* (OECD 2008), and the Irish Country Background Report *Improving School Leadership* (LDS 2007), recognise the complexity of schools today and recommends the distribution of leadership roles and responsibilities in order to improve and enhance teaching and learning and to relieve the burden of work on principals. It supports the development of positional leadership such as middle management for a number of reasons:-

Middle management, embodied in both formal and informal roles and teams, seems to hold much promise for relieving senior management burden and capitalising on a wider range of expertise closer to the locus of its application. (OECD 2008a)

This thesis examines closely the role played by middle management. In the Irish context, the formal roles are taken to mean the post-holders, both assistant principals and special duties teachers. Informal middle management roles are interpreted as subject department co-ordinators working with their subject teams.

The OECD report (2008) suggests that if principals can recognise and capitalise on the expertise that teachers have, there is potential for improvement in teaching and learning. By developing their leadership capacity, teachers can influence each other to explore new and improved pedagogical practices. It is therefore necessary to see post-holders and subject department co-ordinators as leaders of learning in the school. This concept will be explored in this thesis.

Throughout the OECD report the educational leadership role of the principal is emphasised but there is also recognition that the wide-ranging demands placed on principals prevent them from giving sufficient time and attention to their educational role. What are the educational leadership practices that best serve teaching and learning? Among them may be the development of middle management with a view to a 'layered approach' to influencing improvement within classrooms. As mentioned above, this thesis explores the practices of the principal and deputy with reference to their influence on teaching and learning. This includes an analysis of the leadership roles associated with the posts of responsibility structure and the nature of the engagement of the principal and deputy with the post-holders.

Changing Nature of Trusteeship

Since the Education Act (1998), the governance and management of Irish post-primary schools has been changing. All schools are now required to have a board of management. The role of the patron / trustees has also been defined in the Education Act (1998). The voluntary secondary sector, representing 400 out of the 735 post-primary schools, is currently undergoing significant changes related to school ownership and governance. These schools have traditionally been owned, governed and managed by religious

congregations or diocesan bodies. Until the nineteen eighties, the principals of these schools were generally members of their respective religious congregations or dioceses and were supported in their work by the congregation. The introduction of *The Articles of Management* (AMCSS 1989) was one of the first signs of the changing nature of the leadership of these schools and set out the blueprint for their management by lay people. While the continuation of the ethos is being ensured through the setting up of new trust bodies, the schools will not have the same level of support from the congregations for work such as building and maintenance that many schools have enjoyed in the past. This is likely to impinge on the educational leadership role of the principal.

The Teaching Council: Codes of Professional Practice and Behaviour

The code of professional conduct for teachers, as set out by the Teaching Council of Ireland (www.teachingcouncil.ie 2007), promotes a professional approach to teaching that acknowledges the educational leadership role played by all teachers. It clearly states that their role extends beyond their own classroom to working collaboratively with colleagues, management, parents and external agencies to contribute towards a high quality education system. The code also suggests that change will be required within some classrooms, which involves leadership on the part of teachers, principals and deputy principals.

The Teaching Council Acts (2001 and 2006) were a significant development in the professionalisation of teaching in Ireland. Under the terms of these Acts, the Teaching Council was set up “to establish, publish, review and maintain codes of professional conduct for teachers which shall include standards of teaching, knowledge, skill and competence” (Section 6(b)(ii) TC Act 2001). The Council is a statutory body which is based on a partnership model of self-regulation (*Codes of Professional Conduct for Teachers* 2007 p.7). The Council includes among its core values the quality of education, collegiality, collaboration and cooperation.

It is noteworthy that the Codes of Professional Conduct for Teachers (2007) document explicitly states that

Teachers work in collegiality with colleagues in the interests of sharing, promoting, developing and supporting best professional practice

Teachers work collaboratively with students, parents, school management, teacher educators and other professionals in developing shared goals towards the achievement of high quality education for all.

Teachers engage in a professional manner with the wider community including the partners in education, co-professional and related educational bodies and agencies, as appropriate, for the benefit of students. (ibid p.19)

These guidelines represent significant changes in practices for some teachers. For example, they explicitly state (ibid p.27) that teachers establish classroom management strategies that support differentiated learning in a way that respects the dignity of all students. Change needs to be supported. New skills are invariably required in this event and the acknowledgement that teachers can share expertise provides the potential for developing leadership among teachers in the school.

Irish Education Policy

Many policy documents issuing from the Department of Education and Science (DES) in recent years advocate a ‘whole school approach’¹. This term, as used in DES documents, refers to the involvement of all members of staff, parents, board of management and other partners, as appropriate, in the organisation of the school. It suggests a collaborative approach: teachers being more aware of, and involved in, issues that affect the quality of educational provision in the whole school, not just in their own individual classrooms. It implies that teachers, parents and others are involved in team-work and decision-making. This type of collaboration requires leadership, whether this is formal or informal. It is unlikely that one person can provide all the leadership required in this context - a form of leadership that is distributed throughout the school is more likely to be effective.

¹ Examples include Transition Year Guidelines (DES 1995), Looking at our Schools: A Guide to Self Evaluation for Post Primary Schools (DES 2003), A Guide to WSE (DES 2006) and Inclusion of Students with Special educational Needs: Post Primary Guidelines (DES 2007).

This has major implications for the leadership roles and practices of the principal and deputy principal: their approach to decision-making and how they involve others in this. It also has implications for the structures and organisation of the school, for example, allocation of formal leadership responsibilities and providing opportunities for teachers to work together.

Examples of the ‘whole-school approach’ can be found in the DES documents on whole-school evaluation (WSE). WSE has recently been introduced to post-primary schools in a formal, structured fashion. It is a process of external evaluation by DES inspectors of the work of schools. The process is designed ‘to monitor and assess the quality, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the education system provided in the state...’ (Education Act 1998 section 7 (2)(b)). ‘Whole school evaluation is a collaborative process involving the teaching staff, the management of the school, parents and students’ (*A Guide to WSE*, DES 2006).

Although the term ‘leadership’ is not specifically mentioned in the published guide to whole-school evaluation (DES 2006) or in the framework document for WSE, *Looking at Our Schools* (DES 2003), the implications for educational leadership within schools are significant. For example, one of the areas of evaluation is “the quality of curriculum provision and the quality of learning and teaching in subjects”. The guidelines advocate a partnership approach and clearly outline the “influence and involvement of parents, teachers and students themselves as a factor in determining the needs and interests of students” (DES 2003 p.17). Interdisciplinary project work (ibid p.19) and evidence of cross curricular planning and integration (ibid p.25) reflect the need for teachers to work together. This partnership approach implies extending their level of involvement beyond their own classroom to working with colleagues and parents to cater for the overall needs of students. Thus, a whole-school approach is being fostered in the expectation that this will improve the quality of educational provision. Such co-operative work practices require new and developmental forms of leadership.

Another example of the whole-school approach is outlined in the *Looking At Our Schools* document (DES 2003), “support for students”, section. The indicators imply collaboration:

the extent to which the school provides and supports an integrated whole school approach between areas of guidance, social, personal and health education, links with home, school and community, and pastoral care (DES 2003 LAOS p.37).

Collaboration will not happen without some form of leadership.

A further example of the DES expectation, as expressed in the WSE documentation, which has implications for leadership can be seen in the two quotations below:

the extent to which in-school management involves staff in decision-making, through delegation of responsibility where appropriate

the extent to which in-school management actively fosters a partnership approach with staff in agreeing on and achieving the aims of the school (DES 2003 LAOS p.8).

Both of these references highlight the significant role played by teachers in leadership and decision-making. It is interesting to note that frequent reference is made to the ‘in-school management team’ and there seems to be an assumption that such a team exists and that it is a decision-making team. However, it is not clear what is understood by ‘in-school management’ in this document – it may mean the principal, deputy principal and the teachers holding posts of responsibility. This study includes an examination of the leadership role that post-holders play.

In 2007, the Inspectorate of the DES published *Post-primary Guidelines for the Inclusion of Students with Special Needs*. In this publication, the ‘whole-school approach’ is clearly emphasised: “within the framework of a whole-school approach to inclusion, mainstream teachers have the principal responsibility for teaching all students” and “the principal has the overall responsibility for the development and implementation of inclusive school policies and procedures in relation to the education of students with special needs” (DES 2007 p. 64). A ‘whole school approach’ to inclusion requires an amount of collaboration and teamwork. It also provides opportunities for teachers to play significant leadership roles.

A further example of the ‘whole school approach’ can be found in *Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act (1998)*, relating to students’ access to appropriate Guidance; “the development and implementation of the school’s guidance plan is a whole school responsibility” (DES Inspectorate 2005, p.8).

The examples above illustrate the expectation by the DES that the school community, i.e. students, teachers and parents, work together to improve the education provision for all students. The level of teamwork and collaboration required to meet these expectations is significant and the structures and culture of the school will have a significant impact on the success of this work. In this context, it is appropriate to study the distribution of leadership throughout the school and the scope for developing leadership capacity as teachers are given responsibility, decision-making power and a leadership role to address the issues outlined above.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This thesis sets out to explore the understanding of distributed leadership in three schools and the connection between it and improving teaching and learning. Given the current recognition of the complexity of school and the acknowledgement that leadership is required from more than one person, the questions for exploration, as outlined above, focus on perceptions of distributed leadership and how that can impact teaching and learning in schools.

Within the first question, what do the research participants understand by distributed leadership?, a number of ‘themes’ will be examined; for example, middle management / posts of responsibility positions, and the need for teachers to work together to take responsibility for the school as a whole, not just teaching in their individual classrooms. Many of these themes are set out as expectations of a statutory or quasi statutory nature through the Teaching Council Act or DES Guidelines. But how are these expectations met? This thesis contends that they cannot be met within a traditional autocratic form of leadership. They require that leadership be distributed throughout the school and that the professional contribution of each teacher be recognised. They also require a particular

school culture that provides an atmosphere where teachers are empowered to make meaningful contributions to the school as a whole. This incorporates the concept of working together to create a positive learning environment across the whole school, not just in their own individual classroom.

Leadership is required to enable teachers to work together, become involved in whole-school issues and take responsibilities beyond their classroom. But where does this leadership come from? The OECD (2008) highlights the need for more middle management, but that is not sufficient for a school to operate in the ways suggested above. The prevailing culture in a school has a very powerful influence on the educational experience of the students, hence the importance of distributing leadership throughout the school.

Many of the concepts or themes outlined above, e.g. collaboration, collegiality, working together etc. are addressed in the literature on distributed leadership. Chapter Two explores and critiques this literature. In particular, the work of Spillane and Duignan is examined, distributed leadership concepts are linked to teaching and learning, and the educational leadership role of the principal is outlined. Key features are identified and used to form an understanding of distributed leadership for this thesis.

The research is carried out in three post-primary schools with teachers, deputy principals and principals. Preliminary research was carried out in a different school to clarify the research questions. Chapter Three outlines the research methodology used and the reasons for choosing that methodology.

Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven present the data gathered, with commentary and analysis. Chapter Four outlines a profile of each of the three schools and discusses and analyses the findings from the teachers' questionnaires, school by school. This is a case study of the teachers' understanding of leadership and leadership practices in each school.

Chapter Five presents the aggregated questionnaire responses along with the findings from the focus group discussions which further explored participants' understanding of

distributed leadership. This chapter includes not only teachers' perceptions, but also those of the principals and deputy principals. It also analyses the leadership role of post-holders and the implications for developing leadership capacity in the schools.

Chapter Six examines the data linking distributed leadership to teaching and learning and Chapter Seven outlines and examines the principals' and deputy principals' perspectives on their educational leadership role in a distributed leadership context.

The concluding chapter, Chapter Eight, synthesises the data, refers to relevant literature and presents overall conclusions from the research. Recommendations for further research or action are also provided.

1.4 Expected outcomes of the thesis

By working with a small number of schools, one of the expected outcomes of this thesis is that attitudes and practices associated with well-informed educational leadership might be promoted more widely in schools, with beneficial consequences for the quality of teaching and learning.

This research work presents an articulation of distributed leadership as represented in the literature and understood by teachers – to the benefit of policy-makers, professional development providers and practitioners.

Chapter Two

An Exploration of Distributed Leadership: Literature Review.

2.0 Introduction

Research in the UK and the USA shows that leadership is one of the most important factors in making a school successful (OECD 2008, Harris 2004, Leithwood and Riehl 2003, NAHT 2000, King et al 1996). In the USA the research concluded that leadership has a significant effect on student learning, second only to the effects of the quality of the curriculum and teaching (Leithwood and Riehl 2003). In the UK, research also supports the importance of leadership: where leadership is weak it is more difficult for a teacher to do a good job.

Where it is effective ... staff and pupils are better motivated, people know what is going on because communications are clear and frequent, and everyone feels they are pulling together and working towards shared goals (Day, Sammons et al 2007).

But leadership is a very broad concept. Distributed leadership is one form of leadership that is prominent in the current educational discourse. This thesis sets out to explore the idea of distributed leadership as a means of enhancing teaching and learning.

This chapter will explore and critique the concept of distributed leadership as presented in the literature. This exploration has both an analytic and a normative purpose, neither of which can be treated in isolation of the other, since education itself is a normative practice from the start. (Peters, 1966, 25; Dewey 1938, 25-31). In section 2.1 distinctive features of the approaches of two prominent researchers on educational leadership, James Spillane and Patrick Duignan, will be explored and compared. This section will conclude by outlining the key features of distributed leadership and defining a concept of distributed leadership that will be used for this thesis.

The second section, 2.2, will outline the connection between distributed leadership and the quality of teaching and learning. Concepts such as teacher leaders, collaborative work

practices, teamwork, learning communities and organisational learning have all been linked to distributed leadership. This section will examine these concepts with a view to providing some insights on how teachers might work together to enhance teaching and learning.

The third section, 2.3, will examine the connection between distributed leadership and the principal's role in leading learning. What insights does the literature provide on the actions, interactions or practices of the principal that contribute to the learning environment in the school? The principal's role in leading learning may be direct or indirect and by developing leadership throughout the school principals can strengthen their influence, albeit indirectly, on student learning.

Drawing on the insights from research literature reviewed in the body of the chapter, the conclusion will put forward some key constructs, or conceptual features, of distributed leadership in educational contexts, which will serve as a theoretical framework for the exploration to be undertaken in the succeeding chapters.

2.1. Distributed leadership

An emerging idea

The idea of distributed leadership is not a new one. As far back as 1984, Murgatroyd and Reynolds stressed that "leadership can occur at a variety of levels in response to a variety of situations and is not necessarily tied to possession of a formal organisational role" (cited in Law and Glover 2003 p.37).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the idea of distributed leadership was taking shape. The practice of developing teacher leadership was being explored and promoted (Deveney 1987; Lieberman 1988 and Weiss and Cambone 1994, Louis and Marks 1996 and Wheatley 1999). This was a wide-ranging concept, incorporating ideas such as teachers working together in teams and teachers taking a variety of responsibilities within the school. On the positive side, it was considered beneficial to students if teachers discussed their practice

with colleagues, gave and accepted critiques of their work and were open to learning from each other. However, this interaction between teachers was not always easy to achieve. The idea of teachers working together on teams extended to the concept of ‘teacher leaders’ which will be explored further in section 2.2 below.

Another perspective on the research on distributed leadership at this time did not confine the teachers’ engagement to pedagogical issues but broadened the scope of their leadership to decision-making in the overall operation of the school. These concepts of shared decision-making and the democratisation of the school were evident in studies by Greenleaf 1966, Weiss and Cambone 1994, and Hallinger and Heck 1996. Their findings differed; Hallinger and Heck, for example found a paucity of evidence linking distributed leadership to improved student outcomes and Weiss and Cambone found that teachers’ involvement in whole-school change could detract from classroom teaching. On the other hand, Greenleaf found a positive effect on teacher efficacy and levels of morale.

These early studies are already identifying differing interpretations of distributed leadership and its impact on the school. The concept of teachers working together to improve their teaching practices is a move away from the isolation and individualism of teaching as highlighted by authors such as Lortie (1975, cited in Spillane 2001) and Fullan (1993) and, in an era of rapid and significant change, it was essential that teachers would work together rather than separately. Teamwork was one of the structural changes that supported the introduction of new curriculum content and methodologies.

Distributed leadership: two key theorists, Spillane and Duignan

In the current educational leadership discourse, distributed leadership has a variety of interpretations. The work of Spillane and Duignan, two eminent researchers on the topic, is examined and analysed below. Both researchers view distributed leadership as being central to the teaching and learning process in the school and agree that leadership involves all members of the school community, not just the principal and deputy principal.

Spillane argues that leadership happens in a variety of ways throughout the school and is centred in the interactions between people. “Depending on the particular leadership task,

school leaders' knowledge and expertise may be best explored at the group or collective level rather than at the individual leaders level" (Spillane, Halverson and Diamond 2001 p.25)

In what he calls the "leader plus" aspect, he recognises that leadership roles are played by multiple individuals, whether in formal or informal positions. "People in formally designated positions and those without any such designations can and do take responsibility for leading and managing in the schoolhouse" (Spillane and Diamond 2007 p.7). Therefore, his distributed leadership perspective is neither a top-down nor a bottom-up approach but recognises that leadership roles are played by different people at different times.

Spillane's theory of distributed leadership moves beyond individual agency and the study of what leaders know and do to exploring how leaders think and act in situ. In using distributed cognition and activity theory as the basis for his study of leadership practices, he identifies the social context as an integral component. He identifies "the tasks, actors, actions and interactions of school leadership as they unfold together in the daily life of the school" as contributing factors to distributed leadership in schools (Spillane, Halverson and Diamond 2001. p.23.)

He highlights not only the interaction between people, but the interdependence between the people and their context. "The interdependence of the individual and the environment shows how human activity as distributed in the interactive web of actors, artefacts and the situation is the appropriate unit of analysis for studying practice" (Spillane et al 2001 p.23). To illustrate this he gives as an example a pilot landing a plane using his own skills, the instruments and controls of the plane and taking into account the weather conditions and the state of the runway. In the school context this interdependence exists between the teacher, the students they teach, their subject department and the overall school culture and context. Spillane explains the idea further by detailing three types of co-leadership practice; collaborative, collective and coordinated.

Collaborative leadership distribution is carried out by multiple leaders working together at one time and place, e.g. leading a faculty meeting.

Collective leadership distribution occurs when the work of leaders is performed separately but is interdependent, for example, an assistant principal making a number of visits to classrooms, giving formative evaluations and the principal making the formal visit and giving summative evaluation.

Coordinated leadership distribution refers to leadership routines that are carried out in a sequence, for example, using data from standardised assessments to influence instruction. A series of steps is required from the initial administering of the tests, to analysing results to presenting information in an appropriate format for discussion at faculty meetings. (Spillane and Diamond 2007 p.8)

Organisational routines, artefacts and tools are all part of the process that links the interactions of multiple leaders to their situation or context. Spillane describes 'organisational routines' as "repetitive, recognisable patterns of interdependent actions carried out by multiple actors" and they include, for example, grade level meetings, faculty meetings, teacher evaluations, school assemblies and literacy committee meetings (Spillane, Halverson and Diamond 2001). Artefacts and tools serve as go-betweens in interactions among people. Examples include curricular frameworks, templates and observation protocols.

Spillane also recognises the contribution, positive or negative, that organisational structures can make to leadership practices. He is particularly mindful of how they can isolate teachers in their classrooms: the "egg-carton" organisation, as described by Lortie (1975). Structures are created by school leaders but they can be fluid and changed. School leaders can create and recreate structures by their actions and the actions of others in the school. Changing the practice can lead to improvement; an example given by Lortie is that of setting up a breakfast club for teachers, which can create opportunities for dialogue among teachers in an otherwise "egg-carton" structure.

Spillane states that the distributed perspective can be used as an analytical tool to frame research on school leadership and management, and as a diagnostic tool for practitioners to examine and improve their practice (Spillane 2007).

Putting the distributed perspective into practice means focusing on the practice of leading and managing, looking at the formal and informal organisation in tandem, attending to followers and focusing on the situations as a defining element of practice, not just a backdrop (Spillane 2008).

Highlighting the importance of looking at the informal situation in schools Spillane cites an example from his own research on teachers getting advice about their subject. He notes that there is huge variation between schools as to how this happens. While formally-designated leaders were responsible for none of the advice-giving interactions in one school, they were responsible for 82% of these interactions at another. The influence of one teacher over another can have a significant impact on teachers' work and is, of course, central to the concept of distributed leadership (Spillane 2008).

Another key feature of Spillane's work is that leadership is embedded in the vision of improving teaching and learning.

A distributed perspective is NOT a recipe or a blueprint for practice, it is a framework for focusing diagnostic work and a guide to help us design for improving practice. It's about practice and improvement. We must engage with the practice of leading and managing teaching and learning. Improving practice involves the twin processes of diagnosis and design. A distributed perspective provides a framework for diagnosis and design work. School staffs are key agents in this work. (Spillane 2008)

Perhaps one of the major contributions of Spillane's work is that he provides us with the vocabulary and the tools to explore leadership in schools. In summary, his theory of distributed leadership incorporates a number of key features: leadership is enacted by multiple players, not just the principal - it is not a view of leadership that takes a top down perspective; it is a practice that occurs through people interacting with each other and co-leading in different ways; there is interdependence between leaders, followers and the situation. Leaders influence followers and shape their practice particularly in relation to the core work of the school, teaching and learning. The particular context of the school is important and will influence and be influenced by the leadership practices that occur. The distributed leadership perspective is a framework that can be used to focus on teaching and learning and plan for improvement. It is an exploration of leadership as practice and influence, not as power and authority.

Patrick Duignan's work presents an interesting critique of distributed leadership, which, he claims, may be more evident in the rhetoric rather than reality of many schools. While he acknowledges that "the idea of sharing leadership responsibilities more widely in schools is desirable because leadership of contemporary schools is too much for any one person" (Duignan 2007² p.3) he questions what it is that is being distributed. He challenges distributed leadership as being 'the way to do it', which seems to be the accepted practice in education today. "The language of distributed leadership may actually provide practitioners with the comfortable and comforting sense that if they distribute duties, tasks and responsibilities, the leadership density, capacity and quality of their organisation will be greatly strengthened" (Duignan 2007 p.2). He argues that while this may be the case, there is an equally strong chance that it will not be. He suggests that distributed leadership cannot be practised in schools which operate within a hierarchical³ paradigm. He places a strong emphasis on trust and highlights the need to identify a "moral purpose for sharing leadership practices around maximising opportunities and outcomes for students" (Duignan 2006 p.14).

Duignan argues that "leadership is an influencing process effected through authentic relationships and, as such, does not lend itself to distribution, especially if this term is interpreted within a hierarchical and/or control paradigm" (Duignan 2006 p.15). However, what he does encourage and promote is the development of leaders within each organisation, and a development of an "allowed-to-be-a-leader" culture. The process of developing these leaders, however, while not explicitly stated by Duignan is suggested through the manner in which the principal carries out his/her leadership role. For example, he suggests that principals should stop behaving as if they're leading followers and start acting as if they're leading leaders. He also suggests that they actively seek out talent within the organisation and ask the question "do those who work with me grow as persons?" Finally, he asks if principals are providing user-friendly mediating processes and structures to empower people with regard to making decisions which profoundly affect their lives.

² in his address to a Catholic Education Conference in Australia in July 2007

³ By hierarchical, he means based on power and authority – Duignan 2006 p.107

Duignan's approach, then, rejects the idea of distributed leadership if it is operated in either a hierarchical or control paradigm. He sees the value and necessity of sharing leadership, particularly in the area of decision-making where this affects the lives of those involved. In difficult ethical situations he considers it particularly important to share leadership. His critique and his views are founded on ethical principles and in particular draw on the concepts of community, the common good, the principle of subsidiarity, servant leadership and love-driven leadership (Duignan 2007).

Duignan advocates shared leadership and defines it as "a product of the on-going processes of interaction and negotiation among all school members as they construct and reconstruct a reality of working productively and compassionately together each day" (Duignan 2006 p.107). This is not seen as merely splitting the tasks but requires a mind shift – the principal must be prepared to 'let go' the idea that leadership is hierarchically distributed. Assumptions about leadership - such as those underpinning power, authority, influence, position, status, responsibility and accountability - also need to be articulated, critiqued and adjusted if necessary. The quality of relationships greatly influences everything else in the organisation.

Duignan's concept of distributed leadership contrasts with Spillane's in that he places a heavy emphasis on community and relationships. Duignan's theory penetrates the organisation as a whole and could be described as an ethical view of distributed leadership. His theory rests on the empowerment of individuals through the recognition of their worth as people. The community aspect of it tries to ensure that a sense of unity and shared vision prevails. In contrast, Spillane states that "leaders don't have to see eye to eye or even get along with one another to co-perform leadership routines and tasks" (Spillane 2007 p.11).

In conclusion, both Spillane and Duignan recognise that leadership is not solely the remit of one person at the top of the organisation and advocate that leadership and leadership development are relevant to the central purpose of school – improving student outcomes. However, Duignan rejects the term 'distributed leadership' as it does not necessarily create a sense of community within a school. Many of the practices and interactions described by Spillane could be carried out in a hierarchical setting within a paradigm of power and control.

Spillane highlights the ‘follower’ concept but acknowledges that different people may be ‘followers’ and ‘leaders’ at different times. Duignan places a strong emphasis on the sense of community that must exist in a school and the potentially positive impact of developing each member of the community as human beings.

While Spillane acknowledges the importance of organisational structures as part of the interdependence between leaders, followers and the situation he does not explicitly outline the role or responsibility that the principal has in shaping the situation or in developing people in the way that Duignan does.

For the purpose of this thesis, the term distributed leadership will be used. However, in using the term, it is understood by the author to incorporate Duignan’s concept of shared participation in leadership and an awareness of the centrality of community.

Other Features of Distributed Leadership

Before concluding this section on distributed leadership a number of additional key features will be outlined. Firstly, the concept of middle leadership and formal roles will be explored in relation to distributed leadership.

Distributed Leadership: middle leadership and roles and positions

Both Spillane and Duignan agree that the concept of distributed leadership goes beyond formal positions. While these formal positions may not be central to the concept of distributed leadership they cannot be ignored. Depending on the system in place in an individual school, the teachers appointed to these positions can play a significant leadership role. Formal leadership structures also influence and impact on the interactions of leader, follower and the situation as defined by Spillane.

The OECD report *Improving School Leadership* (2008b) recognises that the expansion and intensification of the role of the school leader means that education systems need to adopt a broader notion of school leadership and acknowledge that countries are now experimenting with different ways to better allocate and distribute tasks across leadership teams.

Within this context, middle leaders are recognised as playing a key role in the leadership of schools. Middle leaders are teachers with formal positions of leadership and responsibility. The nature of the responsibilities varies from country to country and can be curricular, pedagogical, pastoral or administrative. Some countries appoint a middle leadership or middle management team, while others allocate duties or tasks to individual teachers. In some cases teachers in positions of principal, deputy, or assistant principal are considered to be middle leaders while in other cases, classroom teachers who have responsibilities in specific operational areas, like subject heads or counselling duties, are considered to be middle management.

An analysis based on statistics from the First PISA study (2003 in OECD 2008b p.75) shows that by far the greatest responsibility distributed to teachers, including department heads, are around curriculum and student policies. Responsibility for human resources or financial resources is not generally distributed to teachers; they are more likely to reside with the board and/or the principal.

The purpose of this ‘layer’ of formal leadership varies from country to country, for example, to improve classroom practice, to support student learning through pastoral support or to reduce the workload of the principal by carrying out administrative tasks. “In Flanders, many of the stakeholders mentioned that middle management is of utmost importance to allow the principal to focus more on the school’s educational project” (OECD 2008b p.80).

While the OECD is advocating the adoption of a broader notion of school leadership, and in its 2008b report *Improving School Leadership*, it uses the term “distributed leadership”, it is clear that the interpretation of distributed leadership is in defining roles and responsibilities and demarcating specific duties to teachers in formal leadership positions. This is a different interpretation of distributed leadership from that of Spillane or Duignan as discussed above. However, the role of middle leaders will be included in this research, in so far as it recognises that teachers with posts of responsibilities in Irish post-primary schools would be considered ‘middle leaders’ in the OECD interpretation but they are also members of the school community. This thesis will explore their leadership role as perceived by themselves and their colleagues.

In a comprehensive review of the literature on distributed leadership carried out for the National College of School Leadership in the UK (Woods et al 2004) three key features were identified:-

- Distributed leadership as an emergent property of interaction
- Distributed leadership as recognition of expertise
- Distributed leadership suggests openness of boundaries.

Distributed leadership as an emergent property of interaction

One of the characteristics of distributed leadership is “an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals” (Woods et al 2004, p.441). Gronn terms this pooling of energies ‘concertive action’ and suggests that

it is about the additional dynamic which is the product of conjoint activity – where people work together in such a way that they pool their initiative and expertise, the outcome is a product or energy which is greater than the sum of their individual actions (*Gronn 2000, 2002a,b in Woods et al p.441*).

This may be compared to Spillane’s definition of distributed leadership as “the collective properties of the group of leaders working together to enact a particular task, leading to the evolution of a leadership practice that is potentially more than the sum of each individual’s practice” (Spillane et al 2001 p.25).

Theories on teamwork share the view that working together produces results over and above what would be expected from individuals working alone. The literature on teamwork often makes the distinction between formal and informal teams but suggests that both types operate best in a culture that fosters an open climate and where relationships are based on trust, mutual protection and support (Belbin 2000, Nias et al 1989, Wallace and Hall 1994 cited in Woods et al 2004 p.447).

Teamwork is a key element of distributed leadership (Harris 2004 in Ritchie and Woods 2007) in that the nature and purpose of distributed leadership is “the ability of those within a school to work together, constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively” (Lambert 1998 p.5). However, the existence of structured teams alone does

not constitute distributed leadership. In fact, distributed leadership practices may not emphasise the formal structured approach to teamwork but rather acknowledge that groups of teachers work together as appropriate in order to achieve a particular objective at a given time. This would mean that the leadership of teams would vary according to the task in hand, the teams would not necessarily operate within a hierarchical structure and their constitution would depend on the function and objective of the team. Leadership of, and within, the teams may vary, thus providing opportunity for the emergence and development of leadership across a number of people, whether or not they are in formal positions of leadership.

Distributed leadership as recognition of expertise

Another distinctive characteristic of distributed leadership (Woods et al 2004 for NCSL), is that the distribution of leadership varies according to expertise. There is recognition that various tasks require different expertise and that all the expertise does not reside in one person at the top. Schools nowadays are complex organisations and therefore it is too much to expect that they can be led by one person. “The role of principal is now so complex and demanding, that it is unrealistic to think that any one person can discharge the role without the assistance of considerable number of colleagues, both from the teaching and the support staff” (Martin 2006). This is particularly significant in the context of leadership for improved learning as it is recognised in the literature that the most significant influence on student learning is the direct influence the teacher has in the classroom.

Elmore, along with Spillane and Duignan, argues that leadership should be concerned with improving instruction and that in this context the skills and knowledge that matter are those that are connected to, or lead directly to the improvement of instruction and student performance (Elmore 2000 p.14). Elmore recognises that in any organisation people will have different skills and competencies that are related to their predispositions, interests, aptitudes, prior knowledge and specialised roles. He acknowledges that some people will do things better than others, either as a function of their personal preferences, their experience or their knowledge and argues therefore, that distributed leadership acknowledges “multiple sources of guidance and direction, following the contours of expertise in an organisation, made coherent through a common culture” (ibid p.15). He

includes it as one of his five principles that lay the foundation for a model of distributed leadership: “The roles and activities of leadership flow from the expertise required for learning and improvement, not from the formal dictates of the institution”.

Recognising expertise at various sites within the school allows for a more fluid approach to leadership than assigning formal roles and positions. Depending on the task in hand, individual teachers, with or without formal positions of responsibility, can suggest new ideas, introduce new initiatives and influence the practice of colleagues. Recognising that expertise exists throughout the school can contribute to creating the culture, referred to by Duignan, as the “allowed-to-be-a-leader” culture. This can be a powerful motivating force for teachers, helping them to feel valued in their work.

Distributed leadership suggests openness of boundaries.

The third distinctive characteristic as identified by Woods et al (2004) is that distributed leadership suggests openness of boundaries. While distributed leadership is generally explored from the perspective of the principal and teachers, it could also include students, parents and those involved in governance and management. It also raises the question of all teachers being leaders or potential leaders. Barth (2000) suggested that all teachers can lead. Harris takes up the point in her statement: ‘all teachers harbour leadership capabilities waiting to be unlocked and engaged for the good of the school’ (Harris et al 2003 p.78). She develops this point further by stressing the need for professional development that will create communities of learning and link professional development and leading. “Teachers who are engaged in learning with their peers are most likely to embrace new initiatives and to innovate” (ibid p.78). Distributed leadership theories differ on this point. Spillane, for example does not suggest that all teachers can be leaders.

The OECD (2008) also recognises the openness of boundaries and in particular the leadership role of the Board of Management. It highlights the different roles played by Boards in different countries but recommends that more support should be given to Boards so that they can play a stronger leadership role in schools.

Related Issues

The concept of trust emerges from the literature as being significant (Duignan 2006, NCSL 2004 and Ritchie and Woods 2007). Teachers need to feel trusted and supported by their principals and their colleagues. Trust is necessary if teachers are to feel motivated in their work and if they are to be allowed to initiate an activity and take responsibility for decision-making. Along with being trusted in their work, people also need support. People want to talk about what they are doing – supporting these conversations is an essential task of the leader (Wheatley 1999). Trust, allied with support, is an underpinning value within the concept of distributed leadership.

Initiative, as an aspect of leadership, is another concept common throughout the literature on distributed leadership. In Spillane's work (2003) he highlights the concept of 'reciprocal interdependency' and defines it as one leader's practice becoming the basis for another leader's practice. This has been referred to as 'the circulation of initiative' in which the individual initiates action and change, within the resources and constraints of his/her organisational context, and, through this, contributes to the flow of activity and the shaping of that same organisational context (Woods 2004, p.6).

Mayrowetz argues that distributed leadership as human capacity building may be best positioned to lead school improvement. He suggests that distributed leadership promotes the notion that by having multiple people engaged in leadership, these individuals will all learn about themselves and the issues facing the school. Eventually the collective capacity of the organisation will increase to the point where the school can address its own shortcomings (Mayrowetz 2008 p.431).

The literature on distributed leadership and on teacher leadership almost always includes reference to collaboration, collaborative work practices or collaborative cultures (Gronn 2000, Spillane 2001, Muijs, and Harris 2007, Grant 2006). These concepts are self evident when the definition of distributed leadership includes interaction among colleagues, leadership practices that 'stretch over' a number of people and the development of a sense of community in the school.

Distributed leadership: Barriers and challenges

The distributed leadership movement is a call for leadership to be shared throughout the organisation in a more democratic fashion; “the fundamental premise of the concept of distributed leadership is that leadership activities should not be accreted into the hands of a sole individual but, on the contrary, they should be shared between a number of people in an organisation or team” (Storey 2004 in Mayrowetz 2008). The questions must be asked, however, whose interests are being served by particular distributions? Are all distributions intended to enhance teaching and learning? It is possible that distributed leadership could support the abuse of power. (Maxcy and Nguyen 2006 in Mayrowetz 2008 p.429). Teachers can become overstressed by shared decision-making and the benefits of participation do not necessarily accrue to better teaching practice or to the benefit of the school as a whole, especially if teachers’ and organisational goals are not well aligned (Mayrowetz 2008 p.429). Whether shared or democratic leadership can lead to school improvement is unclear, according to studies by Conway 1976, 1984, Conway and Calzi 1996, Smylie 1994, York-Barr and Duke 2004, cited in Mayrowetz 2008.

Distributed leadership for efficiency and effectiveness has been contested. While some advantages and benefits have been outlined, there are also risks that distributing leadership will not add to school improvement. Leithwood and Jantzi (1998) found that “higher scores on total or distributed leadership in schools, defined as both teachers and principals engaging in leadership work, have actually been associated with lower levels of student engagement.” Timperley (2005 p.417) concluded that “distributing leadership is a risky business and may result in the distribution of incompetence”.

Harris (2004) outlines some additional difficulties. She recognises that structural and cultural barriers operate within schools which could make it very difficult for some teachers to show leadership. Jockeying for power positions in a school can create a climate which is not conducive to, for example, young teachers expressing their opinion, especially if it differs from the traditional or prevailing opinion. Such action could be perceived as a threat to the status quo.

Teachers are usually very aware of the micropolitics within a school – perhaps more so than a principal – and therefore display wise caution:

Teachers placed in positions that bear titles and resources of leadership display a caution towards their colleagues that is both poignant and eminently sensible (Weiss and Cambone 1994).

This raises serious questions as to how leadership is distributed and by whom? It is understandable that teachers who are used to working with their colleagues as friends and ‘equals’ would be apprehensive about the expectations of them, particularly by the principal, when they are placed in a leadership role. This is especially evident in the Irish context where collegiality is highly valued, and sometimes misunderstood.

Finally, in a climate of accountability, principals may be less willing to relinquish power as it might leave them vulnerable due to lack of direct control. This may be particularly true in relation to financial, legal and human resource issues as well as the educational operation of the school (OECD 2008).

2.2 Distributed leadership and quality learning

The quality of learning is directly related to the quality of teaching, which is in turn a function of the quality of leadership (West-Burnham 2002)

Introduction

The key features of distributed leadership outlined above highlight the centrality of teaching and learning. Both Spillane and Duignan see the moral purpose of distributing leadership as improving student outcomes. Distributed leadership connects to the quality of teaching and learning through the structures, systems, procedures and practices that combine to make the school a learning organisation. Although the leadership of the principal has been found to have an indirect influence on pupil learning, the principal can improve teaching and learning powerfully through his/her influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions. When leadership is widely distributed and brought closer to the site of learning, it has a greater influence on schools and students (Day, Sammons et al 2007).

This section will examine three key concepts that link the key features of distributed leadership to student learning: teacher leaders, professional learning communities and organisational learning. These concepts acknowledge the leadership role played by teachers in collaborative work practices.

Teacher leadership

In the introduction to the book, *Tweak to Transform: Improving Teaching*, West-Burnham (2002) makes the link between leadership and the quality of student learning. A key person in that link is the teacher. The concept of teacher leadership focuses on teachers helping each other to improve their classroom practice. Muijs and Harris interpret it in both formal and informal practices:-

the formal leadership roles that teachers undertake that have both management and pedagogical responsibilities, that is, head of department, subject co-ordinator or key stage co-ordinator and the informal leadership roles that include coaching, leading a new team and setting up action research groups. (Muijs and Harris 2007 p.112)

Some examples of recent projects incorporating teacher leadership include the Carnegie Foundation *National Writers' Project (NWP)*⁴, the NUI Maynooth *Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century*⁵, the *Advanced Skills Teachers* in the UK and the *Specialist Classroom Teacher* project in New Zealand⁶. In the NWP, Lieberman talks of teachers who work together in networks and use enquiry to reflect on and improve their practice. The project operates from the basic assumption that teachers can help each to improve their practice and enhance the quality of learning for students. "The interesting hidden secret may be that teachers are the ones who are best able to teach others how to improve their practice" (Lieberman 2006). Similarly, the other projects also provided structures and supports for teachers to work together to reflect on their practice and try innovative approaches with a view to improving student outcomes and reported success – without doubt, this experience

⁴ See www.carnegie for further information on this project.

⁵ A project initiated from NUI Maynooth in which fifteen schools participated over a four-year period, 2003 to 2007.

⁶ Both of these projects were referred to in the OECD report *Improving School Leadership: Policy and Practice*. 2008.

developed the capacity of teachers to influence their colleagues and to bring about some changes in their own and their colleagues' practice (Hogan et al. 2007).

Harris and Mujis (2002) support teacher leadership as an important form of collective leadership in which teachers develop expertise by working collaboratively (cited in Mulford 2003 p.19). They claim that teacher leadership has a positive impact on improving learning, as it is instructionally focused and located closest to the classroom. The NCSL sums up the position of teacher leadership: "we do not think we need many strategic leaders, but what schools do need is many leaders who can enhance the quality of learning and teaching throughout the school" (NCSL Booklet 1.3 DL Pack 2004). This very firmly places teacher leadership in the context of improving teaching and learning.

In keeping with the view of Mulford and Silins (2005) "securing improvement comes through the hearts and minds of teachers". Teacher leadership can be exercised without reference to formal leadership positions. It is defined by teachers working together in collegial and collaborative ways and recognises the importance of mutual trust, respect and support. A common purpose and a shared understanding must also be identified. (Harris et al 2003 p.75, Grant 2006 p.516). As teacher leadership is exercised close to the site of student learning it has the potential to have a direct positive impact on teaching and learning in the school.

Teacher leadership is premised upon power redistribution, moving from hierarchical control to peer control – it takes a federal, not a hierarchical view of leadership (Harris et al 2003 p.75) and, as such, recognises that all teachers can be leaders.

Teacher leadership, as described in the literature above, is an aspect of distributed leadership which allows different teachers to emerge as leaders at different times. The structures may be formal or informal but in principle, it is a form of leadership distribution that focuses on teaching and learning, that can create a positive learning environment and encourage teachers to dialogue with each other, reflect on their practice, give and accept critiques of their work, thus continuously striving to improve their classroom practice.

Professional Learning Communities

Another concept that links distributed leadership with learning is that of professional learning communities. Professional learning communities may be viewed as an extension of teacher leadership. For example, Harris et al (2003 p.79) identifies four dimensions of the teacher leadership role that extends to the overall operation of the school. Teacher leaders:-

1. translate the principles of school improvement into the practices of individual classrooms (a brokering role);
2. assist other teachers to cohere around a particular development and foster a more collaborative way of working;
3. play a mediating role in school improvement. They are an important source of expertise and information;
4. forge close relationships with individual teachers where mutual learning takes place.

Like Harris, Liebermann sees teacher leadership as being closely linked to the idea a of professional learning community (PLC). Working with other teachers, playing brokering and mediating roles, forging close relationships with individual teachers so that both will learn, working and learning together, constructing and refining meaning are all evidence of learning communities.

Halverson (2006) explores the significance of artefacts in creating professional communities and finds that they provide the necessary tools for leaders to use in improving instructional practice across schools. By artefacts he means programmes, procedures and policies leaders use to influence the practice of others. He claims that although structural changes are insufficient for changing school culture, artefacts, such as discussion groups, collaborative curriculum design efforts and formative assessment policies contribute to the creation of professional communities by providing the ‘tools’ for teachers to work together.

There is some evidence to suggest that professional learning communities make a significant contribution to student learning:

Schools with PLCs report significant benefits for students, including lower rates of absenteeism and decreased dropout rates. In schools with PLCs, students have

exhibited academic gains in maths, science, history and reading than in traditional schools. (Hirsh and Hord 2008 p.27).

Organisational learning

The direct link between leadership and student outcomes “is a rare event indeed in the research literature on educational leadership and school improvement” (Mulford, Silins and Leithwood 2003 p.3) However, Mulford et al’s research found that what was important was that staff are actively and collectively participating in the school and feel that their contributions are valued. This contributes to creating a learning organisation where teachers’ learning, as well as student learning, is valued (ibid p.6).

Similar to the findings of Day, Sammons et al (2007), Mulford et al (2004) claim that both positional and distributed leadership are only indirectly related to student outcomes. Organisational learning (OL), or a “collective teacher efficacy”, is the important intervening variable between leadership and teacher work and then student outcomes. Said another way; leadership contributes to organisational learning which in turn influences what happens in the core business of school: the teaching and learning. It influences the way teachers organise and conduct their instruction, their educational interactions with students and the challenges and expectations teachers place on their pupils (ibid p.9).

Summary

The concepts of teacher leaders, professional learning communities and organisational learning are all recognised as contributing to improving teaching and learning. The link to distributed leadership is evident in the need for such practices to have multiple leaders. They also incorporate, in principle, many of the key features of distributed leadership as outlined in section 2.1 above, such as a climate of trust, a sense of community, collaboration, support and on-going learning by teachers. Organisational routines and structures are necessary in order for these concepts to be developed and practised. The work of leaders close to the site of learning, i.e. the classroom, contributes directly to enhancing student learning.

This thesis will explore the extent to which teacher leadership and professional learning communities are recognised and if the key features of distributed leadership as outlined in section 2.1 above are practised with the intention of improving teaching and learning.

2.3 Distributed leadership and the principal's role in leading learning.

“Improving learning for students is seen as the moral purpose of school leadership and therefore should be at the centre of all leadership activities” (OECD 2008).

This final section of the literature review will focus on the connection between distributed leadership and the Principal's role in leading learning. The term 'principal' will be used throughout this section of the literature review but the author recognises that the deputy principal also plays a key role in the educational leadership of the school.

The key features of distributed leadership as defined above place teaching and learning at the core of all activities in the school. Distributed leadership recognises that there are multiple leaders and that if learning is to be central to all activities then the principals must keep leadership for learning to the fore of their minds in all their professional work. The principals play a dual role in the context of connecting distributed leadership to learning; firstly they must be educational leaders themselves and secondly they must be aware of developing leadership capacity in others.

Educational Leadership

The literature on educational leadership highlights the necessity for leadership to focus purposefully and incisively on quality-of-learning issues and on the range of distinctive human qualities called for in today's educational leaders (Hogan et al. 2007 p.15). The literature suggests that successful learning-centred leaders are aware of developments in curriculum and assessment, keep up to date with pedagogical change, focus relentlessly on student achievement, monitor teaching, develop productive professional relationships and strive to build trust and collaborative ways of working throughout the school (Southworth 2004).

“Learning-centred leadership is about making a difference to what happens in classrooms by spreading the skills and talents of teachers within individual classrooms across the whole school to the benefit of all pupils. And it is about doing this by design, not by default” (Southworth 2004 p.4).

At the school level, leading for learning includes the joint work of principals, assistant principals, department heads, school-based mentors and coaches, and teacher leaders (Copland, M and Knapp, M 2006). The principal does not work in isolation but it is clear that the principal must enable teachers to work together, whether this is by creating structures or a cultural climate conducive to learning, or both. The literature suggests that the principal plays a key role in linking activities at different levels and spreading the skills of individuals across the whole school.

Linking distributed leadership and teaching and learning

The principal sets the formal conditions to support and nurture collaborative learning (Harris and Lambert 2003 and Hopkins and Jackson 2002). This may include setting up and maintaining structures such as teams and committees as well as ad hoc groups to address specific issues from time to time. The conditions needed to support these structures will include time and resources but may also extend beyond these to professional development that enhances teachers’ abilities to work effectively together. The human qualities of the leader may also be a factor here, with specific qualities required to nurture and enable groups to work well together. If change happens through the minds and hearts of teachers, then motivation, trust, feeling valued and listened to, and other interpersonal skills will be required by the leader to develop a learning community.

In what appears to be a resistance to the culture of accountability and external controls, the OECD report (2008) suggests that school leaders can make a difference to school and student performance if they are granted autonomy to make important decisions. However, unless they have the capacity, motivation and support to make use of their autonomy to engage in practices that are most conducive to improved learning, it may have little influence on school outcomes (OECD 2008 p.64). Four leadership responsibilities have been consistently identified as improving learning outcomes:-

1. supporting, evaluating and developing teacher quality;

2. supporting goal-setting, assessment and accountability (including the use of data to improve practice);
3. enhancing strategic financial and human resource management which includes enhancing financial skills and involving leaders in recruiting their teachers;
4. adopting a systemic approach to leadership policy and practice by encouraging collaboration with partners external to the school and by distributing leadership responsibilities (ibid p.66).

These leadership responsibilities present quite a challenge to Irish school principals. To date, at post-primary level, there is very little tradition of principals evaluating teacher performance. Although principals often endeavour to improve teacher quality, the means of doing this are somewhat restricted. Unlike many other European and OECD countries, there is no formal system in place for observing teachers in action in their classrooms, although the Education Act (1998 S23 and S24) requires principals to be responsible for the guidance and direction of their teachers, to provide leadership for them and “to create a school environment which is supportive of learning among the students and which promotes the professional development of teachers”. Section 24 gives the Board of Management the right to suspend or dismiss a teacher in accordance with agreed procedures, which are currently being negotiated with the education partners. This may have an impact on the relationship between principals and teachers and practices of the principal with regard to improving teacher quality. Regardless of what may develop in the future, principals can shape the climate and environment.

The OECD report sums it up: “there is increasing evidence that within each individual school, school leaders can contribute to improved student learning by shaping the conditions and climate in which teaching and learning occur” (OECD 2008 p.19).

In attempting to provide optimum conditions for learning, principals realise that their influence on student learning is predominantly through the teachers. Southworth (2004) says that the really effective leaders know they work through others and therefore usually take the time to concentrate on their indirect effects. They do this in three ways – modelling, monitoring and dialogue. Modelling is concerned with the power of example:

'walking the talk'. Monitoring includes not only observing teachers but analysing data on student progress and achievement. Dialogue in this context is about creating opportunities for teachers to talk with their colleagues about teaching and learning. Southworth (2004) claims that it is their combined effect that really matters. That means, for example, talking about learning and teaching, challenging conventional practices, identifying and valuing good teaching, increasing teachers' reflective powers and expanding their teaching repertoire are treated as professional learning opportunities and processes.

Southworth recommends an array of organisational structures and systems used by successful leaders. Many of these are important in making a difference to the quality of learning and teaching in classrooms:-

- planning processes – for lessons, units of work, individuals and groups of students, classes, year groups etc;
- target setting – for individuals and groups, classes etc;
- communication systems – especially meetings;
- monitoring systems – analysing and using pupil learning data and observing classrooms and providing feedback;
- roles and responsibilities of leaders (including mentoring and coaching);
- policies for learning, teaching and assessment and marking. (Southworth 2004b p.11)

The principals play a key role in setting up these organisational structures and systems and their active involvement is required. However, these systems require teacher involvement and commitment. The extent to which teachers are empowered to lead such structures and systems and to operate effectively within them will be determined to a considerable extent by the nature of the leadership in the school.

When structures and systems become embedded and collaboration and peer learning begin to take off, the culture of the organisation begins to alter and reform. School based research shows that the most important characteristics of the climate are trust, openness and security. (Southworth 2004b p.12).

Summary

The literature recognises the key role played by the principal in improving the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Principals need to keep up to date with curricular and pedagogical developments and focus purposefully and relentlessly on the quality of teaching and learning. But they also need to keep in mind that they themselves do not have a direct influence on student learning, except if they are teaching classes. Therefore, as the literature tells us, principals must create the conditions that ensure that teachers engage in the best pedagogical practices. Providing opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively and exercise influence over each other will necessitate acknowledging and developing leadership among a wide range of teachers.

The third research question in this thesis will examine the principals' and deputy principals' perceptions of their educational leadership role and the practices that they engage in which they believe contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning in an environment where leadership is distributed.

2.4 Distributed leadership: A Theoretical Framework

The term 'distributed leadership' attracts a range of meanings and is associated with a variety of practices. A number of different usages of the term have emerged (Mayrowetz 2008). The key features of distributed leadership, as identified in the literature above can be summarised as

- Recognition that leadership does not reside solely with the principal and deputy principal
- All actions in the school have as their central focus enhancing students' educational experience
- Leadership occurs through interaction and influence and through organisational routines and practices
- Context matters – there is an interdependence between leaders, followers and their situation.
- Each teacher is valued and supported in their professional practice

- Ongoing learning is considered to be the norm for teachers as well as students
- A sense of community prevails
- Recognition that each person contributes to the overall good of the school and the school is only as good as the people within it
- Relevant expertise is recognised, wherever it lies
- Appropriate structures are formed and re-formed to provide opportunities for collaboration and participative decision-making
- A climate of trust exists
- Leadership may be exercised through formal positions, as well as informal roles and actions

These features of distributed leadership form the analytical framework for this thesis research. Summarising these features, distributed leadership can be defined, for the purposes of this thesis, as ‘the operation of participative leadership throughout the school in a manner which enables people to work together to improve teaching and learning’.

The first research question of this thesis will explore participants’ understanding of distributed leadership. The findings from the research will be compared with the concept and key features as outlined here.

2.5 Conclusion

The literature review examined the concept of distributed leadership and its connection to teaching and learning. The variety of interpretations of distributed leadership were analysed and the key features were combined to form a concept that will be used for this thesis. This concept, as defined in section 2.1 above, links it integrally to teaching and learning. However, sections 2.2 and 2.3 expand and elaborate on this and examine leadership practices that contribute to the quality of teaching and learning.

The key research questions were outlined in Chapter One. In researching these questions, the concepts and features identified in this chapter, Chapter Two, will be used to gain insights into the research participants’ understanding of distributed leadership and the practices in which they are engaged that enhance teaching and learning.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology adopted for this thesis and the reasons for the choices made in the research design. These choices are influenced by the author's epistemological stance and professional experience, which will be explained more fully in section 3.1. Section 3.2 will address the ethical issues and section 3.3 will outline the research design, explaining how the methodology chosen is consistent with the epistemology and the professional purpose of the research. The choice of data-gathering techniques will also be described in this section (3.3), with the advantages and limitations of each outlined.

A preliminary investigation was carried out to gain some current practical insights into the concept of leadership as understood by teachers and to clarify the research questions. This will be outlined in section 3.4.

Section 3.5 outlines the selection of schools and presents a short profile of each school. Section 3.6 describes how the research was carried out, showing the evolution of the author's reflections and the process of adapting the data-gathering techniques to suit the research questions. In conclusion, section 3.7 summarises this chapter and makes links to the reporting and analysis of the findings in subsequent chapters.

3.1 The Author's Perspective and Epistemological Stance

The epistemological status of any work of research rests on identifying and justifying the kind of knowledge claims the research seeks to make. In his seminal study *Ethics and Education* (1966), R.S. Peters argued convincingly that education is, from the start, a normative undertaking: "It implies that something worthwhile is being or has been transmitted in a morally acceptable manner." He adds that it would be a contradiction to

hold that a person “had been educated, but had in no way changed for the better”(p.25). Peters acknowledges that this “purely conceptual point” doesn’t favour any particular set of moral purposes over others in educational undertakings; that the question of justification is a further issue. The importance of Peters’ “conceptual point” however is that such justification cannot be simply an epistemological matter. So in the case of an inherently normative practice like education, the kind of knowledge claims made on behalf of its defensible conduct are necessarily different from those made by natural sciences, such as physics or chemistry. Where education is concerned, the key question becomes the defensibility of the moral purposes or the ethical orientations cultivated by the practice. For instance, in relation to any such purpose or orientation, one might ask: Is it partisan, or is it a candidate for some more universal form of validation? Does it make presumptions, overt or more implicit, upon the minds and hearts of teachers and students? Is it open to some form of criticism and revision?

In the case of the present piece of research, the author’s epistemological stance as researcher takes its bearings not only from Peters’ arguments on the normative nature of the concept of education. It also has origins in Deweyan currents of thinking (Dewey, 1916/1966; Dewey 1938/1997). Such currents of thinking emphasise forms of educational leadership which promote democratic learning practices and democratic environments of learning. Such sources link the author’s work as a researcher to her many years of experience as an educational practitioner, both as teacher and as school principal. Accordingly, in carrying out this research, the author acknowledges that the knowledge claims etc. being made spring from a commitment to teaching and learning as a practice undertaken with others, governed by democratic norms and principles. The tests of validity to be applied to such knowledge claims are those of self-criticism, of openness to criticism from other perspectives in a pluralist democracy, of a commitment to equality, of respect for the dignity and rights of all other human beings, and so on. From a practical viewpoint, this commits the teacher/researcher to exploring and advancing practices of teaching and learning that are continually seeking fresh insights, that are open to review and critique, and that embrace the kinds of change that are likely to improve the experience of learners and of teachers in such democratic and pluralist contexts. Critically viewed, this is a constructivist stance, though it might be more accurately referred to as a co-constructivist

stance, and its implications for educational leadership will be elucidated as the research unfolds.

Needless to say, there are limitations on the knowledge claims that can be advanced from such an epistemological stance, and more specifically, on any generalisations that can be made from researches informed by such a stance. This is particularly important where the scope of the research is small-scale, investigating qualitative issues in some depth, as the current research proposes to do. It is hoped however that readers / practitioners will find in the knowledge claims put forth some resonances with their own professional insights and some convincing warrant for improved forms of practice.

As stated in Chapter One, the author is working as a member of the Leadership Development for Schools⁷ (LDS) team and was prompted to investigate the theme of leadership because of this experience and her previous experience as a school principal. The research questions began to take shape as a result of providing professional development for teachers, rather than principals or deputy principals and of the realisation that perceptions of leadership among teachers varies considerably. In many cases, the concept had not been articulated or discussed until the teachers attended their first session of the programme. By enquiring about teachers' perceptions of leadership, the author felt that her own work, and that of the team, could be enhanced, to the benefit of the schools with which the LDS team was working. The work could also inform professional development policy.

The philosophy and shared values held by the LDS team, combined with the author's own educational values, as stated above, influenced the nature of the research. LDS places at the core of its work the principle that the moral purpose of school leadership is leading learning. Among the other basic principles is that of empowering others. The author's own belief in empowering individual teachers and involving them in decision-making in the

⁷ Leadership Development for Schools was set up as an agency of the Department of Education and Science in 2002 to provide professional development for school leaders. Initially its work was with principals and deputy principals only, but in 2006, it extended to include teachers and schools interested in developing leadership capacity throughout the school.

school was also an influencing factor. Increasingly, in its work, LDS has promoted the concept of distributed leadership in recognition of the fact that the principal alone cannot lead learning. The teachers are closer to the site of learning, i.e. the students in the classroom, and therefore leadership must be developed at that level. The principal plays a significant role in this development. This often poses a challenge to principals, who are responsible for so many aspects of the school that they sometimes have difficulty in finding time to focus specifically on student learning and/or developing teacher leadership.

The author was further influenced to carry out this research by her involvement in writing the Irish Country Background report on *Improving School Leadership* (2007, as referred to in Chapter 1 p.4) for the OECD activity on school leadership⁸. Researching current leadership in Ireland and attending international workshops comparing trends in leadership highlighted both the similarities and differences between countries in their approach to leadership. The OECD work informs educational policy, both nationally and internationally. However, for the author, her involvement raised further questions about the application of some of these ideas within schools in Ireland; for example, the OECD (2008) recommends that leadership be distributed in schools. What this means in the context of an Irish school became a possible subject of enquiry and three key questions emerged. How do teachers and principals understand the concept of distributed leadership? How does it link to improving teaching and learning? In what ways might the principal influence teaching and learning by their leadership practices in the school?

The decision then had to be made on the most appropriate research method to investigate these questions. Because of the 'people-centred' nature of leadership, with interpersonal and intrapersonal perspectives being of central importance, the author wanted to conduct her enquiry within a small number of schools so that the researcher and the participants could engage in dialogue together. This would enable both parties to learn from the experience - one of the features of a post-positivist approach to research (Antonesa 2007 p.18).

⁸ The Irish Country Background Report was published by Clare Education Centre and the Department of Education and Science in 2007. The OECD Comparative Report was published by the OECD in August 2008.

3.2 Ethical Issues

Ethical issues must be taken into consideration in all forms of research. Ethical decisions “are concerned with what is right or just, in the interests of not only the project ... but also others who are participants in the research” (May 2001 p.59). In this research, the principle of “informed consent” was applied. This refers to “a freely given agreement on the part of the researched to become a subject of the research process” (ibid p.60). Invitations to participate in the research were proffered and schools freely accepted these invitations. However, the author recognised that usually the principal accepted on behalf of the school and the degree of consultation with the teachers beforehand is not known to the author. For the questionnaires and focus group discussions, therefore, a letter of invitation was issued to teachers which included the opportunity for any individual teacher to withdraw from the research at any time. Copies of these letters are contained in Appendix 8.

With regard to participation in the focus group discussions, particular attention was paid to the ethical issues concerning confidentiality and anonymity. In addition to the letter of invitation and a consent form, time was allowed at the beginning of each discussion for participants to ask questions or make comments on the process and implications of participating in the research. Likewise, at the end of the focus group discussion participants were given time to discuss the process and were invited to contact the author subsequently if they so wished.

3.3 The Research Design

Selecting the methodology – school-based studies

Having identified that the research would be most appropriately conducted in a small number of schools, a mixed-method approach was decided on, through which a preliminary stage of questionnaires might enable a rich yield of relevant issues on distributed leadership to be identified, for a more searching investigation through a series of focus groups.

The research focuses on three schools and the data gathered in each school consists of demographical information on the school, relevant documentation (e.g. schedule of posts of

responsibility and a report on school-based project, see Appendices 4 and 5 respectively). A questionnaire was used to establish an agenda and to clarify the questions to be explored. For a deeper insight into the concept of distributed leadership and its links to teaching and learning, the methodology moves to a further stage, namely a qualitative one, using focus group discussions. As a result of reflection on action the author considered that ‘combining’ members of the three schools for focus group discussions would yield richer results for the researcher and enrich the learning experience for the research participants.

Data-gathering

This research is an exploration of the concept of distributed leadership – it is not about ‘extracting information’ from participants but rather generating a shared understanding of leadership. Ideally, participation in this research will contribute to leadership development in the three schools and assist the author and the participants in gaining insights into leadership practices that have a positive impact on teaching and learning. A combination of qualitative and quantitative data-gathering was used: questionnaires, including ‘attitudinal’ and ‘open’ questions, and focus group discussions.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires have the advantage of gathering data from a relatively large number of people in a short period of time and they present the possibility of being replicated. Questionnaires can take many forms and be structured in different ways – they can be designed to accommodate a ‘closed’ or ‘open’ approach. They may contain very different types of question and may be administered in a variety of ways. The style and format will depend on the purpose and use of the data.

For this research, a questionnaire was designed to ascertain teachers’ perceptions of distributed leadership and the practices in their schools that contribute to it. The findings were used to form the basis for further exploration through focus group discussions. From the outset however, it was not intended to use the questionnaire for detailed statistical analysis of data. The questionnaire was primarily an attitudinal one and therefore used the *Likert* scale which places people’s answers on an attitude continuum (May 2001 p.104). In

addition, three open questions were included. This allowed participants greater freedom in their answers. Responses to the questionnaires were used to clarify the research questions and identify more specific issues which would be discussed with the focus groups. In this respect they resemble more the reconnaissance stage of an action research study than a set of data for statistical analysis, as carried out by empirical research studies⁹.

As the research was being undertaken in only three schools, all teachers in each of the schools were invited to respond to the questionnaire.

As a means of piloting, the questionnaire was given to three teachers currently undertaking a post graduate diploma in educational leadership. Each teacher was asked to complete the questionnaire and comment on the clarity of questionnaires, the length of time it took to complete and the difficulty, or otherwise, in completing it. Their comments were considered and further adjustments made to the questionnaire; for example, some ambiguous (double-barrelled) questions were re-worded. Among the notable comments made by one teacher in the pilot was that she would like to explore these issues further, thus highlighting the potential use of the questionnaire itself to provoke dialogue in the participating schools. The questionnaires were only given to teachers, not to the principals and deputy principals. The questionnaire is presented in Appendix 6.

Questionnaires have disadvantages – participants are free to leave any number of questions blank and there is a time commitment required to complete them. However, these questionnaires facilitated data-gathering from a high percentage of the teachers in each school in a way that would not be possible otherwise and provided insights into the issues that would be further explored in the focus group discussions.

⁹ The research work is not an action research study as it does not include in its purposes any initiatives to bring about an actual change in leadership practices in the schools. The intention to promote such change is a defining feature of action research (Elliott, 1991; McNiff and Whitehead, 2005).

Focus Groups

Focus groups have been defined as a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research. (Powell et al 1996 p.499)

They can be used to ascertain attitudes, feelings, knowledge, perceptions, ideas and beliefs of participants, from the participants' personal experience. As the literature suggests (Gibbs 1997 and McNamara 2006), the researcher plays an important role which includes providing a clear purpose, helping people to feel at ease and facilitating interaction between group members. The researcher may also need to promote debate by asking open questions and challenging participants, drawing out differences and teasing out a range of meanings on the topic. She needs to be a good listener, non-judgemental and adaptable.

Among the advantages stated in the literature (Gibbs 1997, McNamara 2006, Barbour 2007 and Stewart et al 2007) and found by the author in her research were that the social setting and the interaction allowed participants to reveal their attitudes and perceptions. A significant amount of information was gathered, interaction between participants was lively, and they asked questions of each other and debated and disagreed on some issues. The participants agreed that they benefitted from the discussion, they appreciated their opinions being sought and there were indications, especially among the principals and deputy principals, that some of the ideas emerging from the discussion would be explored further in their schools and would be used as a basis for action.

There are also some disadvantages. Again, from the literature (as above) and the author's experience of this research, these include the practical difficulty of arranging dates, times and venues that suit all participants. The people who volunteer to participate will not necessarily be representative of that group (i.e. post-holders or non post-holders) even in their own school; the researcher has less control over the data as the participants interact with each other and at times deviate from the question. Although focus groups are not fully confidential or anonymous, this did not appear to inhibit the discussion in any of the three focus groups in this research.

The limitations of focus groups are also recognised: as mentioned earlier, (in Chapter 3 p41), knowledge claims are limited and generalisations cannot be made based on small scale research of this nature. However, one major advantage of focus groups is that they create their own inherent momentum. When the researcher poses a question and then steps back, thoughts are allowed to come to fruition without the influence of the researcher. Focus groups also allow for in-depth knowledge to emerge and they achieve a richer yield of information.

Collating and analysing data from focus group discussions also presents challenges. “Making sense of qualitative data ... is a complex and inherently ‘messy’ process” (Barbour 2007 p.126). The findings must be presented in a format that adequately reflects the views expressed, while at the same time addressing the research questions. In this research the computer package, MAXQDA was used to assist in the data analysis. The lexical search facility on MAXQDA was used to identify common themes across the discussions. A provisional coding frame was devised, based on these themes and drawing on the literature review. Further analysis and synthesis was carried out both manually and with the aid of the computer package. While the author was aware beforehand of some of the themes that would emerge, referred to as *a priori* codes, (Barbour 2007 p.120), additional themes arose from the participants’ contribution to the discussion.

3.4 Preliminary Investigation

While the author was clear on the general aim of the research, there were a number of issues of concern in planning the approach. Firstly, carrying out research in schools can be an imposition on the participants. School principals and teachers are busy and the pace of school life is such that it is difficult to find time to engage in research. If there is a perceived benefit to the participants there is a better chance that the time will be found willingly.

Secondly, to set about investigating the concept of distributed leadership, without first exploring perceptions of leadership in general, might be difficult. It was necessary to be

able to frame the research and to devise a range of questions that could be answered without ambiguity. A preliminary investigation in one school could bring clarity and assist in choosing the best research methods and designing the most appropriate data-gathering instruments.

With both points in mind, the author chose a school that had already participated in professional development in leadership¹⁰ with LDS. The principal was an Associate member of the LDS team and was willing to cooperate on the basis that the participating teachers would benefit from some reflection and discussion on the concept of leadership.

A focus group discussion was the chosen data-gathering method. Six teachers, who had participated in the LDS programme as mentioned above, volunteered to participate in the focus group meeting. The meeting lasted for one hour, during lunchtime. Among the questions for discussion were:-

1. To what extent is leadership discussed and developed among teachers?
2. How might your role as a leader be developed?
3. What contribution might teachers make to the overall leadership and management of the school?

In addition to the discussion on these questions, participants were invited to represent their perceptions of their leadership roles in the school using diagrams or drawings. They were also invited to respond to a set of pictures on leadership roles and relationships.

Overall, the focus group meeting suggested that teachers see themselves as leaders within their own classroom and that leadership is perceived to exist or be developed through interplay between people in different roles. Through the discussion, concepts such as shared vision, taking ownership of small parts of the school, 'positional leadership' and opportunities for all teachers to engage in leadership activities emerged. The preliminary investigation also highlighted to the researcher some of the skills required to gather data

¹⁰ The programme engaged in by teachers from this school was the Middle Leaders programme offered by LDS with the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) between 2006 and 2008.

successfully. A report on the outcomes of this preliminary investigation can be read in Appendix 3(a).

3.5 Selecting the schools

Having carried out the preliminary investigation, the author was satisfied that the concept of distributed leadership could be explored best in schools that had participated in the LDS Middle Leaders programme. The principals and deputy principals of those schools had completed the LDS 'Forbairt'¹¹ programme previously. Therefore the schools have senior leaders who were supportive of developing leadership throughout the school. As a result of the middle leaders programme, not only had the schools discussed and reflected on leadership, but they had undertaken a school-based project which aimed to improve teaching and learning through developing leadership. (The project themes for each school are outlined in the School Profiles below and summaries of the three projects are presented in Appendix 5). This research does not intend to evaluate these projects or the LDS programme. The author felt that the schools' leadership development work might be enhanced further by participation in this research and that the research would be enriched by their prior experience.

There were twenty-five schools throughout the country involved in the LDS Middle Leaders programme. A number of criteria were used to select three from this group:-

- willingness on the part of the school to participate;
- two of the three sectors being represented;
- their school-based project focussing on improving student learning;
- geographical location – proximity to each other and to the researcher.

Ideally, one school from each of the three sectors, voluntary secondary, vocational and community/comprehensive would be included. However, when all the criteria were taken together, only two of the three sectors could be represented.

¹¹ The Forbairt programme is an LDS professional development programme for principals and deputies from the same school. They attend three residential sessions over a two-year period and participate in Action Learning Networks throughout the two years.

While recognising that this selection is from a small group of schools which have been through a ‘set of experiences’, it provided a valuable ‘test bed’ (Robson 2002) for the development of knowledge about leadership in the Irish context. It is not purporting to be a representative sample and therefore generalisations to the wider educational landscape will not be appropriate. However, it may serve to illuminate some effects of participation in programmes of professional development, in addition to providing guidance to professional development providers.

A profile of each school is presented below; with fictitious names assigned to each, Eldorado, Louvain and Heidelberg.

School Profiles

School No 1 Eldorado

Eldorado is a girls’ voluntary secondary school in south Dublin. There are 413 students, 28 whole-time equivalent teachers and four special needs assistants. There are six assistant principals (AP) and eleven special duties (SD) posts, including the programme co-ordinator. A full list of posts of responsibility is presented in Appendix 4.

The principal and deputy principal, along with six teachers participated in the Leadership Development for Schools programme for Middle Leaders from March 2007 to April 2008. Their school-related leadership project was entitled “Fostering Learning and Achievement” and aimed to :-

- encourage and facilitate students to take responsibility for their own learning;
- encourage active learning;
- help students to value their achievements and progress. (Further details of this project are outlined in Appendix 5)

School No. 2 Louvain

Louvain is a boys’ voluntary secondary school in west Dublin. There are 658 students, 54 whole time equivalent teachers and four special needs assistants. The post of responsibility structure includes nine assistant principals, fifteen special duties teachers and one

programme co-ordinator at AP level. The full list of posts of responsibility is outlined in Appendix 4.

This school also participated in the Leadership Development for Schools programme for Middle leaders in 2007-2008. Their school-based project examined the use of the College Journal as an aid to learning and as an effective means of communication between school and home (See Appendix 5). The project aims were outlined as follows:-

To improve learning by

- encouraging students to keep accurate records of work;
- developing a practice where teachers communicate both positive and negative progress;
- fostering increased involvement from parents in their sons' progress through the journal.

School No. 3 Heidelberg

Heidelberg is a co-ed community school in south Dublin. There are 700 students, 50 whole time equivalent teachers and six special needs assistants. Eleven teachers hold assistant principal posts of responsibility and there are fifteen special duties teachers.

Again, this school participated in the Leadership Development for Schools programme for Middle leaders in 2007-2008. The principal and deputy principal, together with nine teachers, mainly assistant principals, lead a school-based project entitled "Raising Achievement". The project aims were outlined as follows:-

- to raise student achievement by reviewing and developing policy and practice relating to attendance and punctuality;
- prioritising professional development needs and organising relevant inservice training;
- developing structures to highlight and support more able students.

3.6 Carrying out the research

Data-gathering: questionnaires

Designing the Teachers' Questionnaire

Questionnaires were distributed to teachers in each school. The questionnaire was designed on the basis of findings from the literature on distributed leadership and learning, and from the author's own views and experience of working with teachers and schools.

Part 1 of the questionnaire contained thirty statements pertaining to leadership and participants were asked to rate their agreement or otherwise with these statements using the Likert scale. Respondents' scores of 4 or 5 denote agreement or strong agreement respectively. Scores of 2 or 1 denote disagreement or strong disagreement respectively and a rating of 3 is considered 'neutral'.

Part 2 consisted of thirty statements pertaining to leadership practices in schools. In this section, participants were asked to score each item on the basis of how far along a spectrum their school was in implementing this practice. A score of 4 or 5 denotes a well-established practice and a practice which is being refined, respectively. Scores of 2 or 1 denote that the practice is starting or does not happen in the school respectively. A rating of 3 denotes that progress is being made in this practice.

By asking respondents to indicate their degrees of agreement with these statements, the researcher can ascertain the respondents' perceptions of distributed leadership and identify the key issues which they highlight as being central to the practice of distributed leadership and its connections to teaching and learning. These can be analysed from a normative perspective, based on the literature findings in Chapter 2.

The questionnaire includes three open questions; the first elicits further insights into respondents' understanding of distributed leadership, the second asks them to identify factors that support their work and the third seeks to identify factors that inhibit their work.

In the case of each school the questionnaire results are presented in full in Appendix 9. The key salient findings, which were then used in the focus group discussions, are presented in the next chapter.

Questionnaire distribution in School number 1 – Eldorado

Following initial contact with the principal to ascertain willingness on the part of the school to participate in this study, it was agreed that the author would meet the staff as a group at break-time on 10th December 2008. The study was outlined to them and the questionnaires were distributed to all teachers present, approximately twenty. The principal agreed to distribute the questionnaires to the remaining teachers later that day. There are twenty-eight full time teachers on the staff. A total of sixteen questionnaires were returned before Christmas, representing a 57% response rate. Four participants left the first open-ended question blank, and one participant (the same person) left the other two open-ended questions blank.

Questionnaire distribution in school number 2 – Louvain

As in school number one, the author initially spoke to the principal and secured his agreement that the school participate in this study. The author met with the whole staff as a group, as part of their staff meeting on 15th December to introduce the idea and to explain the procedures. She outlined the study and distributed between 35 and 40 questionnaires. Sixteen completed questionnaires were collected on Monday 22nd December.

After Christmas, in consultation with her supervisor, the author agreed that the percentage return rate was too low; sixteen returned from a staff of fifty-four (30% response rate). As it was very close to Christmas, this was probably to be expected. Therefore, she contacted the principal again and secured agreement to re-issue the questionnaire. The principal agreed to allow time at a staff meeting for the teachers to complete the questionnaire. This was carried out in early March and, on this occasion forty questionnaires were completed and returned, representing a 74% response rate. It is interesting to note that, although most of the 'rating scale' questions were answered, thirteen participants left the first open-ended question blank (their understanding of shared leadership). The second open-ended question

(factors which support your work) was left blank by eight and the third open-ended question (factors that inhibit your work) by seven. There was significant overlap between these, i.e. in many cases the same person left all three blank.

Questionnaire distribution in school number 3 – Heidelberg

Following contact with the principal, the author visited school number three, Heidelberg, on 15th December. The principal agreed to distribute the questionnaires at a staff meeting the following Wednesday morning. As this was a very short meeting and the author had other commitments, she did not attend. Eighteen completed questionnaires were collected on 22nd December. There are fifty teachers in the school. The author is not aware how many attended the meeting on the 15th when the questionnaires were distributed. However, as with school number two above, the questionnaires were redistributed in early March and time was allowed for staff to complete them during a staff meeting. As a result, forty-two questionnaires were completed and returned, representing an 84% response rate. As in the other schools, a number of participants left the first open question blank; in this case sixteen were left blank. The second open question was left blank by six and the third by eight participants.

In both Louvain and Heidelberg, teachers who had already completed the questionnaire were asked to complete it again. Their first questionnaires were discarded.

Data-gathering: focus groups

The questionnaires and the documentary analysis provided an initial picture of each school and their perceptions and practices of distributed leadership. It was the intention of the author to continue her research school-by-school through focus group discussions or individual interviews. However, having reflected on the literature and her own experience, she decided that focus group discussions that included teachers from *different* schools would be more appropriate for this research. The reasons for this include the possibility for a richer discussion when people from different schools come together and the opportunity to learn from each other by exchanging ideas about the practices in different schools.

The author also decided that in order to answer the research questions it was necessary to gather data from groups that have experience of different levels of leadership and compare their responses. Therefore, three different focus group discussions were arranged, one with the principals and deputy principals from the three schools: six participants in total in this focus group. The second focus group was with three teachers from each of the three schools who hold posts of responsibility: a total of nine participants, and the third with teachers from the three schools who do not hold posts of responsibility: another group of nine participants. Each focus group was approximately two hours duration and held in one of the three schools. The questions asked in the focus group discussions are in Appendix 7.

3.7 Summary

This research arises from the author's deep commitment to educational leadership practice that is open to inquiry and reflection as a basis for continuous improvement. The research design reflects a co-constructivist view of knowledge. The status is that of emergent insights and ideas. Insights are not candidates for validity as scientific research would be. To present them as such would be to misunderstand them. Their validity is based on the insights of practitioners being brought to light. They are presented in the following chapters as the participants' views and, as such, are hypotheses which can be further tested.

Following a preliminary study with a group of teachers in one school, the researcher then used a questionnaire to explore and ascertain teachers' perceptions of distributed leadership and its impact on teaching and learning. Responses to the questionnaires then formed the basis of the questions to be dealt with in the focus group stage of the research.

Chapter 4 outlines the agenda for the focus group discussions. The findings of the focus groups are presented and analysed in subsequent chapters. Chapter 5 explores the concept of distributed leadership as understood by the research participants. Chapter 6 examines the links between distributed leadership and learning and Chapter 7 reviews the perceptions of principals and deputy principals of their role in leading learning in a distributed leadership context.

Chapter Four

Setting the Agenda for the Focus Groups

4.0 Introduction

Questionnaires were distributed to teachers in each of the three schools. The chief function of the questionnaire was to establish the most pertinent agenda for the qualitative stage of the research. Therefore, the questionnaire results will not be presented in tabular form in the body of the thesis. Instead, these can be found in Appendix 9. This chapter will give a summary account of how the responses to the questionnaire furnished an agenda of relevant items for the focus group research.

The design and distribution of the questionnaires was described in Chapter 3. In each of the three schools, all teachers were invited to complete the questionnaire, which comprised statements and open questions. Responses to the statements yielded two sets of themes; one suggesting respondents' perceptions of distributed leadership and the second suggesting some leadership practices they perceive to be exercised in their schools. Sections 4.1 and 4.2 respectively present the key themes emerging from these responses.

Some interesting differences emerged between schools and between respondents' views of distributed leadership and how it is practised in their schools. Some of these issues are presented in Section 4.3 and Section 4.4 respectively as issues that will be further explored in the focus group discussions.

Questionnaire respondents were also asked an open question about their understanding of distributed leadership. These responses yielded further insights and are summarised in Section 4.5.

Section 4.6 concludes the chapter by outlining the key themes that form the agenda for the focus group research. It also identifies a number of claims emerging from the

questionnaires that might be described as professional assertions. These assertions will be examined throughout the following chapters.

4.1 Perceptions of Distributed Leadership

Responses to the first set of statements on the questionnaire identified a number of issues perceived by the respondents to be associated with distributed leadership. These can be summarised as follows:-

- Teachers' influence and responsibilities
- Structures and systems such as subject departments and posts of responsibility
- The learning environment
- Involvement in decision-making.

It was evident from the questionnaire responses that all teachers perceived themselves to be leaders. However, the context of that leadership was in the classroom – they see themselves as leaders of their students within the classroom, having a direct influence on their learning. Their view of themselves as leaders with influence beyond the classroom, i.e. in the wider school environment, is contingent upon particular circumstances prevailing; for example, a culture which allows them to accept responsibilities, showing initiative and being given opportunities to lead by the principal.

The dominant pattern of responses to the questionnaire suggested that structures such as subject departments should aim to improve teaching and learning; each subject department should have a leader and a designated meeting time and should be a forum for teachers to plan and review their work together as a team.

This dominant pattern also revealed the respondents' belief that the learning environment is influenced positively when teachers work together and when they engage in professional development to improve their knowledge and skills.

Finally, respondents perceive distributed leadership as including their involvement in decision-making and in leading new initiatives in the school. However, they also

acknowledge the key role the principal plays, for example in ensuring that there is a shared vision among staff and that pastoral care systems operate effectively for students.

4.2 Perceptions of Distributed Leadership Practices

In response to the second set of statements on the questionnaire, respondents highlighted a number of leadership practices that are operational in their schools to a greater or lesser extent. These practices were identified along a spectrum ranging from not existing in the school, at one end, to the condition being well established or refined, at the other end. In spite of variation within and across schools in their responses a number of themes emerged worthy of further exploration:-

- Monitoring and supporting student learning
- Responsibilities of individual teachers
- Working together as a staff
- Structures and systems such as subject departments and posts of responsibility

Within the theme of monitoring and supporting student learning, four statements found particular support among respondents. These four statements included i) having systems in place to support student learning, ii) analysing results of examinations and using the data to review practices, iii) all teachers playing a role in monitoring student performance and iv) all school policies being designed with a focus on enhancing, improving and developing a high quality learning environment. As these statements relate more specifically to teaching and learning, they are incorporated in Chapter 6, Linking Distributed Leadership with Learning.

The responsibilities of individual teachers incorporated communicating with parents, engaging in professional development in their own subject area and accepting responsibility for leadership beyond their own classroom.

Working together as a staff encompasses discussing school development priorities at staff meetings, engaging in professional development on whole-school issues, collectively prioritising specific actions to improve learning and providing the best learning opportunities for students.

While subject departments were perceived by respondents to form a central part of distributed leadership, they are considered to be a forum for sharing resources; but other issues such as planning and reviewing work together are not yet well established practices.

4.3 Variation across schools

While Sections 4.1 and 4.2 above highlighted emerging issues for further exploration based on common themes across the three schools, some variation across schools – equally worthy of further exploration – was also evident. Below, two examples of variation are presented.

Decision-making

One of the emerging issues raised in the questionnaire responses was involvement in decision-making. This was considered to be an important element of distributed leadership. The table below presents an insight into the respondents’ views of the practice of being involved in decision-making and being listened to. There is a marked contrast between the scores in the different schools, with a very low percentage of respondents in Louvain perceiving that they are actively involved in these aspects of school.

Table 4.1 Involvement in decision-making

	Eldorado % 5&4	Louvain %5&4	Heidelberg %5&4
Senior management (principals and deputy) listens to teachers’ voices	73.33%	38.46%	35.71%
Post-holders have a significant role in decision-making	40.00%	20.51%	32.50%
All teachers are involved in decisions which affect the whole school	56.25%	28.21%	12.20%

The student voice

There was one statement pertaining to the involvement of students in decision-making in each of the sections of the questionnaires. The first statement, presented in the table below,

reflects respondents' perceptions of this as a distributed leadership issue while the second statement in the table below shows the perceptions of this statement being practised.

Table 4.2 Students' Voice

	Eldorado % 5&4	Louvain %5&4	Heidelberg %5&4
School management should ensure that the student voice is heard in the decision-making processes of the school	93.75%	53.85%	73.81%
Students get an opportunity to make suggestions about their learning (e.g. subject choices, approaches to assessment etc)	12.5%	7.69%	23.81%

These results show an interesting variation across the three schools, with a very high percentage of respondents from Eldorado showing agreement with the statement that school management should ensure that the student voice is heard.

Also of note is the difference between declared views and the actual practice in the schools. All three schools indicate a high degree of agreement that the student voice should be heard but it appears that, in practice, students are not given much opportunity to make suggestions. Further examples of difference between perceptions and practices are presented in Section 4.4 below.

4.4 Perceived differences between perceptions and practices

It is worth noting that there was considerable variation between respondents' perceptions of what constitutes distributed leadership in theory and what they perceive to be distributed leadership in practice in their schools. Table 4.3 below highlights the gap, as perceived by the questionnaire respondents, between distributed leadership perceptions and practices.

Table 4.3 Examples of differences between perceptions and practices, as ascertained from questionnaire respondents

Perceptions	Practices
95% agree that student learning is enhanced when teachers work together	46% agree that they work together, as a school community, to ensure that they are offering the best curricular opportunities for students
80% agree that teachers should plan and review	49% agree that teachers in the same subject

their work together with colleagues in the same subject departments	departments share resources 32% agree that in their subject department they work together to systematically review their work
79% agree that teachers from different subject departments should share ideas about teaching and learning	39% agree that teachers work together in teams (e.g. to review practice, to design policies, create new ideas and implement plans)
77% agree that when teachers attend professional development courses they should share their learning with colleagues	42% agree that teachers are encouraged to engage in professional development related to whole-school issues (e.g. school development planning, special needs, pastoral care etc) 22% agree that opportunities are provided to discuss new classroom practices with colleagues.

While respondents agree that distributed leadership means working together, planning and reviewing and sharing ideas, the majority of respondents do not consider that this happens in their schools. These issues will be included in the focus group discussions and reviewed in subsequent chapters.

4.5 Open question: Understanding of shared/distributed leadership

For further insights into respondents’ perceptions of distributed leadership, the responses to the open question are presented below, school by school. The question asked respondents to describe their understanding of shared or distributed leadership.

Understanding of shared/distributed leadership in School No.1, Eldorado

The predominant themes emerging from the respondents from Eldorado were “working together”, “involvement in decision-making” and “consultation”.

The concept of working together, as described by respondents, incorporated “ideals and values held in common by all staff” (assistant principal) and “all members of staff and management setting example and goals together for students and each other” (non post-holder). Both of these statements highlight the sense of having shared goals and a shared vision for the school. Two further statements by respondents include actions that need to be taken to build this shared vision.

All teachers, non teaching staff and others work together ... in ensuring opportunities are put in place to better students’ ... moral, academic, social and emotional well being. (non post holder)

Different teams come together and reflect on progress and plan and revise ideas for the future (special duties teacher)

In addition to the four respondents quoted above, a further statement referred to the need for coordination across all teachers “to ensure a fully rounded education” (non post holder).

The other two themes, involvement in decision-making and consultation, are closely linked in that the reference to consultation, in the case of five respondents, was in the context of staff being consulted when decisions were being taken. One respondent made the distinction between all teachers and post-holders, stating that all staff should be consulted on major decisions and post-holders should be involved in all other decisions that affect the whole school. In the other responses reference to consultation included either a reason for consultation (usually because the decisions involve change which will affect everybody) or the manner in which the consultation could take place (for example, at staff meetings). One assistant principal made reference to initiating new ideas:

Where a culture exists that encourages all staff members to put forward suggestions and initiate new projects/ideas – where everyone has a sense of ownership for the school and its mission (assistant principal)

Two respondents made reference to students; one stating that various jobs could be delegated not only to teachers but also to students and the other stated that everybody, including students, can be a leader, depending on the situation.

As can be seen from the above, the three main themes ('working together', 'involvement in decision-making' and 'consultation') overlap considerably and apart from the five participants who left this question blank, each response includes reference to at least one of these themes.

Understanding of shared/distributed leadership in School No.2, Louvain

In Louvain, the responses to the open question about what teachers understand by shared leadership included eleven (out of 39 responses) references to everybody being involved in leadership. In some cases, 'everybody' was defined as principal, deputy, year heads and class teachers, while in others it was explained as "all staff plus management", and in yet another it was "principals and deputy and especially post-holders". There was also reference in some of these responses to leadership in specific areas, although the "specific" was not defined.

The next most common theme in these responses was involvement in "decision-making". Seven participants made reference to shared leadership as involving everybody in decision-making. Again, there was some variation in meaning, ranging from "all decisions should be made by everybody", to the principal and deputy make decisions, "taking on board the majority views of staff". Others referred to the topic of the decision, stating that "decisions regarding the workplace conditions or student achievement" should be made by all members of staff.

Six participants referred to "working together" as being their perception of shared leadership. In some instances they qualified this as "working towards agreed goals and aspirations", "agreed direction" or "sharing strengths".

Two participants made reference to all stakeholders' voices being heard and another participant stated that recognising talents and encouraging ideas was part of shared leadership.

Understanding of shared/distributed leadership in School No.3, Heidelberg.

In response to the open question in Heidelberg, being involved in decision-making emerged as a very strong theme. Of the twenty-six responses to this question (sixteen were left blank) ten included reference to teachers being involved in decision-making and/or “having a voice”.

Principal, deputy, heads of year, as well as teachers together make decisions regarding the school as a whole. (non post holder)

These responses are in keeping with the findings from section 1 of the questionnaire, 95% of respondents agreeing that all teachers should be involved in decisions that affect the whole school, but contrasts with the perceptions of practice, where only 12% of respondents perceived that this practice was well established.

One respondent referred to the student voice being heard.

It should also include student voice via student council/prefects/captains etc. (assistant principal)

Another respondent included parents among the people who are involved in student learning, thereby implying that they might be involved in decision-making, or at least that their voice would be heard. There was one reference to the fact that the decision-making should be structured.

The responses included reference to the types of decision in which all staff should be included. Among the responses was “expressing opinion on the running of the school”, “decisions regarding the school as a whole”, “expressing their feelings on issues and putting forward resolutions/ideas”, “general decision-making” and “decision-making on policies”. Reference was also made in one response to the degrees of influence.

All teaching members contribute to the decision-making, possibly with varying degrees of influence. (special duties teacher)

The above statement links closely to the concept of having one's voice heard. Five of the ten respondents who referred to decision-making also made reference to the importance of "being listened to" and six respondents included "working together towards a common goal" or having a "shared vision".

Five respondents made specific reference to student achievement, "being involved in" and "taking responsibility for" this, along with "promoting new ideas" and "new teaching methods" and "initiatives". This presents a contrast to the statements in part two of the questionnaire where two pertinent statements, new ideas being discussed at staff meetings and opportunities to discuss new classroom practices, found low levels of agreement.

A number of other issues were raised by individual respondents, for example, "teamwork", "delegation" and "being part of a community". One respondent stated that "some issues are for senior management only", and that "teachers cannot always be consulted". Another stated that they did not understand what was being asked of them.

4.6 Conclusion: key themes and some professional assertions

The results of the questionnaire provided sufficient indicators to the researcher that the respondents' understanding of leadership issues incorporated many of the features of the distributed leadership framework outlined in Chapter 2. In summary, their perceptions clearly show recognition that each teacher is a leader of students within their own classroom. They also recognise that their influence over students can extend beyond the classroom. Teachers also exert influence over colleagues both formally and informally, through subject departments and other structures such as posts of responsibilities. Respondents also highlighted the importance of being involved in decision-making, particularly when the decisions affect the whole school. These issues set the agenda for further exploration of the first research question:

- 1. How do teachers and principals understand the concept of distributed leadership?*

The focus group addressed this question, using the observations from the questionnaires as guidance for in-depth discussion. The outcomes are presented and analysed in Chapter Five.

The questionnaire findings highlighted many practices that link leadership to learning, including: the analysis of students' results; teachers' use of these in reviewing and planning their work; monitoring and supporting students' learning; high quality communication systems between school and home. The teachers with posts of responsibility, especially year heads, are considered to play a significant role in supporting students and in communicating with home. Their leadership role therefore is significant. These practices are perceived to enhance learning and require multiple leaders working interdependently throughout the school.

Further links between distributed leadership and teaching and learning were evident through respondents' agreement that student learning is enhanced when teachers work together and that their own teaching improves when they receive support from management and colleagues. There was also a high level of agreement among respondents that subject departments aim to improve teaching and learning. These issues set the agenda for the second research question:

2. *How does the concept of distributed leadership, as understood by the teachers, principals and deputy principals, link to teaching and learning?*

Chapter Six presents and analyses the outcomes of the focus group discussions as they pertain to this question.

There are implications in these initial findings for the practices of principals and deputy principals. For example, the results of the questionnaire suggest that senior management must listen to teachers' voices. Teachers must be facilitated in working together; they must be given opportunities to engage in professional development and to share their learning, and new ideas, with colleagues. These actions not only require leadership but have the potential to develop leadership capacity in a school. However, particular practices and attitudes on the part of the principal and deputy are often required to facilitate such

developments. These issues are further explored through the focus groups to address the third research question:

3. *To what extent do the principal's / deputy principal's own leadership practices enhance teaching and learning in the school? Do these practices include distributing leadership?*

Emergent Professional Imperatives

The findings established by the questionnaires, when placed in the context of the review of the research literature on distributed leadership in Chapter 2, highlight a number of professional assertions, or professional imperatives. These imperatives are listed below and they will form a backdrop to the analysis to be undertaken in the following chapters.

1. Teachers believe that they are leaders but their perceptions of the nature and type of leadership varies considerably. For the purposes of this thesis a definition of distributed leadership that confines itself to the teacher exerting leadership influence over students within the confines of the classroom only is not sufficient. For leadership to be distributed, teachers must have influence over their colleagues as well as their students.
2. Distributed leadership requires recognition of individual teachers' traits and work. Teachers need to be supported and affirmed so that a level of confidence can be built up which will enable them to exercise influence over others, as well as nurturing the concept of reflection on their own practice and the creation of a culture of openness and critique. This type of culture does not appear to be the norm in the three schools in this study.
3. A central tenet of distributed leadership is the concept of collaboration. For leadership to be distributed among a variety of people within the school community, a collaborative work environment must exist. This will not happen automatically. It requires conscious consideration by the principal and deputy principal so that appropriate systems and structures are set up to enable teachers to work together.
4. Setting up systems and structures may allow for leadership to be distributed but, if they do not have a specific educational focus, they may not contribute positively to improving teaching and learning.

5. The role of the principal and deputy principal is of central importance. They influence the learning environment and they set up structures to enable teachers to work together.

While the questionnaire results set a broad agenda and yielded initial insights into teachers' perceptions of distributed leadership and its impact on teaching and learning, the focus groups aim to explore this agenda further and to test some of the assertions arising from this preliminary investigation.

Given the different roles and responsibilities exercised by different people within the school, the researcher considered it to be important to distinguish between the teachers who hold posts of responsibility and those who do not hold such posts. By distinguishing between these two categories, i.e. having two different focus groups, she could identify if perceptions of distributed leadership varied between those already in a leadership position and those not holding any formal leadership position. The third research question focuses on the particular role of principals and deputy principals and therefore it was appropriate that a separate focus group discussion was held for them. Chapters Five, Six and Seven respectively, address the three research questions.

Chapter Five

Results and Analysis of Focus Group Discussions: perceptions of distributed leadership

5.0 Introduction

Chapter Four outlined the agenda, arising from the questionnaire responses, for the focus group research. This agenda includes firstly recognition that each teacher is a leader within their own classroom but that their influence over students can extend beyond the classroom. Secondly, leadership occurs through structures such as subject departments and positions such as posts of responsibility. Through such structures and positions, teachers exercise leadership among colleagues. Thirdly, respondents perceive that distributed leadership incorporates interactions that influence the learning environment, for example working collaboratively with colleagues, having opportunities to lead new initiatives and engaging in professional development. Finally, distributed leadership also incorporates a sense of involvement in the school through active participation in decision-making.

In this chapter, the results of focus group discussions are presented and analysed to examine these issues further. Three focus group discussions were held: one with principals and deputy principals (6 people); one with post-holders (9 people); one with non post-holders (9 people). The principal and deputy principal from each of the three schools attended the first focus group. The post-holders' focus group was attended by three teachers from each school, each of them holding either an assistant principal or special duties post of responsibility. The third focus group comprised three teachers from each school who do not hold posts of responsibility.

To explore the first research question: "How do teachers and principals understand the concept of distributed leadership?" the emerging themes from the questionnaires are reviewed followed by the presentation and analysis of the findings from the focus groups.

In the focus group for principals and deputy principals it was explained at the outset that the term ‘distributed leadership’ is used interchangeably with ‘shared leadership’. As reviewed in Chapter Two, Duignan favours the term “shared” while Spillane favours “distributed” and while their research reflects some differentiation between the two, the working definition for this thesis incorporated key features from both. The author felt that it would be easier for participants to respond to the word ‘shared’ as the term ‘distributed’ may not be commonly used in the schools. For that reason, the term ‘shared’ was used in the teachers’ questionnaire.

Section 5.1 presents a summary and analysis of respondents’ understanding of distributed leadership, including factors that support teachers in their work, using the agenda arising from the questionnaires and the understanding of distributed leadership as expressed in the three focus groups: the post-holders, non post-holders and principals/deputy principals. A comparison will be made between the views of the three groups.

Participants in all three focus groups were asked to discuss whether they viewed distributed leadership as leadership held in the first instance by the principal and subsequently distributed or dispersed to others or if all teachers had a responsibility to be leaders, particularly in relation to their own teaching. In section 5.2 the results of discussions on this issue are presented and analysed, along with the implications for developing leadership capacity in a school.

One of the salient issues emerging from the focus group discussions was that of the leadership role played by post-holders. Section 5.3 analyses the key emerging issues and presents the views of the focus group participants on whether post-holders are considered as having a particular leadership role and how they are supported in this role.

This chapter concludes by summarising the emerging views of the research participants on distributed leadership and the factors influencing its development. A summary of the leadership role of post-holders is also presented.

5.1 Participants' Understanding of Distributed Leadership

Teachers' views of shared leadership – from questionnaires

In each of the three schools, all teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire which included an open-ended question asking them what they understood by 'shared leadership'.

The quotes below reflect the common themes that emerged across the three schools:-

1. “*Working together* to achieve agreed goals”. Respondents who used the phrase “working together” in their response qualified it in different ways, but in most cases it meant working on whole school issues, rather than, for example, teachers of the same subject planning their classes together. The interpretation was in the context of the whole school.
2. “... that all staff members are *consulted* on major *decision-making* processes ... because these decisions usually affect the majority of staff”. References by respondents to decision-making can be divided into two categories, the first, where everybody is involved in making the decisions and the second, where staff are consulted, their voice is heard, but they may not have the ‘ultimate say’ in the decisions. In general the decisions in question were those pertaining to ‘whole school’ issues, for example school policies on attendance and punctuality, or decisions that affect everybody such as changing the structure of the school day from an eight-period to a nine-period day.
3. “... everybody being *involved* in leadership”. It is not clear from the responses what was meant by ‘leadership’ in this context. In some responses there was reference to “specific areas”, which might suggest a delegation of responsibilities, for example to post-holders.
4. “All staff members should have a *voice*”. It is interesting to note that “being listened to” and “having a voice” were both stated by respondents as features of shared leadership. The implication was that not only was it necessary to provide a forum where teachers could express their views, but that these ‘voices’ would be taken into consideration when decisions were being made.

5. “Working as a *team* with the same goals”. “Principals, deputy principals and teachers should *delegate* responsibility”. Teamwork referred to teams such as subject departments, year head teams and special needs teams and how these teams are facilitated in working together. Delegation was described as roles and responsibilities being assigned to other members of staff.

A number of ‘secondary’ themes, i.e. mentioned in individual schools, rather than in all three schools, were also raised, for example:-

- setting example and goals and initiating new projects (school 1);
- recognising talents and encouraging ideas (school 2);
- promoting new ideas and new teaching methods and initiatives, being part of a community, working together towards a common goal and taking responsibility for student achievement (school 3).

The themes emerging from this open question generally suggest a response that supports a view of shared/distributed leadership which reflects community and collaboration rather than emphasising hierarchy or autocracy.

The second open question on the questionnaires asked teachers to name the factors that support them in their work. The key issue emerging was the need for support and help from both colleagues and management, particularly in dealing with student behavioural or disciplinary issues. They also referred to the approachability, accessibility and openness of the principal as being an important factor in enabling them to do their job well. Other factors stated were encouragement from management, being trusted and treated as a professional, good organisation and planning and being allowed to try out new ideas without interference.

The views of distributed leadership expressed by respondents in the questionnaires were reinforced in the focus group discussions, particularly by the post-holders. However, different views on the nature of decision-making were expressed in the post-holders’ focus group; firstly, if leadership is distributed then that should mean making decisions together

but on the other hand, “sometimes it is important for a principal to make a decision. There might be a decision that the team can’t agree on and it is a horrible decision and the principal has to make the decision.” (PH¹²)

The participants in the post-holders’ focus group agreed that it was important that everybody has a voice.

It is important that everybody has a voice and that the same amount of listening is applied to everybody for it to work and to be real leadership. (PH)

The idea of having a voice was extended further by another post-holder, adding that, “if, at a staff meeting, people are listened to, then you are going to get the message that this is a good place to share initiative and share ideas.” (PH) The post-holders also acknowledged that there was a lot of support from year heads and management in relation to working as a team, particularly when newly appointed to a post of responsibility.

The participants in the non post-holders’ focus group agreed that teachers are role models for the students and that their behaviour and interactions with colleagues, as well as with students, have a major influence on students.

We’re role models for students in what we do, in how we interact and speak with each other. (NP)

Principals’ and Deputy Principals’ view of distributed leadership

In the principals’ and deputy principals’ focus group the question on their understanding of shared or distributed leadership provoked discussion on a number of issues, ranging from formal and informal roles, to activities teachers might undertake and be encouraged to undertake. The principals’ and deputy principals’ focus group also included discussion on traits such as potential, influence, initiative and authority and incorporated the concepts of ownership, delegation, capacity, belonging to a team and the school as an organic structure.

¹² In the focus group discussions, the author cannot (and would not wish to) distinguish between speakers, therefore, the referencing system being used is P/DP for all quotes from the principals and deputy principals group, PH for the post-holders group and NP for the non post-holders.

Many of the concepts articulated referred to relationships, practices and interactions undertaken as part of the daily life of the school.

The focus group discussion allowed for a degree of interaction, disagreement and debate about issues and concepts that was not possible in responding to a questionnaire. Leadership and management were debated. While there was a general consensus that leadership involved everybody in the school, there was some debate about the role of post-holders. This theme is discussed further below. There was agreement, however, that leadership was about 'undefined roles' and these roles could change and be taken by different people at different times. The roles could be formal or informal.

The consensus among the group was that all teachers, not just post-holders, can be empowered to lead.

My understanding of distributed shared leadership is that most of the people, if not everybody in the building would have a sense of leading some aspect of school life ... I certainly wouldn't believe that you have to hold a post of responsibility to share in the leadership of the school; you can do so [even] by not having a post. [For example] as a subject head in a department, leading the school musical, leading a variety of different activities in the school, [teachers] share in that overall leadership of the school going forward. (P/DP)

The above opening comment set the tone for distributed leadership as an inclusive concept, not specifically related to formal roles or posts of responsibility. The three quotes below taken from the principals' and deputy principals' focus group discussion identify distributed leadership as extending beyond classroom leadership to whole-school issues.

Now almost every member of staff will either have authority delegated to them for a particular area or will take it on their own back to organise something. Whether you are a tutor or whatever it is, there is much more involvement in school life now than there was in the past. (P/DP)

I think you try to develop a leadership capacity within people and they express that through the particular roles they are doing. It is looking at the whole management thing, it is the whole team aspect, unlocking potential, and that can be channelled

into different roles at different times. If a person can go from one role to another, they develop various aspects of leadership. (P/DP)

I would see leadership as leadership wherever it expresses itself throughout the school, whether it is in management or whether it is running the school musical or whatever it might be that it is the capacity of the person to bring people with you to achieve a particular task. (P/DP)

These three perspectives: a) delegation, b) building leadership capacity and c) the capacity “to bring people with you” to influence others, were central to the principals’ and deputy principals’ discussion on shared and distributed leadership.

a) Delegation

There was some debate among the principals/deputy principals about delegation. Delegation meant that people were asked to take a role or carry out a task, whereas leadership means that teachers take the initiative to decide independently to undertake a task or a role.

You can make somebody a year head, or ask them to be a year head or exam coordinator but they may not carry it out as well as somebody else. So just because you are given the mark of leadership, it does not necessarily work that you are going to be that person. (P/DP)

When you delegate you give authority but not everyone accepts it equally or is equal to responding to it. (P/DP)

The idea of accepting authority when delegated was also raised by the teachers in the context of post of responsibility, and is referred to in section 5.3 below.

The teachers’ responses to the question on their understanding of shared leadership included delegation, along with teamwork and setting example and goals. The principals/deputy principals concurred with these concepts being part of distributed leadership. There was agreement among both groups that teamwork was very important and

that this should be modelled from the top down, by principal and deputy principal working closely together.

I think a very important word in the context of sharing leadership is working as part of a team. (P/DP)

b) Leadership capacity

At times, some of the principals/deputy principals struggled to find meaning in the term 'distributed leadership'. In attempting to understand and articulate the concept, and to distinguish it from management, one participant (a deputy principal) said that his understanding of leadership was about vision and asked the question "how do you distribute that?" The term "unlocking potential" found resonance among the group. Distributing leadership was seen, not so much as something that can be parcelled up and handed around but rather as a way of being and acting/behaving in the school context. In the course of the discussion participants asked questions of each other

How do you distribute leadership, if the essence of leadership is something that is definitely not management or administration? It is that thing that sets it apart. (P/DP)

Some suggestions were presented in response to this question.

I think that probably the answer to some degree is a spectrum; there is nothing black and white in this, so it is a spectrum. I think [it is] about unlocking potential, is a very good metaphor for what you are doing. (P/DP)

I think you can't just 'distribute' it to them. You can't just say here 'share out the cards, this is your hand of cards etc.' It is not like that. If you open the opportunity and give possibility for potential to be unlocked then you are effectively distributing leadership. (P/DP)

c) Influence

There was agreement that there are "so many aspects" to leadership but that "the bottom line is that the measure of leadership is influence" (P/DP). However, "you can provide opportunities for people to display initiative and to grow their influence" (P/DP). The word

“influence” emerged frequently throughout the discussion, as is evident in the selection of quotations below:--

The measure of leadership is influence.

If a person has influence, they have leadership.

Often you find people with more leadership skills and more influence who don't have the title.

He was able to get people on board.

You need to drive it and influence others.

The person who is exerting influence and pushing things forward.

(P/DP)

While this concept of influence did not appear in the teachers' questionnaire, it emerged in both the post-holders and non post-holders' focus groups in the context of how teachers might influence each others' work in the classroom and is discussed further in Chapter Six, as it relates to teaching and learning.

Comparison of principals and deputy principals with teachers' views of shared and distributed leadership.

In the principals' and deputy principals' focus group, distributed leadership is discussed, not as a technical 'parcelling out' of tasks or roles, but rather as a way in which people interact with each other. Concepts mentioned by principals and deputy principals included empowerment, giving authority and independence, involvement in decision-making, recognising expertise, ownership, having a voice, leading by example, delegation and creating an environment where people are not afraid to take risks and are encouraged to take initiative. There is strong overlap between the views expressed by the principals and deputy principals and those expressed by both post-holders and non post-holders.

While the principals and deputy principals did not use the term “consulting” with teachers when making decisions, they did, however, mention “having a voice” and “involvement” in decision-making. They expressed the view that if teachers “actually have a voice and have their opinions listened to, you will find that people will take responsibility outside their designated or defined role”. (P/DP)

There was very strong agreement among participants in all three focus groups that leadership is a concept that can apply to all teachers, whether they hold a position or post of responsibility or not. The participants in all three focus groups agreed that distributed leadership is about empowering people, allowing them to take initiative and be involved in decision-making. They also agreed that it is about the atmosphere in the school that encourages teachers to take leadership roles in specific aspects of the school, for example, co-curricular or extra-curricular activities and special functions that occur in the school from time to time. In all three focus groups there was agreement that distributed leadership incorporates the idea of teachers working together in teams and collaborating in planning and providing learning opportunities for students. This applies at both subject department level and at whole school level, for example having a team approach to policy development.

One area, however, where differences occurred within and across the focus groups, was that of the post of responsibility structure. In the principals and deputy principals’ focus group participants agreed that, although teachers were appointed to a position of management within the post structure, that did not automatically make them a leader. The discussion among the post-holders themselves elicited different interpretations of their leadership role and the non post-holders agreed that the leadership role of post-holders differed, depending on the individual person and situation. These issues are discussed further in sections 5.2 and 5.3 below.

5.2 Distributed leadership – top down or bottom up? Developing distributed leadership

To explore their understanding of distributed leadership further, participants in all three focus groups were asked if they see distributed leadership as a responsibility held in the first instance by the principal and deputy principal but dispersed or distributed to others, or, is leadership something that all teachers have responsibility for by, for example, showing initiative in their own teaching? In other words, is leadership distributed downwards from the principal and deputy principal or do all teachers demonstrate leadership from the bottom up?

In their focus group principals and deputy principals responded to this question by discussing interactions between themselves and staff members, for example, they agreed that principals must be aware of the situation and know what is going on in order to bring people with them to achieve their vision. In this discussion, reference was also made to unlocking potential, providing opportunities, building capacity, encouraging teamwork, trusting staff to do things and giving them ‘a long lead’. There was also a suggestion that

if you have appropriate levels of leadership distributed throughout the school, you can free up the principal and deputy principal to be more involved in more aspects of teaching and learning and the curriculum. (P/DP)

In the post-holders’ focus group the question of whether leadership originates with the principal/deputy principal or with teachers was keenly debated. Their discussion started with the view that teachers have responsibilities from the start to show initiative, but then concern was expressed that post-holders were asked to do too much. In general there was agreement that post-holders should exercise leadership in relation to students and parents as appropriate to their role, but that the principal and deputy principal should manage staff. However, one or two post-holders stated that they felt, as leaders, that these boundaries should be blurred sometimes. After all, if holding a post of responsibility was a precursor to becoming a deputy principal or principal, then this would be good preparation for that role. The group as a whole, however, did not agree with these comments. There was further discussion among the post-holders on the issue of payment – they acknowledged that the

posts of responsibility carry with them a set of duties for which they are responsible but some members of the group stated that they were not paid enough to take on the responsibility of managing their colleagues and that the duties of the post-holders originally were supposed to be carried out during the school day.

In the non post-holders' focus group, the response to the question as to where distributed leadership originates was that it should be a mixture of both top down and bottom up.

You need both. You need good leadership and a good principal and deputy to say how it is done. But equally you need to use your own initiative". (NP)

There was agreement that if all teachers took leadership responsibility beyond their classroom, e.g. for students' behaviour in the corridor, it would be a very good school. But a note of caution was sounded about some teachers taking on too much power and the need for the principal to "direct" came through strongly - "he directs us to make sure we're all singing from the same hymn sheet". (NP)

Across the three groups, the responses to the question of where distributed leadership originates, can be summarised by stating that while everybody should take responsibility and be free to take initiative, all were in agreement that the principal and deputy play a particular leadership role, whether in managing staff or directing practices, so that there will be a shared vision in the school. Even the principals themselves talked about creating an atmosphere that would be empowering and the need for direction from the top was evident in their comments. The discussions among the three groups suggest that there is a responsibility on principals and deputy principals to create an atmosphere that is conducive to teachers showing initiative and being involved in decision-making. The perceptions arising from the teachers' open-ended question in the questionnaire was that they should be involved in decision-making, the culture should be collaborative, everybody's voice should be heard and people should work together. However, the comments about 'direction' from the principal and deputy principal suggest that they play a key role in defining the atmosphere in the school, which allows leadership to be distributed. In order to develop this further each group was asked how this type of leadership might be developed.

How leadership is developed – what practices encourage others to display leadership?

In the principals/deputy principals' focus group discussion many of the themes raised earlier once again surfaced, for example, teamwork, delegation, influence and having their voices heard. In addition, the principals and deputy principals recognised the role they play in providing opportunities, for example, creating teams and encouraging teachers to be part of the team and to take leadership roles within that context. They expressed the view that unexpected leaders sometimes emerge from such situations.

People you wouldn't think come out of it, are very capable and very able and they would never be the first ones to put themselves forward. So working in the smaller teams is very good. (P/DP)

Role modelling and example given from 'the top' were seen as important by all groups.

I think that in terms of leadership in the school, it has to be ... role modelled very well by the senior management team, the Principal and the Deputy Principal. (P/DP)

You also have to lead by example yourself and especially the Principal and Deputy Principal; if they are willing to show leadership and distribute tasks and leadership roles to people I think you will have a more cooperative staff. (P/DP)

Both post-holders and non post-holders agreed that the principal and deputy principal must be willing to 'let go', that they must be open, and that the example must come from the top.

I think leadership is developed as long as the principal and the vice principal are not hanging on to power and want to do everything themselves. (PH)

But I think as long as they are willing to allow other people to get on with what they are good at, I think that leadership just happens. (PH)

I suppose that comes from the top down. If the principal is not willing to be open to that then it can't really happen. (NP)

Pragmatism! One of the participants in the principals/deputy principals' discussion made the comment "You need to accept too that some people will not change and will only want

to go in and do their teaching and do it well or not.” This assertion however was contested and suggestions were put forward regarding affirming people, recognising their individual worth and taking small steps towards change.

Individual recognition: The principals and deputy principals agreed that it very important to recognise and affirm the work of teachers, as shown in the selection of comments below:

Value people and acknowledge contributions, no matter how small.

I think people’s self worth is important, you praise them and affirm them.

Research shows that the greatest incentive for employees is the sense of being affirmed and being involved, not wages and other things. (P/DP)

Some specific suggestions were offered as to how they might affirm teachers, such as having rules at meetings where everybody has to speak once before anybody can speak a second time.

In the post-holders and non post-holders’ focus groups they also agreed that the concepts of recognition and affirmation made an important contribution to the development of distributed leadership. Being asked how things were going and being given opportunities to show leadership even in small ways, such as taking minutes at meetings or making announcements over the intercom, helped them to exercise and develop some leadership skills.

An atmosphere of trust and risk taking was considered important by participants in all three focus groups.

One thing that came to my mind was that there has to be trust that if you are a very tight Principal and Deputy, and don’t trust your staff to do things, you are always checking up on them. You have to allow them a long leash and if they make a mistake or things go a bit pear shaped, be prepared to live with that. (P/DP)

The non post-holders felt that a supportive atmosphere was essential, the ‘approachability’ of the principal was significant and the atmosphere in the school must be conducive to people becoming involved, expressing opinions and feeling free to speak at staff meetings.

I think it definitely depends on the atmosphere and the environment you are in. (NP)

In all three focus groups the concept of structures was discussed. They were described as meetings with post-holders and subject departments and were considered to be a vehicle where people could have a voice, be involved in decision-making and have opportunities to develop leadership

... regular meetings with post-holders and subject meetings with subject departments. So there are channels and there are ways for people to put forward ideas and have them discussed. (P/DP)

I think people feel that they have a voice as well and they are involved in the decision-making process. (P/DP)

The post-holders and non post-holders recognised the important role the principals/deputy principals play in setting up these structures as teachers themselves are not in a position to do so.

They have to set up those formal structures really, don’t they? (PH)

Once the different departments meet and start discussing things, then that just opens the channels. (PH)

I think it depends on how the staff are organised. What I used to find funny is that it is always the same person that chairs the meeting. It is nice if it occasionally is a case where ‘you chair the meeting this time’ and everyone gets a turn at it. (NP)

A further point made in relation to the development of leadership was that leadership opportunities should be inclusive: everybody should be afforded the chance to exercise leadership from time to time. It was stated by one of the post-holders that a measure of leadership was that different people volunteered for activities at different times. If the same people always volunteered, then leadership was not being developed. This point found some agreement among the group members.

I think you would notice if you looked over a year at a staff and see who volunteers for what? If those volunteers are coming from a broad range you are probably doing a fairly good job towards promoting leadership in your school. (PH)

The comment below, made by a teacher who had a post of responsibility in a previous school but not in the current school, sums up the non post-holders discussion on how leadership might be developed throughout the school. It clearly indicates that distributed leadership is not specifically related to posts of responsibility, but rather to the general atmosphere that prevails.

I have no post here, nothing, but I feel I have much more opportunity in terms of leadership than I did in the other place and feel much freer to speak at a staff meeting than before. Even though I had the title, the way of giving leadership is much freer now. I would be more willing to step up to the mark as opposed to it being imposed on you. (NP)

Why might leadership be distributed?

Part of the principals/deputy principals' focus group discussion centred on the reasons for distributing leadership in schools. This highlighted two different perspectives on distributing leadership, one being the 'nuts and bolts' of managing the school and the second being the potential benefit to students when more people feel ownership of the running of the school. The responses raised issues of the complexity of schools and the concomitant need for many people to take responsibilities for aspects of the school.

It is a practical necessity now because school life is so complex. (P/DP)

A leader can't lead 50 people, but if they can lead other leaders, there is a multiplier effect to spread to people they have been in contact with. (P/DP)

The unlocking of potential, referred to above, is also applicable here. It was implied in the conversation that unlocking potential and feeling ownership contributed to a better school environment.

I think if more people feel ownership of an organisation, they will benefit, the organisation will benefit and in our case, the recipients, the students will really benefit. (P/DP)

I think that is very useful to have more people involved because it really helps and they understand the complexities. (P/DP)

Further analysis of the role of the principal and deputy is presented in Chapter Seven in the context of leadership practices that enhance teaching and learning.

5.3 Leadership role of post-holders

The need for leadership and direction from the top is evident in the three focus group discussions about posts of responsibility and systems and structures to support post-holders in their leadership roles. One form of distributed leadership, as outlined in the literature, is that of creating leadership or management positions. Posts of responsibilities are the only formal, remunerated positions of leadership/management in the Irish post-primary system and they were designed and intended to allow teachers to contribute to the overall work of the school. Posts are generally classified as contributing to pastoral, academic or administrative work. Each school agrees its 'schedule of posts' and defines the responsibilities associated with each post.

Through the discussion with principals and deputy principals it was evident that holding a post of responsibility confers a leadership or management function on a teacher and that teachers need to be nurtured and supported as they carry out these functions. However, it was the view of the principals and deputy principals that the post of responsibility in its own right does not make one a leader. It is the exercise of their role in a particular manner that allows post-holders to develop as leaders.

The post of responsibility structure

Three key ideas emerged from the principals' and deputy principals' discussion – a) post-holders need to be given the authority and 'space' to exercise their posts; b) conferring a post on a teacher or delegating a set of duties, does not make them a leader; and c) the

school must support them in their leadership role. The majority of principals and deputy principals in the focus group recognised the management position of post-holders but agreed that they were not the only leaders among the staff, in other words, they recognised informal, non-positional leadership as being as significant as the post of responsibility structure when it comes to distributed leadership in their schools, as seen in the two quotes below:

I suppose on year heads and assistant year heads and assistant principal's salary, you give them a particular role to do, whereas other people, [take initiative] for example, last year we had a teacher who had an idea to do a musical. He was not musically minded but he knew how to push the buttons and he took that on his own initiative and to me that is leadership. (P/DP)

The roles that go with posts are to do with management and are the nuts and bolts of how the school operates. (P/DP)

Post Holder views of their leadership role

The post-holders' discussion revealed very mixed opinions as to whether they played a special leadership role. There was no consensus. Some of the post-holders valued their leadership role and felt they set the tone for the school, while others argued that younger teachers bring a 'freshness' and show leadership by taking on roles without having a post of responsibility. There was also reference to the specific nature of the post. At one end of the spectrum, one post holder expressed the view that the influence of the year head was exerted over students and parents, rather than over colleagues, while at the other end of the spectrum there was a view expressed that in the case of disputes or conflicts between teachers and students, the year head plays a significant leadership role by intervening and negotiating in the conflict.

In relation to post-holders as leaders, the comments below give a flavour of the mixed views held by the group.

You can't beat experience. The longer you are at it, the more interactions you see and deal with and try and deal with. I would still look upon the older teachers again with the experience, as the leaders in our school. (PH)

I would agree with that. As you say, the more experienced teachers would tend to create the atmosphere in the school. The others will pick up on that. It is leading from the front. (PH)

I think real leadership – the school is really encouraging leadership when even people who are not that long in the school, ... take on responsibility for something, whether it is on a voluntary basis or the unlikelihood of them having a post at that stage. (PH)

I think individual schools will encourage a particular model and then I think your own personality very much will influence how you chose to lead. (PH)

... post-holders are a very diverse group in general. There are posts there that you may disagree with, that they should be posts at all, they don't necessarily lead themselves handily towards leadership. (PH)

The key points raised here include the appropriateness or otherwise of some of the posts of responsibility.

The quotes below reveal a difference of opinion among post-holders as to the extent of their responsibilities as post-holders. Are they expected to carry out the duties of their post only, or is there a bigger responsibility on them to exercise leadership in the wider and more general context?

It is leading by example in different things, like getting to class on time and participating at meetings. The difference between holding a post and being a manager and a leader is a slightly wider brief than you simply have a task to fulfil and you do it. Therefore your task is done and you get paid for the job. Whereas, as a manager / leader, there is extra, you have an extra load on your brief which would encompass things such as leading by example etc. (PH)

You have to be flexible. You can't really go in for a special leadership role, you can't be a leader and go in with a basket of terms, parameters and goalposts, you have to be flexible. (PH)

If people interact with you, because they need you, they will look for leadership. (PH)

However, in contrast to these views, other post-holders did not see themselves as role models for other teachers, or indeed as leaders. They might, however, be a "conduit" between teachers and students in resolving a conflict but they would not "dictate down" to

solve the problem. In other words, they would not take a “management” position in relation to colleagues.

In discussing the various job descriptions for posts of responsibility there was consensus among the post-holders’ group that some posts of responsibility require more contact with colleagues than others and that the nature of the contact will vary. For example, a teacher who has responsibility for IT may be involved in providing professional development for colleagues, a year head might have to intervene in a conflict between students and teachers and an examinations coordinator’s contact with colleagues may be confined to information exchange. In short, the group agreed that the nature of the post determined whether or not colleagues perceive post-holders as leaders.

With regard to involvement in decision-making, again there was evidence among the post-holders of different experiences. Some comments suggested that they have autonomy to take the initiative and make their own decisions whereas others suggested that they might “have a voice” but that ultimately the principal would make the decision.

Another example of the differing opinions is evident in the discussion on the starting and finishing times of the school day. There was general agreement that if a school is reviewing this, all staff should be involved but that post-holders could have an initial discussion on it because they could then present a clear proposal to the whole staff.

I do think sometimes it is the initial teasing out of something like that might go to post-holders, as to the possibilities, we have to satisfy a certain requirement, what options have we got? Sometimes it starts off [with the post-holders] so that you go to the whole staff with a neater package. (PH)

However, this view was countered by the view that younger teachers might be more radical in their approach and bring a fresh perspective. On this understanding, a committee comprising a cross section of staff should meet to draw up proposals.

The key issues arising from the post-holders’ discussion can be summarised as follows:-

1. There was a difference of opinion on the leadership roles of post-holders. Perceptions vary as to whether their colleagues view them as leaders and whether they viewed themselves as leaders. They agreed that post-holders and posts were enacted differently by different people.
2. Post-holders' own understanding of what it means to exercise leadership in this context is not clear – is it about fulfilling the task, according to the job description in the Schedule of Posts, or is it the wider brief of being a good role model and taking responsibility at a more general level?
3. There was a reluctance to differentiate post-holders from other members of staff when key decisions are being taken.

Teachers' views of post-holders

In the non post-holders' focus group there was agreement on a number of issues regarding the leadership role of post-holders:-

- If the post duties are exercised well, it makes a significant positive difference;
- Post-holders differ in the way they exercise their posts – consistency does not always exist. It depends on “who they are and what post they're doing”;
- The system of allocating posts by seniority should be changed;
- There is a need for leadership at that level.

The duties attached to the posts were briefly discussed, with the teachers identifying the year head post as being particularly relevant to their work, as the year head is likely to be the first 'line of referral' for student behavioural issues in the classroom. Posts such as Examinations and School Planning also featured in the responses, as they have organisational and/or developmental implications that impact on all teachers. Three key quotes are presented below.

There is no doubt about it, a post holder does play a special role if the job is done properly. It does bring order to chaos. You do need some direction at some level. (NP)

I think you really notice it if a post is done badly. (NP)

I think they do [play a special leadership role] in that if you think of any of the posts, they have to motivate and lead. The person doing up the exams has to tell you to make sure you are down on time and if you are relieving somebody, get down there quickly, they have to go back to class. The person in charge of school development planning has to make sure it is kept on the agenda and has to motivate the individual groups (NP)

The responses from the three focus group discussions indicate that leadership at the level of post-holders is required but is not automatically created by placing people in posts of responsibility. Individual post-holders differ in their perception and enactment of their posts and the need for both support and training, which was raised by the principals and deputy principals, was discussed further with the holders in their focus group meeting.

Supporting post-holders in their role

The post-holders themselves discussed the preparation and training they received when appointed to their posts of responsibility. There was strong agreement that they had no formal training for their post. They watched other post-holders doing similar jobs, especially year heads. They all agreed that not only did you watch them but you consulted with them and asked their advice and opinion. Some posts, however, are new and their incumbents therefore have no 'predecessor' or colleagues to consult with. These posts require "an awful lot of initiative".

In the post-holders' focus group, some time was given to discussing the systems in place for communication between post-holders and the principal or deputy principal. The participants in the group consider meetings, whether formal or informal, with the principal or deputy as being a form of support to them in their role. The arrangements for formal meetings varied significantly between schools and also between the two levels of post-holders, i.e. assistant principals are more likely to have formal meetings with the principal and deputy than special duties teachers. In all three schools, the year heads meet with the principal and deputy. In one of the schools, the assistant principals meet on a monthly basis and are considered to be the senior management team. In another of the schools, at the year heads' meetings, they often discuss issues beyond the role of the year heads – they are used as a 'senior management committee'. In that school the year heads are not all assistant principals and therefore there was some cause for concern among their colleagues that they were discussing issues that perhaps should be discussed by the whole staff.

When asked about whether post-holders are seen as a team (another possible means of supporting post-holders in their work), the participants in the post-holders' group agreed that the special duties teachers were not seen as a team because they never meet. The discussion around having a senior management team raised a debate about staying after school for meetings. In one school this is the norm once a month. The others exclaimed that they would not be willing to do this, as posts were supposed to be carried out during the school day. However, one post holder mentioned that because post-holders get an additional allowance they should be willing to stay on after school to carry out some work related to their post – “I have to be seen to earn that money”. There was no response by any other member of the group to this statement.

5.4 Summary

Views of distributed leadership – summary of emerging themes

Across the three focus groups (principals/deputy principals, post-holders and non post-holders) there was a significant degree of similarity in their understanding of distributed leadership. It is something that must permeate the whole school and is evident through the prevailing culture and atmosphere. The principal and deputy principal play a very important role in setting this atmosphere and they do this in both formal and informal ways. The general ‘approachability’ of both principal and deputy plays a key role – showing a genuine interest in and concern for the work of each individual teacher helps to set the tone for how people approach their work. But distributed leadership goes beyond that to providing opportunities for teachers to exercise leadership. This may be through actions like chairing a meeting, leading a new initiative or leading an extra-curricular activity. This opportunity to exercise leadership must be facilitated from the top, i.e. the principal or deputy.

There was also agreement that structures were an important element of distributed leadership as they allow for leadership to be exercised by a variety of people. Structures included subject departments and teams set up to address a variety of school development issues from time to time. To be considered a ‘structure’, they must have time to meet and particular goals to achieve. Different people may play different roles from time to time

within these structures and in that way they allow for teachers' voices to be heard, thus including them in the overall decision-making of the school. They also provide opportunities for teachers to exercise their influence, whether they hold a formal position of leadership or not.

The most commonly recognised formal leadership/management structure in Irish post-primary schools is the post of responsibility system. In this research, it was evident that in spite of this, distributed leadership is not equated with the post of responsibility structure. While post-holders can exercise leadership and can sometimes be seen by colleagues as leaders, this was dependent upon individual teachers, and how they exercised their particular post. There was also a reluctance among post holder themselves to accept a decision-making status, to the exclusion of their colleagues who did not hold posts of responsibility. They disagreed on the extent of their leadership and principals and deputy principals recognised that a post of responsibility did not automatically make somebody a leader.

The four points below represent a summary of the key issues emerging from the research and are also reflected in the literature review.

(i) Roles

The concept of distributed leadership recognises that people play leadership roles throughout the school. These roles may be formal or informal, positional or non-positional. In this research, four different examples of roles emerged (see table below). The post of responsibility is a formally recognised and remunerated position. The others may be formal or informal and may be short term or long term.

Roles	1. Having a post of responsibility
	2. Having a role such as head of subject department, special needs coordinator, debating coordinator (which is not a post of responsibility)
	3. Leading a specific event, e.g. organising the school musical
	4. Rotating roles, e.g. chairing a staff meeting

These roles provide teachers with opportunities to exercise leadership in a variety of ways. They imply leadership beyond the classroom and incorporate actions which will influence colleagues. Whether all teachers engage in these leadership activities is not clear from this research but the research participants agree that distributed leadership is defined by the *possibility* of these roles being exercised by any teacher.

This summary also presents the views of the research participants that structures are a necessary feature of distributed leadership. The post of responsibility and the subject departments are examples of structures that allow for leadership to be distributed.

(ii) Individual traits

Distributed leadership is also linked to individual, personal traits. These traits influence the practices and interactions of teachers in the school, whether in a formal or informal manner. These traits as they are exercised have an impact on the culture of the school.

Personal, individual traits	1. Having influence
	2. Being able to work independently
	3. Taking responsibility
	4. Exercising authority
	5. Showing initiative

(iii) Belonging to the organisation

Through the research a sense of belonging to the organisation featured strongly and the concepts below were part of this sense of belonging. If there are no common goals or sense of shared vision, then leadership is not likely to be shared or distributed.

Belonging to the organisation	1. Having a sense of belonging to the school
	2. Being part of an organic structure
	3. Having a voice

	4. Being part of decision-making
	5. Being involved in professional interactions with colleagues

Research participants identified collaboration as a key feature of distributed leadership. A sense of belonging to the organisation contributes significantly to creating the conditions for collaborative work practices.

(iv) Supporting the individual

The concept of support from principals, deputy principals and colleagues in exercising their leadership responsibilities featured strongly among the participants in this research. It emerged as significant in responses to the teachers' questionnaire as a factor that helps them to do their job well. It also arose through the focus group discussions, where it was evident that distributed leadership doesn't 'just happen'. People need to be 'nurtured' if leadership capacity is to be developed.

Supporting the individual	1. Unlocking potential
	2. Recognising skills and talents
	3. Providing opportunities to take initiative
	4. Leading by example

Teachers need to be supported and affirmed so that a level of confidence can be built up which will enable them to exercise influence over others, thus developing leadership potential and capacity.

Chapter Six

Linking Distributed Leadership with Learning

6.0 Introduction

The previous chapter presented and analysed the perceptions of distributed leadership emerging from the three focus groups: the principals and deputy principals, the post-holders and the non post-holders. The issues raised in these focus group discussions were summarised under four headings: roles, individual traits, a sense of belonging to the organisation and being supported in their work. Leadership is distributed through roles, formal or informal, some of which can be rotated, depending on the task or activity. Individuals display leadership in different ways: by influencing colleagues, taking responsibility and showing initiative. A sense of belonging to an organisation is developed through involvement in decision-making and through positive interaction with colleagues. Teachers feel supported in their work when senior leaders, especially principals and deputy principals, recognise their skills and talents and affirm them in their work.

Spillane (2007), Duignan (2006), Day et al. (2007) all agree that leadership involves all members of the school community, not just the principal and deputy principal. They also view distributed leadership as being central to the teaching and learning process in the school. In setting the agenda for the focus groups, the questionnaires raised a number of themes linking distributed leadership to teaching and learning. Included among these were monitoring and supporting student learning. An example of how this might be achieved includes analysing students' results and using them to review practice. This process involves leadership routines carried out in a sequence by a number of people in a coordinated process. Such co-leadership practice is within Spillane's (2007) definition of distributed leadership and shows a link to teaching and learning. To explore this and other links further, the participants in all three focus groups were asked about their perceptions and experiences of the links between distributed leadership and teaching and learning. The emerging issues are analysed and discussed in this chapter – if distributed leadership is

linked to teaching and learning, what is the nature of the link? Does it enhance student learning?

In Section 6.1 the links between the post of responsibility structure and teaching and learning are reviewed. Does the post structure contribute to improving teaching and learning? The potential for influence lies in the first instance in the job descriptions that make up the schedule of posts, and in the second instance in the manner in which the posts are implemented. The views of post-holders themselves are contrasted with the views of principals and deputy principals and non post-holders on these issues. Is there a difference between allocating or delegating a set of tasks to a post holder and distributing leadership in a manner which empowers post-holders to be educational leaders? Are post-holders seen as leaders who can influence teaching and learning?

Section 6.2 presents an analysis of the leadership practices which provide a link to teaching and learning. The perspective presented in this chapter mainly reflects the views of teachers, both post-holders and non post-holders, as Chapter Seven examines the practices of the principals and deputy principals. The focus group discussions with post-holders and with non post-holders established that leadership was not the prerogative of the principal alone but could be exercised by any teacher, even if only within the confines of his/her own classroom. Distributed leadership means having influence and being able to take initiative. In that context, the focus groups discussed and examined the practices that might link leadership to teaching and learning.

Section 6.3 summarises and discusses these findings in the context of the research question: what are the links between distributed leadership and teaching and learning?

6.1 The post of responsibility structure and its influence on teaching and learning

Chapter Five outlined differing views on the leadership role played by post-holders. Each post holder is assigned a set of duties, but that does not automatically make them a leader. The job description of the post has some impact on the scope and level of leadership

exercised. The selection of teachers to these positions and the manner in which the post duties are fulfilled were among the issues that arose as being relevant to the extent and nature of leadership exercised by post-holders. Such issues affect how the post of responsibility structure influences teaching and learning.

The Schedule of Posts of Responsibility

When the post of responsibility structure was revised in 1998, all schools were required to carry out a review of their needs and each board of management, in consultation with the principal, deputy principal and teachers, was required to ratify a schedule of posts that would best meet these needs. For the list of posts in the three schools involved in this research, see Appendix 4. In this appendix each post is categorised as administrative, curricular and/or pastoral (the categories were supplied by the schools). An examination of these posts, as categorised, provides the first insight into the possible link between distributed leadership and teaching and learning. Many posts are placed under two categories, suggesting the variety of activities associated with the post. Examples of posts categorised under the curricular heading include programme coordinator, staff induction, PGDE coordinator, school development planning coordinator, transition year coordinator and special needs coordinator. Posts categorised under the pastoral heading include, for example, year heads, home-school liaison and guidance. Posts categorised under either of these two headings have the potential to significantly influence teaching and learning.

In the principals' and deputy principals' focus group the potential of the various posts to influence teaching and learning was discussed. One of the participants gave several examples from his school which included the programme coordinator, the dean of academic performance, transition year coordinator and the Junior Certificate Schools Programme coordinator. Similar examples were given from the other participants, which gave rise to a discussion on the potential, which may or may not be realised, for influencing teaching and learning. Three examples were given from three different participants, highlighting the perspectives that can be taken – the title of a post does not always indicate clearly what the post entails. The potential for influencing teaching and learning lies in the details of the job description and implementation of the post. The first example was the post for the school

timetable, the second was induction of new teachers and the third was the position of year head. The first quotation below refers to the post of school timetabling:-

It depends on whether they just do the nuts and bolts or whether they do the curriculum planning I suppose. They actually facilitate the way the curriculum is laid out and time slots, priorities given to the different subjects etc. (P/DP)

Induction is about the teaching methods and it is also about the running of the school. (P/DP)

The year heads were always regarded as pastoral essentially, [and] they check on the academic performance. (P/DP)

In the first example, the post of responsibility can have an administrative or educational focus, as designing a school timetable incorporates many stages and usually involves a number of people. The post holder might be required to carry out the technical tasks of entering data into the computer and scheduling classes, or he/she may be involved in decision-making regarding curricular provision.

Throughout the discussion it was evident that the participants were analysing the posts in their own school from a perspective they had not necessarily considered previously. They reflected on the different aspects of the posts that could be emphasised or prioritised which could result in a more positive impact on teaching and learning.

There was consensus among the principals and deputy principals and the post-holders themselves that all posts of responsibility were intended to influence the broader learning environment, whether the job descriptions focused primarily on curricular, pastoral or administrative issues. For example, the post for school planning was seen as having a curricular dimension, as it is through the process of school development planning that policies such as curricular provision, grouping of students and subject options and levels are formulated. Such policies have a direct impact on teaching and learning. Other policies, such as attendance and punctuality and extracurricular activities will contribute to the learning environment in a more general way. However, the post of responsibility for school planning is generally one of coordination, not of sole decision-making. Because of this, it is unlikely that any one teacher holding the post for school planning would work alone. It is in

the interaction and interdependence between all staff, management, parents and students that decisions are taken. In such a post, therefore, there is potential for the exercise of leadership to have a significant impact on teaching and learning.

In each of the three focus group discussions, the post of year head was discussed, each raised in different contexts: the principals and deputy principals discussed their meetings with year heads, the post-holders debated their influence on learning and the non post-holders agreed that year heads played an important leadership role in supporting the work of teachers.

In the post-holders' focus group, four of the nine participants were year heads. They debated the nature of their influence on student learning and differed in their opinions. One of the year heads expressed her perception of how the year head influences student learning.

I am a year head and in my role, my whole focus is on student learning. Apart from the administration, I am always looking at attendance and all of that, it is all towards student learning at the end. You are doing all these jobs to enhance the students' learning and give them the best learning environment they can have. (PH)

However, another post holder saw it differently. He felt that the reality was that he spent his time following up attendance and reluctantly admitted that, at best, the student might not leave school early but that would be the extent of his influence.

... but I find that I would hope and aspire that in the greater picture, it will enhance student learning. But my day to day stuff generally gets bogged down in the routine of the 10% of guys who take up to 90% of your time. So you might enhance their learning because you are probably keeping them in the system longer but most of it would be trying to placate teachers, an irritation with these guys that are taking up most of the time. (PH)

The group discussed the implication of this statement and agreed that if the year head had influenced 10% of students to arrive on time and not disturb the class, this was a positive contribution to a more pleasant learning environment for the other 90%.

The difference of opinion between the post-holders on this topic reflected the differences expressed in relation to their leadership role overall. Those who felt they were in a position of leadership and could influence their colleagues as well as their students, were the same people who felt that all the actions they took in the context of their post of responsibility position were linked to teaching and learning. They saw issues such as attendance and punctuality as being significant for a student's learning – not only will a student have a better chance of achieving his/her potential by attending school regularly and on time but his/her attendance and punctuality impact on the classroom environment. If a student is absent or arrives late he/she is the cause of disturbance to both the teacher and the other students in the class.

Another key topic discussed in the post-holders' focus group was the change that has occurred in the past few years, particularly since the post of responsibility system was revised in 1998. Three or four members of the group, those who have held their posts of responsibility for a number of years, discussed the nature of the changes that have occurred and agreed that, in the past, the posts were more administrative. For example, the year heads kept records of attendance and punctuality but would not have investigated reasons for absenteeism or lack of punctuality and therefore would probably not provide help and support to the student to improve. The next stage of the development of the post of year head was to include a pastoral dimension, where the year head would take a more active role in identifying the social and personal needs of students that impact on their learning. The year heads, along with other post-holders, would focus on "getting the context of the learning right". Currently, according to one of the year heads, they have a more direct influence on the educational development of their students. The quotation below presents a view of the changes that have occurred.

As time went on, year heads for example, started to look at how they could directly influence student learning. In other words, encouraging motivation, talking to parents, meeting parents at night, those kinds of things started to come into the role gradually. I think a lot of the later posts that we have in our school are very much based on influencing student learning. But a lot of the old roles are still quite administrative. (PH)

While the group generally agreed that changes have occurred and there is more emphasis on influencing student learning, not all the year heads in the focus group agreed with all aspects of this statement; for example, not all would meet parents at night.

A further point made by one post holder which found agreement with the group, was whether the post-holders *intentionally* influence student learning.

Everything that happens in the school affects student learning in some way.
Whether the role is intentionally doing that, is the point. (PH)

However, this comment can be linked to the principals' and deputy principals' discussion on the job descriptions of the posts of responsibility, which also reflected the intentionality of each post. The duties attaching to a post can be described with the intention of positively influencing teaching and learning. The manner in which these duties are carried out can also impact on the amount and nature of the influence on student learning.

The manner in which the post duties are carried out can also impact on teachers and teaching. This issue was analysed in Chapter Five and again, the differing opinions of post-holders were presented. In relation to teaching and learning, the non post-holders recognised the potential support that post-holders in general, and year heads in particular, can offer to them in their work. The year heads are often the first line of referral when students are misbehaving in class. If a year head is effective, according to the non post-holders, then there are fewer discipline problems with students in that year group. But the role of the year head extends beyond discipline to the pastoral role they play in the lives of their students. By having a relationship with the student, having relevant information about their family background and any other knowledge that might influence the student's progress in school, they can lead their colleagues in providing the necessary supports for this student to be able to engage more positively with curriculum and learning. The non post-holders all agreed that there are marked contrasts between year heads; some, but not all, are "really really good".

If you have a year head who doesn't care and you have this crazy kid and he is like 'whatever', you would feel like giving up. If at least you have somebody who cares, they are leading you to help you tackle things together. (NP)

Leadership roles, as exercised by post-holders, particularly year heads, are closely linked to teaching and learning but this can vary; in particular in the title, the description and the implementation of the posts. In the post description, the emphasis can be placed on administrative rather than educational dimensions, and in the implementation, variation exists in the individual traits and attitudes that different teachers bring to their post. The post of year head is particularly significant as it has the potential to provide support for both students and teachers in such a way as to have a direct influence on learning.

Some of the post-holders themselves did not recognise the degree of influence they have and also acknowledged that the leadership roles are not consistently exercised.

6.2 Teachers' leadership practices that influence teaching and learning

The literature on effective schools highlights the potentially positive impact of collaborative work practices (Lambert 1998, Fullan 2001 and Stoll and Fink 1996), many of which require leadership to be distributed through the school. As leadership is defined as "relationships of influence" (Duignan 2006) the discussion in both the post-holders' and non post-holders' focus groups on how teachers influence each other and work together was insightful.

This section presents and analyses the data gathered from these two focus groups on leadership practices among teachers that provide opportunities to enhance teaching and learning. A number of themes emerged, including:-

- a) Teachers influencing each others' work
- b) Teachers working together
- c) Classroom observation and team teaching
- d) Seeking advice
- e) Positive learning environment

The findings are analysed under these headings and, where relevant, data from the teachers' questionnaire is included to support the findings.

a) Teachers influencing each others' work

The concept of influence is embedded in definitions of leadership. Therefore, it was not surprising to find that the teachers in their responses to the questionnaire were very aware of the influence they have, particularly on students: the aggregated results of the questionnaires returned from teachers in all three schools show that 87% of the participants agreed that teachers' influence on students extends beyond the classroom. The questions in both the post-holders and non post-holders' focus groups addressed the influence that teachers have on each other in the context of teaching and learning. Consensus emerged that teachers can influence each other in a manner which impacts on teaching and learning, but the discussions revealed that, in practice, the process varies significantly from teacher to teacher.

In the post-holders' focus group examples were given of some possibilities that occur for influencing colleagues: while typing up notes on a computer "a colleague might ask what you're doing" or conversations about teaching and learning issues might arise while having a cup of coffee in the staff room. A further example was given by a teacher who uses technology in his classroom. He stated that no other teacher had asked him about the use of IT in spite of the fact that he has been using a data projector in class for a long time. The participants in this focus group acknowledged that teachers did not necessarily avail of such opportunities and therefore the nature of influence was *ad hoc*. The focus group then moved on to discuss the extent of the knowledge teachers have about what goes on in other teachers' classrooms. Since peer observation is very limited among these participants, they depend on informal means to ascertain what goes on as "we all close the doors when we go into our classrooms". There was disagreement among the group on the extent of knowledge they have. While one participant claimed he would "have a fair idea of people's different ways and methodologies by just sparking off each other" the other members of the group disagreed and the quotation below reflects the view of the majority of the group.

I would have a different view of it. I would say myself and X [name of teacher] are working in the school for 27/28 years. I would have very little knowledge of what he does in his class. I would say he has very little knowledge of what I do in my class. I think that would be true of most of the staff of the school. We don't talk very much at all about education. (PH)

An exception to this was given: the PE teacher who teaches outdoors and in areas that are often visible to other teachers as they pass.

In the non post-holders' focus group, which consisted mainly of teachers with less experience than post-holders, there was clear agreement that teachers influence each other, helping to improve practice. Classroom observation is discussed below but in addition, the non post-holders felt that by observing teachers in "dealing with student discipline" their practice was influenced.

Both post-holders and non post-holders stated that teachers can influence each other's practice by sharing resources. The non post-holders agreed that sharing resources can deepen their understanding of the subject matter being taught. However, the questionnaire responses supported the view expressed in the post-holders' focus group that this does not happen as much as it could. In the aggregated responses to the teachers' questionnaire only 49% of participants agreed that resources are shared within the same subject department. However, this varied considerably between the three schools; 75% of participants from Eldorado and 57% from Heidelberg agreed, while only 31% from Louvain agreed. The comment below was made by one participant, but may reflect the situation in Louvain only.

We have an internal school system where we have folders for each department, computer folders. I put all my power point stuff etc. in there. Nobody ever uses them. (PH)

However, the participants appreciated the difficulty of setting up practices that enable teachers to share resources and raised the question of the prevailing culture and attitude that enables teachers to improve their practice through sharing resources.

The subject department structure was discussed as a means of providing opportunities to share resources and discuss work. Both post-holders and non post-holders agreed that the

recent emphasis on subject departments in school development planning nationally offers the possibility for a more formal approach to sharing resources thus influencing each other's practices.

In both focus group discussions, the operation of these departments did not emerge as a very strong force in improving student learning, although in the questionnaires teachers expressed very strong agreement that the aim of subject departments is to improve student learning. The leadership role of the coordinator was seen as important.

Table 6.1 Teachers' perceptions of distributed leadership – the role of subject departments

	%5&4 (agreement)
The objective of subject departments is to improve teaching and learning	87.63%
Subject departments should have designated meeting times	86.60%
Teachers should plan and review their work together with colleagues from the same subject department	80.41%
Subject department coordinators play an important leadership role	70.10%
Analysis, using data as evidence, of student progress should be carried out by teachers as part of subject department meetings	63.90%

However, as table 6.2 below shows, even though teachers connect the work of subject departments to both distributed leadership and learning, less than 50% of questionnaire respondents agree that, in reality, subject departments provide the forum for leadership practices that could enhance teaching and learning. This might account for the lack of strong reference to subject departments in the focus group discussions and seems clearly to be an area for further investigation and development.

Table 6.2 Leadership practices in relation to subject departments

Teachers in the same subject departments share resources	49.48%
New ideas about teaching and learning are discussed at subject department meetings	34.02%
In our subject department we work together to systematically review our work	31.96%

The three statements in Table 6.2 identify practices that would enable teachers to influence each other to improve teaching and learning. The low scores indicate that scope for potential improvement is being underutilised. Teachers could influence each other through educational discussion and dialogue at subject department meetings, and while this happens to some extent, the depth of dialogue could be greatly improved. A comment made in the post-holders’ focus group expressed this view and is supported by statistics from the questionnaires.

I think even within the faculties, what we do is we discuss the curriculum, but we don’t necessarily discuss the methodologies of teaching. We shy away from those because we are not totally convinced what we are doing ourselves is right and therefore we are not going to tell everyone else what we do. (PH)

But the marked contrast between schools in response to the questionnaire (see table 6.3) again suggests that practices vary considerably between schools.

Table 6.3 Subject departments (individual schools’ scores)

	Eldorado	Louvain	Heidelberg
Teachers in the same subject departments share resources	75%	31%	57%
New ideas about teaching and learning are discussed at subject department meetings	44%	18%	45%
In our subject department we work together to systematically review our work	44%	18%	40%

The issue of confidence, or lack thereof, found resonance among the participants in the post-holders’ focus group and is addressed below in the context of seeking advice and creating a positive environment.

The influence which teachers have over each other extends beyond subject departments. Both the post-holders’ and non post-holders’ focus groups raised the issue of the direction of influence. A newly qualified teacher expressed the view that she would “probably influence maybe the H. Dips a little bit more” but would also influence her peer group, i.e. other newly qualified teachers. However, in the post-holders’ discussion, the influence of younger teachers on those more experienced was acknowledged and valued. There was agreement that younger teachers often had new ideas that could enhance the practice of more experienced teachers. The benefits of reciprocal influence were acknowledged.

The overwhelming message emerging, however, was the informal nature of influence and the impact of the school culture and atmosphere on the practices that facilitate sharing of resources as a means of influence. Teachers in the focus groups came from traditional voluntary secondary schools and from a community school that opened only nine years ago. They identified that new schools might have a more open culture while more traditional schools are more likely to have a “closed” classroom door culture. The question was also asked if there is a difference between male and female teachers – are females more likely to engage in discussion about their own performance than males? Both of these issues were left unresolved.

The participants in the post-holders’ focus group recognised the reality of cultural influences and the possibility that influence can be negative as well as positive. For this reason, the suggestion that some more formal approaches should be taken to practices such as subject department meetings to ensure that they will influence teachers to improve their teaching found favour with the group.

b) Teachers working together

In the responses to the questionnaires 95% of respondents agreed that when teachers work together student learning is enhanced. The principals and deputy principals, in their focus group also agreed that the students benefit when everybody works together.

I think they [students] pick up on an atmosphere where everybody is working together, and where more knowledge is transferred between departments, staff is more aware of how students are doing. They pick up on those kinds of things that are in the ethos of the school. (P/DP)

The post-holders’ and non post-holders’ focus groups discussed their understanding of “working together” and how this influences student learning. Both structural and cultural issues emerged.

Structural issues include having teams or groups with specific tasks or functions and having formal meetings. Cultural issues incorporate the atmosphere in the school which “allows” teachers to be open with each other and to discuss their pedagogical practices. The influence on student learning emerges through having a shared vision, being consistent in the exercise of policies and sharing resources and expertise in order to improve the quality of instruction.

As outlined in section a) above, subject departments are now playing a more important role than in the past. The subject department meetings offer the opportunity to plan lessons together, to synchronise teaching across a year group and to discuss teaching methods for particular elements of the syllabus. There was agreement that subject departments in many schools are in the early stages of development, and that having formal subject meetings is essential for this development to continue.

The three of us in my department get on great but we never discussed our teaching, we just didn't. Now I find that we are beginning to share an awful lot of stuff, 'how do you teach that? I am not great at that' and 'I hate teaching that bit' or whatever it might be. I don't think that honesty would have ever come out only for the subject meetings. (PH)

But subject department meetings are not the only structures that enable teachers to work together. An example was given of a meeting, set up by a principal, to review the progress of a particular student. All teachers involved with this student were invited to analyse the situation and help teachers to work together to meet the challenges of supporting this student in his learning. This meeting required a restructuring of the timetable for the period of the meeting and the provision of class cover for some teachers but the priority it was given showed the belief in the power of teachers working together to improve the educational experience for this student.

In the non post-holders' group there were two teachers who had trained and worked in the UK. They spoke of their experience of working as part of a team in their respective schools there. They both agreed that the structures were more formal in the UK and that these formal structures not only enabled teachers to work together but created the expectation that they would. There were formal systems in place for sharing resources, for holding

meetings and for observing each other's lessons. Both teachers agreed that these systems and structures were beneficial.

In the school I came from [in the UK], we always shared resources, had meetings, observed each other and we would observe each other's lessons and take notes and ideas. It was very helpful. (NP)

The group, however, agreed that cultures differ and that this impacts on teachers' practices. There were contrary views expressed regarding the desirability of such formality. While the possible benefits were recognised, it was also suggested that it can be "very awkward and staged".

In the non post-holders' group there was consensus that when the atmosphere is friendly teachers can talk to each other and ask questions in an informal setting such as the staffroom. They expressed the support they felt when they work together. It removes the sense of isolation and supports their pedagogical practice and classroom management. The quote below is reflective of the consensus among this group. Not only does it help teachers but they also perceived that it has a positive impact on students.

I will ask the other teachers questions and I think it has really helped me to relax and feel that I am not ... a little island on my own. I can ask for help. Things like that do permeate out to the students as well when they see it. (NP)

An example given by a non post holder highlighted the importance of working together to implement the code of behaviour. When all teachers worked together to implement the policy consistently it was more effective, as students were more inclined to comply with the policy when they knew that all teachers were operating it.

Dealing with special needs was cited as an area which lends itself to teachers working together. Because of the necessity to tailor one's teaching to individual students, teachers need to share information about the student's needs and also about the approaches to teaching and learning that are most appropriate to that student. Where there is a resource teacher in the school, he/she often becomes a source of knowledge for other teachers; they can provide information and guidance to other teachers from their training and their experiences.

From a special needs perspective, if there is a teacher in the school who is in close contact with a particular pupil, you will often find that [another teacher] will go to that teacher and seek advice about what the best way is to approach a topic, or what learning styles they use etc. (NP)

It emerged from the non post-holders' group that sharing this kind of information and expertise is common when teachers are dealing with special needs students in the mainstream classroom. This is a good example of teachers spreading their expertise across the school.

The impact of this kind of collaboration on student learning can be very positive. One example was given of a student appreciating the fact that teachers consulted with one another and felt that it showed they cared. The student appreciated that one teacher had informed the resource teacher that a particular aspect of the subject was difficult for him.

The benefits to students resulting from teachers working together also found high levels of agreement among the questionnaire respondents. However, less than 50% of questionnaire respondents agreed that in their schools they actually work together to offer the best curricular opportunities or that they work in teams to review their practice (See table 6.4 below)

Table 6.4 Leadership practices – working together

	%5&4
We work together, as a school community, to ensure that we are offering the best curricular opportunities for our students	46.39%
Teachers work together in teams (e.g. to review practice, design policies, create new ideas and implement plans)	39.18%

In the comments above, working together incorporated a number of different ideas: sharing resources, discussing work, consulting each other and being consistent, for example in the implementation of the code of behaviour. It is evident that much working together is informal rather than formal and there is a suggestion that it should be more formal. The special needs and the UK examples provided interesting discussion points and highlighted the benefits that can be accrued from working together. The reference to school culture is

interesting in that it highlights the possibility that women are more likely to discuss their work and that the culture in a newer school, rather than a more traditional school, might encourage teachers to work together. There is also acknowledgement that newer practices such as school development planning and Department of Education inspections have encouraged teachers to work together.

c) Classroom Observation

It was evident from the three focus group discussions that, with one or two exceptions, peer observation was not generally practised among the participants. Classroom observation forms part of the teacher training process and, for the recently qualified participants in the non post-holders' focus group, there were references to the benefits of it, not only in being observed but also in observing others. They agreed that being able to observe a variety of different teachers gave them ideas and helped them to learn how to deal with different students and different situations. Teachers who had taught in the UK system had experienced a 'line management' and/or 'performance management' system and found it had certain benefits.

One of the participants in the post-holders group recounted her experience in the UK, where a line manager observed her classes once every half term. This was common practice in that school and she thought it was a very good idea - "you do learn from it". However, her colleagues in the staffroom in Ireland did not approve of it. The participants in the post-holders' discussion group agreed that classroom observation for newly qualified teachers is a good idea. It is easier for younger teachers to adopt the practice of observation than it is for more experienced teachers. Practices and attitudes are shaped from the beginning of their training. If that training includes group projects and group discussions it helps to build these skills into their practice as teachers and to form habits of working together with colleagues. In the same way, if classroom observation is the normal practice from the beginning of one's career and it continues beyond the early years of teaching, then teachers become accustomed to it.

It is a matter of getting used to it. The first couple of times you are going to feel a bit awkward, but after a while you get used to it. As long as you weren't feeling you were being picked on and that someone is calling into everyone and it is a

natural practice to call into the class. After a while then it becomes matter of fact.
(NP)

There was agreement among the non post-holders with this but some reservations were expressed in relation to “being picked on”. They agreed that if it was the normal practice and everybody was being observed it would become “a matter of fact”. One advantage of a formalised system was that one could ask for a second opinion if dissatisfied with the report from the performance review. The buddy system, a less formal method of observation, found favour among the group and some examples were given of voluntary observation among teachers.

Another girl started in the school at the same time as me. We were talking and she had spent time in the UK. She asked me something and I told her I would go and observe her lesson one day and she came in because we were teaching the same class, she was having some issues with students in the class and she wanted to see how I interacted with them. Then I went in and did the same in her class. (NP)

It is of note that the person giving this example mentioned that her colleague had spent time in the UK and was already comfortable with the practice of having an observer in her classroom. One other example was cited, from a teacher who left his classroom door open in the expectation that other teachers would come in. This rarely happened, but on one occasion the deputy principal was passing and came in to the room and joined in the class discussion.

For experienced teachers who are unaccustomed to classroom observation the situation was quite different. They agreed that the practice of classroom observation is more difficult if one has been teaching for a long time without having any other adult in the room. The two comments below reflect this concern expressed in the post-holders’ focus group.

Younger people, I would find, have no anxiety about it. For people who are teaching quite a while, it can be quite stressful. (PH)

I think as teachers, we do have a basic fear of having somebody else in our classroom. We are so used to doing our own thing over the years. It is very hard to open up to the whole idea of somebody observing you. (PH)

One final point in relation to observation found agreement among the post-holders: if teachers engage in peer observation they, and their students, will be better prepared for inspections. No reference was made to teachers acting as mentors to newly qualified teachers or to an induction programme for new teachers that might include an element of observation.

The principals and deputy principals, in their focus group, discussed the practice of observing teachers in their classrooms. Although they stated that they would have no difficulty in going into classrooms, in practice they did not do so very often. Some sense of apprehension to the idea also emerged from the discussions.

You always have to judge the person and the particular class they have. If you felt, depending on their experience and if they were being challenged in the classroom and it wasn't the optimum learning environment, you would choose the class to go into. They are not going to invite you in, but if you have to go in for educational reasons, you might say, you will leave that, and do something else. It could be slightly embarrassing in a minority of situations. (P/DP)

This comment highlights the apprehension but does not make it clear if the principal would or would not observe the teacher if he/she were having such difficulties. As there is no agreed formal system for observing and monitoring teachers in Ireland currently, it is a matter for each principal and deputy principal to formulate their own policy and practice. The traditions, climate and atmosphere of the school will have a significant impact on this.

Closely associated with the idea of classroom observation is that of team teaching. Team teaching is not common practice among the participants in either the post-holders' or non post-holders' focus groups, but two examples were given, one in the context of special needs and the other from a previous school.

We do a bit of team teaching, particularly in maths. I must say it is a revelation to me ... I would have had the weaker maths class and rather than withdraw the students, the learning support people preferred to come in; therefore they wouldn't have to target a specific student [for help]. (PH)

We used to team-teach a lot in my previous school. We would sit down beforehand and we would agree, if there was going to be a discipline issue in this particular class, who is going to deal with it?... I think I would definitely influence the guy ... and vice versa. We both learned from each other. (NP)

In the post-holders' and non post-holders' focus groups respectively, these were given as examples and participants listened with interest. However, no further examples were forthcoming and it was evident that these were the exception rather than the norm for the participants. Because of the growth in the provision of special needs education in the mainstream setting in recent years, there is potential here for significant development.

Principals and deputy principals state that they will go in to classes, but acknowledge some apprehension about it. The teachers differed in their views, with the younger teachers agreeing that it is useful to be observed and to observe but the older teachers admitting that they would find this very difficult. However, there was a note of willingness – it would prepare them for inspections. The nature of the classroom observation was discussed and there was more openness to the idea of peer observation than to the 'performance management' idea. However, it is interesting to note that in practice, the most common form of classroom observation is Department of Education and Science inspection. In spite of the comment made by one participant about peer observation being good preparation for this, voluntary peer observation is not a common practice among these teachers.

d) Seeking advice

In seeking to improve practice an important issue is that of being able to seek advice from others. In the post-holders' and non post-holders' focus groups this issue was discussed to ascertain if participants sought advice through formal or informal channels and if, in their experience, this was an easy thing to do.

The findings showed that teachers go to different colleagues, depending on the nature of the advice they seek. Distinctions were made between advice in relation to classroom management and advice about the subject being taught. While structures such as subject departments exist and offer a forum for teachers to seek advice, the culture of the school plays a more important role in influencing their practice of seeking advice.

In the non-post-holders' focus group, there was unanimous agreement that one would only go to somebody whom they could trust, and get on with. Unless the issue was specifically to do with their subject, they would not confine themselves to seeking advice only within their subject department. If it related to discipline they would go to any colleague who had more experience and whom they respected. One participant stated that a newly qualified or part time teacher would definitely not consult the principal as they felt that to admit they were having difficulties would jeopardise the possibilities of being employed in a permanent capacity. That point was also made in the post-holders' focus group and there was not only strong agreement with it but a concern that the newest teachers would not seek advice "because they are afraid of appearing incompetent" – "they will struggle and say nothing".

You need a certain confidence about yourself to be able to go and ask for advice.
(PH)

As far as the post-holders themselves were concerned, two of them said they would seek younger teachers' advice about their subject as "they might have a nice little nugget that they can give you". Like the non post-holders, the post-holders agreed that they choose the person to go to, based on expertise rather than position and that confidentiality, trust and the ability to listen are the factors in determining whom they choose to seek advice from. The quotation below summarises the views of both groups.

But it would very much be someone that I got on with, no matter what it was, I wouldn't go to anyone that I didn't trust or like. (NP)

Seeking advice in relation to new ideas, as opposed to having difficulties, was also discussed. In this context the person chosen to go to for advice must have an interest and be open to new ideas. Again, they do not confine themselves to somebody within their subject department.

Or sometimes you might have people in your subject department, that, if you had some new ideas, they might not really care! It depends on who is in your department. You could always tell someone else that you think would be into fresh ideas. It doesn't necessarily have to be someone in your same department. (NP)

The questionnaires issued to teachers in the three schools addressed the question of opportunities to discuss and initiate new ideas. The low level of agreement with the practice of new ideas being discussed at subject department meetings supports the view that a teacher may not raise a new idea in that forum. Cumulative results from the questionnaires illuminate this point further. As can be seen from table 6.5 below, teachers showed a high level of agreement with these statements of actions that should occur in schools where leadership is distributed but table 6.6 shows that in practice new ideas are not generally shared among colleagues.

Table 6.5 Perceptions of leadership - innovation

	% 5&4s
Teachers from different subject departments should share ideas about teaching and learning	78.35%
Teachers should be given the opportunity to lead new initiatives in the school	87.63%

Table 6.6 Leadership practices - innovation

	% 5&4s
Opportunities are provided to discuss new classroom practices with colleagues	21.88%
New ideas about teaching and learning are discussed at staff meetings	19.59%

If teachers are to show leadership in generating and implementing new ideas to improve teaching and learning, not only are the structures needed but the culture must also be such that opportunities are provided, and teachers feel comfortable, to raise and discuss new ideas.

Once again, the views express the informal, rather than the formal structures that are called upon when seeking advice. Formal structures, such as subject departments or posts of responsibility, do not play a significant role. Among the participants of both the post-holders' and non post-holders' focus groups there was a very honest expression of concern about admissions of inadequacies and a very strong emphasis on trust and confidentiality. Seeking advice also included suggesting new ideas. This highlights the need for a 'safe' culture for innovation as well as improvement.

e) **Positive environment**

In section 6.1 above, the role of the post-holders in contributing to a positive learning environment was analysed. Leadership links to teaching and learning through the work of non post-holders, post-holders and principals and deputy principals in their efforts to create a positive environment.

In the focus group discussions with both post-holders and non post-holders there was very strong agreement that a positive learning environment is important for both students and teachers. It was perceived to enhance student learning indirectly through teachers being interested in their work and their students, and in being positively motivated.

If [students] can learn better what [they] want to learn and [they] are in a safe environment or a calm environment and it's positive, they are more inclined to learn. If everything is really hostile, it will put them off as well. Kids are very instinctive. (NP)

As was evident from earlier analysis, a positive environment enables teachers to work well together and seek advice from each other. A positive, friendly atmosphere where teachers may chat informally, allows teachers who are experiencing difficulties to express these and to seek help with them.

There is good banter and you feel more secure with each other and feel confident to say things to people and there is a pleasant atmosphere. (NP)

Once again, trust emerges as a dominant feature of a positive environment. There was a strong link between the teachers working in a positive climate and the benefits to students. A sense of fun and enjoyment was also raised as being a positive motivator.

The aggregated responses to the questionnaires from teachers in the three schools suggest that schools make conscious decisions to provide a positive learning environment. The two statements below show two practices that were considered by a high percentage of teachers to be well established, although responses differed from school to school.

Table 6.7 Creating a positive environment - aggregated scores and individual school scores

%5&4s	Aggregated	Eldorado	Louvain	Heidelberg
Systems are in place which ensure that students are supported in their learning	70.10%	93.75%	48.72%	80.95%
All policies are designed with a focus on enhancing, improving and developing a high quality learning environment	64.95%	93.75%	43.59%	73.81%

6.3 Summary

Participants’ understanding of distributed leadership incorporates a number of features that link directly to teaching and learning. There is a clear recognition that by working together they can influence and support each other and that such practices would contribute to improving student learning. However, the gap between possibilities and actual practice was also evident.

The results of the research, as presented in this chapter, suggest that distributed leadership in the three schools is linked to teaching and learning through the structures and practices that enable teachers to improve their teaching and support students in their learning. The post of responsibility structure is given as an example of the possibility of leadership being distributed in a manner which can potentially improve teaching and learning. However, the results of this research suggest that the post structure does not currently maximise its potential influence.

When posts of responsibility are defined with the intention of positively influencing teaching and learning, the manner in which the duties and responsibilities associated with the post are implemented will determine the impact these posts have on teaching and learning. This research has highlighted inconsistencies in implementation, and the lack of clarity for many incumbents on the parameters of their role. The non post-holders, however, appreciate the leadership role of post-holders, especially year heads, and see the potentially positive effect it can have on student learning. For this potential to be realised, there must be an *intention* on the part of post-holders to influence teaching and learning in a positive manner.

A variety of practices, which are influenced by and influence school culture, emerged from the focus group discussions linking distributed leadership with teaching and learning. Connections between distributed leadership and learning have been presented in the literature: Lambert (2001), for example, views opportunities for collaborative learning as being the core activity for the expansion of leadership capacity. Harris et al (2003 p.99) quotes from Silins and Mulford's (2001) major Australian study which concluded that dispersed forms of leadership are characterised by "shared learning through teams of staff working together to augment the range of knowledge and skills available for the organisation to change and anticipate future developments".

While this research found that teachers perceive collaborative work practices as being beneficial for themselves and for their students, the opportunities to "augment the range of knowledge and skills" are not fully utilised. Subject departments are perceived as providing opportunities for teachers to learn from each other through sharing resources and ideas, but this opportunity is not always availed of to engage in dialogue about pedagogical issues. This research suggests that teachers influence each other mainly through informal channels.

While recognising the potential benefits of classroom observation, there were mixed views on the desirability of formal observation. There was evidence of some peer observation being practised to positive effect but there was some resistance to the idea of extending this practice to all teachers. However, there was agreement that more formal structures would be helpful in enabling teachers to share their experience and their ideas. The participants recognised the expertise of colleagues and when seeking advice it is from their colleague with relevant expertise that the advice is sought, regardless of leadership positions.

Although no causal links with enhanced student outcomes can be established through this research, the participants in all focus groups and the questionnaire respondents were in no doubt that when they work together student learning is enhanced. They attribute this to their own knowledge, skills and motivation being enhanced. Where 'missed opportunities' have been identified through this research (such as defining posts of responsibility more specifically to enhance student learning and using subject departments more specifically to

improve teaching and learning), developing stronger leaders at this level may hold the key to opening up new learning opportunities for both teachers and students.

Developing such leadership could strengthen the educational focus of the work of subject teams or post holders and thereby contribute to improving teaching and learning.

Chapter Seven

Distributed Leadership and the Principal's Role in Leading Learning

7.0 Introduction

The previous chapter analysed and reviewed the links between distributed leadership and teaching and learning as they emerged from the post-holders' and non post-holders' focus groups and the teachers' questionnaires. This chapter presents and analyses the principals' and deputy principals' perspectives on their educational leadership role in a distributed leadership context, as ascertained from the focus group discussion held with the principals and deputy principals from the three schools participating in this research. Practices that influence teaching and learning and their connection to distributed leadership are established and analysed.

According to Southworth (2004b p.4) "learning-centred leadership needs to be distributed" and it is in this context that principals and deputy principals were asked about their understanding of, and their practices related to, educational leadership. Section 7.1 presents and analyses their perceptions of their role as educational leaders.

Section 7.2 presents and analyses the key leadership practices that influence learning as reported by principals and deputy principals in their focus group. The links between these practices and distributed leadership are analysed.

Section 7.3 presents challenges facing principals and deputy principals in their role as leaders of learning in a distributed leadership context.

7.1 The educational role of the principal and deputy

In the discussion on their role as educational leaders the principals and deputy principals made a number of suggestions: educational leadership encompasses curricular provision as

provided for in the school timetable; the school development planning process has a curricular dimension; principals and deputy principals must provide a suitable environment for teaching and learning; “the instructional part” of educational leadership will vary according to the subject. Before discussing the actions and practices of the principals and deputy principals themselves, the group discussed the “parameters” of educational leadership. One member of the group described educational leadership as “*leading learning*” and went on to explain his understanding of that term, as follows:-

Leading learning, I think there are different strands of it, you can be an educational leader and then you need to lead the curriculum, then there is another level that you need to lead the instruction. (P/DP)

The focus group participants agreed that while principals and deputy principals are directly involved in leading the curriculum through creating the school timetable, their levels of engagement with instructional issues varies. The comment below found agreement among them as the second level curriculum demands a level of expertise in a wide range of subjects.

I don’t think the one person like the principal or deputy can lead the instruction at second level in all the different subjects. (P/DP).

In recognising that they would not have the expertise to lead each subject department, the principals and deputy principals acknowledged that others, namely teachers, need to be involved at a leadership level in each of the subjects being offered.

However, while agreeing that they could not lead subject areas apart from their own, there were other ways in which they could exercise learning-centred leadership, some of which would have a direct influence on student learning and others which would influence the teachers and therefore have an indirect influence, through them, on student learning.

I think there is a need to lead the education in the broad sense of keeping a focus on what the purpose of the school is about, [i.e.] the learning, and maybe have a large input with others into leading the curriculum. If you just approach it from the point of view of one person, educational leadership would be about keeping the focus of the organisation on the core activity of learning. (P/DP)

The group agreed that their role was to keep the focus of the organisation on the core activities of learning and the focus group discussion then moved to actions that the

principal and deputy principal take to influence learning. Suggestions were forthcoming from all members of the group and are presented and analysed in section 7.2.

7.2 Key practices that influence learning

In Chapter Five, attention was drawn to the teachers' perceptions of the important role that principals play in encouraging and supporting teachers in their work. Chapter Six highlighted the links between distributed leadership and teaching and learning and claimed that teachers (both post-holders and non post-holders) perceive that when leadership is distributed it can have a positive influence on teaching and learning. However, they also recognised that the actions of the principals and deputy principals are fundamental in creating an environment that allows teachers throughout the school to exercise leadership. The third of the key research questions in this thesis asks to what extent the principals' and deputy principals' own leadership practices enhance teaching and learning in the school. This section presents and analyses the findings from the principals' and deputy principals' focus group discussion on their perceptions of these actions and practices. The practices identified are sub divided as follows:-

- a) Creating and influencing the learning environment
- b) Analysis of examinations results
- c) Providing opportunities for teachers to learn
- d) The principal and deputy principal as teachers
- e) Systems and structures that influence learning

These are presented below as possible hypotheses for testing in subsequent research.

a) Creating and influencing the learning environment

There was considerable debate among the principals and deputy principals about the amount of time and the actions they take that influence student learning. The discussion moved from an initial shared impression of not really influencing teaching and learning in the school, to a keener appreciation that they were indeed influential, but in more indirect, or subtle ways.

Initially, it was stated that 80% - 90% of their time was not spent on curricular issues. Comments were also made about the fact that they could not be curricular leaders in all subjects, due to the nature of the second level curriculum. The discussion then opened out to the difference between curriculum leadership, leading teaching and learning and influencing the educational environment. The 'environment' featured prominently in the discussion, and there was agreement that post-holders, deputy principals and principals all played a major role in creating a positive learning environment. For example, one participant made the following observation, which found agreement among the others.

I think the role of a deputy is to provide the environment that other people can teach and learn, that is just managing the order in the school, organising staff, substitution cover for classes. (P/DP)

The post of responsibility structure can influence the learning environment and is discussed further in section e) below, 'systems and structures'.

Other practices that influence teaching and learning were:-

- Advising teachers. While this issue was raised by one of the deputy principals, the whole group recognised that as principals or deputy principals they are in a position of influence and teachers come to them for advice. This may be for discipline or other issues such as dealing with parents.
- Involvement in school planning, facilitating and attending meetings. The principal/deputy principal can support the work of subject departments or other teams by providing time for meetings, providing background information, for example, analysis of student results. The consensus among the group was that the principal and deputy principal attended some, but not all meetings.
- Prioritising teaching and learning by ensuring that it is on the agenda at staff meetings, inviting teachers to share ideas, encouraging networking between schools and inviting teachers to share with others what they learnt at professional development sessions.
- Visiting classrooms. This is common practice in two of the schools, but generally relates to new teachers only. There was some evidence of a cautious approach being taken to this practice.

The practices outlined above influence teaching and learning in the three schools to varying extents. The deputy principals in particular saw themselves as playing a strong advisory role among teachers, but both principals and deputy principals reported that they are involved in arranging and attending meetings. Attending meetings of, for example, a subject department gives the principals and deputy principals an opportunity to support teachers in their work and to influence the educational decisions where appropriate. However, they recognised that in a distributed leadership context, teachers take leadership responsibility and each subject department will have not only its formal leader, but possibly also informal leaders. As suggested in the literature, it is important that the principal or deputy principal encourages this development of leadership among teachers as the teachers' influence on student learning is more direct than the principal's influence (Southworth 2004a). As stated in Chapter Six, the principal's and deputy principal's role in setting up structures and providing opportunities for teachers to meet is essential.

b) Analysis of examinations results

Principals and deputy principals, in their focus group, discussed the dissemination and analysis of students' Leaving Certificate results. Practices varied across the schools, ranging from the distribution of the results of all subjects to all teachers, to the distribution of results in their own subject area only to each teacher. Further variation exists in that two of the schools compare their own results to national averages, while the third school does not provide this information. In two schools, the student results are compared with baseline data gathered from standardised tests when the students first enter the school.

The analysis of results provides an opportunity for coordinated leadership distribution as stated in Chapter Six. Analysing results provides insights into student progress, which can then be used to improve instruction. This involves a number of leaders in the school working together. For example, to relate the results to the student's ability the 'analyst' consults with teachers, year head and guidance counsellors. To disseminate the results and use them effectively to improve practice, the 'analyst' works with the team of teachers involved with the individual student or, in a more general analysis, with the subject department.

In the principals' and deputy principals' focus group the level of discussion about these results allowed the participants to learn from each other. They were asking questions about the manner in which results were given to teachers and how they could use this practice to enhance student learning. It was evident that they wanted to enhance student attainment and recognised the potential of this activity in achieving this objective. There were also sensitivities associated with it – the tradition in the school, the possible resistance to the “league tables” approach and the “exposure” of teachers.

c) Providing opportunities for teachers to learn

One aspect of distributed leadership, as outlined in Chapter Two, is that ongoing learning is the norm for teachers as well as students. In the principals' and deputy principals' focus group there was recognition of the importance of teachers continuing their own learning. Not only was continuous professional development favoured, but there were several references to the desirability of teachers sharing with other teachers in the school what they had learned at in-service courses. There was also a reference to teachers' networking with other schools, particularly in the case of minority subjects, where a teacher has no colleague teaching the same subject in their own school.

Examples of sharing of expertise were given:-

The other thing that we have done from time to time is when the staff members go on in-service and if we have an opportunity, they might come back and give their experience of what they have learned and new insights etc. We don't do it often enough I suppose; it's just to get the opportunity. (P/DP)

We have one teacher who every year does the oral Irish exam, therefore is an expert at the techniques etc. We have teachers who have never done it. That person goes away full of confidence and comes back. Last week I wanted them to go and talk to all of the Irish teachers and some of the students. That is sharing of expertise. (P/DP)

Teacher learning was positively associated with enhancing student learning as demonstrated by the quotations below:-

Teacher learning is critical to student learning. (P/DP)

I think they [the students] pick up on an atmosphere where everybody is working together, and where more knowledge is transferred between departments, staff are more aware of how students are doing. They pick up on those kinds of things that are in the ethos of the school. (P/DP)

The participants agreed that it is the role of an educational leader to encourage everyone to be a learner.

d) The principals and deputy principal as teachers

It emerged from the principals' and deputy principals' focus group discussion that two of the deputy principals and one of the principals were teaching some classes. This practice provided a clear example to teachers as a whole in those schools of the importance that school leadership gave to teaching and learning.

Some convincing arguments were presented in support of principals and deputy principals teaching classes. By being included on the timetable, the principal and deputy principal had a direct influence on student learning. Not only that, but it was also claimed that they had credibility among colleagues, and they could be involved in designing and implementing new initiatives or methodologies in the classroom. It also enabled them to model good practice, not only of teaching but also of leading educational change.

Certainly from my own experience, if you asked me today if I was involved in any aspect of curriculum teaching and learning I can honestly say yes, because I have a Maths class today. So at least you are in touch with that every single day, you are part of the teaching time-table every day, you are out there... Now you are allowed to be part of the teaching and learning environment. (P/DP)

I think that clearly you are in a position to model best practice. You are in a position also to lead elements of development within the teaching and learning environment. So if you are bringing in things like assessment for learning techniques, you can lead those in your classroom and I am part of the maths team. (P/DP)

I would be very connected to the staff on that level. We are a smaller school. Because I am teaching, I have a foot in both camps and they do see that. (P/DP)

An interesting debate ensued about the merits and possibilities of the principal and deputy principal being timetabled to teach some classes. A teaching principal or deputy could get

to know the students better, keep in touch with the reality of the classroom, give advice on discipline, deal with parents and be “very connected” to the teachers.

However, the problems associated with it were also evident. These included the time commitment and being able to deal with very different issues one after the other, being mentally able to switch from what might be a difficult emotional issue to concentrating on teaching a class.

There is a very wide workload, you are expected to walk the talk in all of them and to be an instructional leader in the classroom. I think it is desirable but I think there are practical problems with actually achieving it, depending on ... how busy you are with the discipline, management and organisation. (P/DP)

I am a teaching deputy and I think it is very valuable some of the time. It is very hard then to switch off and go into a classroom and click in. Sometimes I find that very hard, but I think it is on the whole, better to have some contact because you do forget when you are out of the classroom all the time, about the stresses, and the little things that can set you off. (P/DP)

While there was agreement among the group that there were benefits to being timetabled to teach classes, as it provided opportunities to role model good teaching and leadership practices, in the current context it was not considered feasible by all members of the group.

e) Systems and structures

Systems and structures allow leadership to be distributed across multiple teachers who can influence not only their students but also their colleagues in a manner which can improve teaching and learning. The principals and deputy principals suggested three specific systems or structures that can enhance learning in the school. These were a) posts of responsibility which focus on student or teacher learning, b) creating time for subject department or team meetings and c) individual interviews with each member of staff every year.

Posts of responsibility that help to create or develop a positive learning environment included school development planning, teacher induction and timetabling. As stated in Chapter Six, there must be an *intentional* focus on the teaching and learning elements of

these posts. The principals and deputy principals gave the following examples. The school development planning coordinator can arrange for teachers to discuss their subject planning, their teaching methodologies and approaches to assessment. A post for teacher induction can create a climate of collaboration among teachers where they can share their experience and expertise in classroom management. A post for creating the school timetable allows for the central values of the school to be made explicit by the manner in which the timetable is designed.

A specific example of a post related to teaching and learning was given:

We have one specifically at senior cycle where they focus on setting academic targets for each student, the grades, the points; and we review it at the different stages like Christmas and Summer etc. (P/DP)

If meetings are to be included in the timetable they must be approved by the principal. If arranging meetings involves disrupting the timetable during the year to hold ‘ad hoc’ meetings, not only does it require the approval of the principal but it also requires organisation, rescheduling and possible supervision cover. This is usually done by the deputy principal. Such work, however, can be very beneficial in allowing teachers to work together and improve their practice. Again, a number of leaders are required for these meetings to operate effectively.

One of the principals explained his system of meeting each teacher on an individual basis every year. This is a review meeting, where he asks them about their successes and challenges during the year. It provides an opportunity for him to discuss teaching and learning, student achievement, and to work with the teacher to set goals for the following year. But, more than this, it enables him to foster a relationship of trust with the teacher and, through reviewing targets and identifying needs together, not only is the teacher’s leadership capacity developed but the importance of continuous review of teaching and learning is highlighted.

One of the things that I do here at the end of the year between Easter and the summer, I do a review, an individual review with each teacher in the school. It is hugely time consuming but it is very beneficial. They would come in and they

would have their record of class tests for each of their class groupings. I would ask them where they felt their own successes were and why? Were there any areas that they felt they were behind in a little bit and they have no difficulty in identifying those. In terms of moving forward next year, and maybe in conjunction with our plan for teaching and learning, I would ask them if there was any particular challenge they have set themselves for next year. I would use the opportunity to be as affirmative as possible so that the general sense is that they feel valued and affirmed throughout the year. At the same time I use the opportunity to target improvements and they are choosing their own improvements. (P/DP)

While it was evident that this practice is not repeated in every school, there was agreement that it has a beneficial influence on teaching and learning. As recorded in Chapter Five, supporting the individual by unlocking potential and recognising skills and talents was found to be an important element of distributed leadership. Individual reviews, such as the example given above, provide an ideal forum for such support.

7.3 Challenges for principals and deputy principals

In their focus group, the principals and deputy principals all expressed strong agreement that the focus of their work *should* be on the educational aspects of the school. They agreed that they engage in a number of practices that are related to teaching and learning but they expressed a wish to have more time to devote to these.

I suppose you get tied up with the day-to-day running of your school, it is such a busy role of deputy principal. (P/DP)

The big challenge is time, you try to do so much, but time is a huge factor (said in the context of the principal meeting each teacher on a one-to-one basis). (P/DP)

One of the issues that create time pressure for principals and deputy principals in voluntary secondary schools was that, unlike in the past, there is no “back-up” from members of the congregations who are the Trustees of the school to look after issues related to the building. Other time-consuming issues included administrative work, including “procedures” such as discipline where “you have to note down everything”, and “Section 29¹³’s, the NEWB¹⁴, all

¹³ Section 29 refers to the Section of the Education Act (1998) that gives parents the right to appeal a school’s decision to suspend or expel a student. Documenting the actions leading up to the decision to suspend or expel are an important part of the process.

the reports online etc”. There was agreement that if schools had an administrator to look after the buildings and some of the paperwork then the “educational leader”, i.e. the principal, could look after the curriculum and the teaching staff. The quotations below found strong agreement among the principals in the group. Whenever there is building or renovation work being carried out in the school, the principal must devote considerable time to it.

This year for example, we had a new library put in before Christmas and then a new canteen in October so all that stuff takes time. It’s fine and you are told to go ahead and do it, but you are on your own and you have total responsibility for making sure it is done. (P/DP)

If you could park some of the maintenance or administrative tasks, that would allow you actually get on with what the business is, which is education. (P/DP)

When asked if responsibility for the school building was removed from principals where would they direct their energy, the following responses were given:-

Definitely more on education and learning. (P/DP)

The time you spend interviewing [staff], you could do that twice a year, at mid-term. (P/DP)

Somebody coming back from in-service and having the time to in-service the other members of the department ... it would be such a positive thing to do. (P/DP)

Encourage everyone to be a learner. (P/DP)

While recognising the benefits of the post of responsibility structure in the overall leadership and management of the school it was considered to be inadequate to meet the needs of schools in the current context:

In general terms, the in-school management structure in a voluntary secondary school is not satisfactory. (P/DP)

Practices in relation to the appointment of teachers to posts of responsibility and the expectations of their role and function differ across the school sectors. These issues were discussed in Chapter Five but in the context of the principals’ and deputy principals’ discussion on leadership practices that enhance learning, it was clear that it was a cause of

¹⁴ Schools are required to send reports of students’ attendance, suspensions and expulsions to the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB).

some frustration that much of the administrative work is not delegated to others, thereby restricting the principals and deputy principals in their exercise of educational leadership.

One further issue arose in relation to leadership and learning: the need for teachers to take responsibility for improving their own practice.

I think another challenge is that teachers like to deal with problems which are defined as student problems, if students are not doing something properly. Whereas when the focus is on teaching, the responsibility is “how do I change myself?” If I change and become a more effective teacher, maybe the problem with the student will be easier managed. You are the only person who can change, and you can change others if you change yourself and it is getting teachers to accept that. (P/DP)

This is a fundamental issue related to leadership and is particularly relevant in the context of distributed leadership. It was also discussed in Chapter Five. If teachers recognise themselves as leaders, is it not incumbent upon them to take responsibility for improving their own practice? Instead of looking to others to resolve problems for them, when necessary, they would try to change their own practice in order to solve their problems. This idea links many of the issues raised in the previous chapters: the questionnaire findings show that self-reflection is not commonly practised among teachers. The post-holders’ and non post-holders’ focus groups showed that when a positive climate prevails teachers can seek help and advice from each other and if there was a more formal approach taken to working together, systems and structures could be set up for teachers to improve their skills. By applying distributed leadership practices across the school the challenge of taking personal responsibility for improvements to teaching and learning could be addressed.

7.4 Summary

The principals and deputy principals were very conscious of their role as educational leaders and were aware of the practices that potentially influence teaching and learning. In particular they agreed that it was important that they keep the focus of the organisation on the core activities of teaching and learning.

They reported that they engage in a number of practices which they perceive have a positive influence on teaching and learning. These include giving advice to teachers, being actively involved in school planning, creating opportunities for teachers to share ideas and visiting classrooms. In addition, some members of the focus group facilitate teachers in sharing their professional development experiences with colleagues, others teach classes and/or analyse examination results and use this as a basis for reviewing student achievement. Such activities and practices provide important support to teachers and contribute to developing leadership capacity by involving multiple leaders. All of these issues can have a positive impact on the learning environment.

The principals and deputy principals identified three key areas where distributed leadership could enhance teaching and learning; posts of responsibility which focus on student or teacher learning, team and subject department meetings and individual interviews with each member of staff. They reported that if teachers accept leadership responsibility through the post of responsibility structure and through subject departments, they can exert a strong influence over their colleagues and thereby influence student learning. The individual interviews with teachers provide an opportunity for dialogue and review, as well as offering an opportunity for the principal to affirm and recognise the work of each teacher individually. Such practice potentially develops leadership capacity in individual teachers and thereby enhances teaching and learning.

Among the challenges faced by principals and deputy principals is that of time and lack of administrative support. They expressed the view that if there was more administrative support available to them they would devote more time to educational leadership.

The findings outlined above suggest that the principals and deputy principals recognise the key role they play as educational leaders and that their practices influence the development of leadership capacity throughout the school.

The principals and deputy principals reported being aware of the central role they play in influencing the learning environment and in setting up structures that enable teachers to

work together. The specific examples of practices they engage in provide a series of hypotheses that can be further tested.

Chapter Eight

Conclusions and Recommendations

8.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the insights gained through the research and discusses these in the context of the research questions and the literature. These insights would probably have remained as smothered or undisclosed assumptions but this research enabled them to be brought to light and as such, this research contributes new emerging knowledge.

Conclusions from the study are presented as insights which can become hypotheses for further testing. The limitations of the study will also be presented. This will be followed by ideas and recommendations, arising from this thesis, relevant to practitioners, researchers and policy makers in the area of school leadership.

Section 8.1 presents responses to the research questions posed. It summarises the findings under a number of themes and compares these findings to the key features and definition of distributed leadership outlined in Chapter Two.

Section 8.2 presents additional themes emerging from the study that provide the basis for further investigations on the concept of distributed leadership and its impact on teaching and learning. Reflections on the thesis process will highlight the limitations of this study.

Section 8.3 takes the key findings and discusses the implications for leadership practice in schools today. It presents ideas that could develop leadership capacity within the school and contribute to improving teaching and learning.

Section 8.4 reviews succinctly what this thesis has attempted to do, what has been learned from the process and new questions that have arisen as a result.

8.1 Distributed leadership and its impact on teaching and learning

This thesis set out to investigate three key questions:-

1. *How do teachers and principals understand the concept of distributed leadership?*
2. *How does the concept of distributed leadership, as understood by the teachers, principals and deputy principals, link to teaching and learning?*
3. *To what extent do the principals' / deputy principals' own leadership practices enhance teaching and learning in the school? Do these practices include distributing leadership?*

The previous chapters, four to seven, presented and analysed the data gathered in investigating these three research questions. The issues emerging have been synthesised and the high points are presented here and linked to the literature. The first research question raised many issues and provides the basis for the other two questions. The key issues are presented under the following themes:-

- a) Defining distributed leadership
- b) Features of distributed leadership
- c) The gaps between perceptions and practice
- d) Developing leadership capacity
- e) Linking distributed leadership with teaching and learning.

a) Defining distributed leadership

Ritchie and Woods (2007 p.365), state that distributed leadership is not a single phenomenon but a complex mix of structural and individual characteristics and actions. This research suggests a similar interpretation: distributed leadership means different things to different people. In the schools involved in this research, the concept of distributed leadership is not generally part of the educational discourse and consequently there is no commonly agreed simple definition among the research participants. However, there was broad agreement with many of the features outlined in the theoretical framework.

A wide range of terms has been used in the literature, including delegation, dispersed, democratic, shared and collaborative leadership. In Chapter Two the works of Spillane and Duignan were compared. While both agree that leadership is not the remit of one person and that the central purpose of school leadership is to enhance learning, they differed in their use of the term 'distributed leadership'. Spillane favours its use as a lens for diagnosing practices and revising or designing new practices that will improve learning. Duignan places a stronger emphasis on the importance of creating a sense of community where teachers see eye to eye and where an "allowed to be leader" culture prevails.

Chapter Two also presented a 'working definition' of distributed leadership which was then explored with principals, deputy principals and teachers in three post-primary schools. The definition had a particular emphasis on the relationship between distributed leadership and teaching and learning.

Distributed and dispersed leadership are often treated synonymously with delegation. However, the literature suggests that delegation implies that the authority lies, in the first place, with the principal and deputy principal, and they delegate this authority according to their judgement. The principals and deputy principals in this research made a clear distinction between delegation and distributed leadership in that delegation meant they asked a teacher to carry out a task or play a role, whereas distributed leadership meant that teachers throughout the school were empowered to exercise leadership through influencing others and using their own initiative. One of the participants in the principals'/deputy principals' focus group referred to delegation as 'old fashioned' and stated that "you can't just ... share out the cards". However, delegated leadership may best describe the type of leadership assigned to teachers with posts of responsibility. Each post carries with it a specific set of duties and responsibilities delegated to the appointed teacher. It was evident from this research that although teachers may be assigned a set of duties for a post of responsibility, this does not necessarily mean that they are perceived to be good leaders.

Dispersed leadership, on the other hand, suggests leadership as an activity located at different points in a school and enables people to make a contribution or exercise initiative

when relevant. (MacBeath et al 2004 p.8). There was evidence of dispersed leadership in the articulation of views by principals, deputy principals and teachers themselves in this research: teachers can exercise initiative and make a contribution to decision-making and policy, no matter what their position or status within the school. The principals and deputy principals recognised that teachers need to be given space to develop their potential and an opportunity not only to use their initiative, but also to make decisions. The principals and deputy principals expanded the concept further by including a sense of ownership of what is happening and being part of an organic structure.

This research also highlighted the significant role the principal and deputy principal must take in leading the school; they must have a vision and be able to influence others to work with them in achieving this vision; they are in a unique position to provide the structures needed for teachers to exercise leadership; for example they make timetable arrangements, they facilitate teachers attending professional development and they provide opportunities for teachers to formally share their experiences with colleagues. For these reasons the teachers see the principal and deputy principal roles as extremely important for giving direction and see the organisation as somewhat hierarchical. Shared leadership “lies between people, within groups, in collective action, which defies attempts to single out ‘a leader’” (MacBeath et al 2004). In this sense, the term ‘shared leadership’ is not entirely appropriate as the particular senior leadership role of the principal is accepted. However, elements of MacBeath et al’s description are relevant - leadership is seen as creating avenues for people to work together rather than waiting for decisions to be handed down through hierarchy and it is built on openness, trust, concern, respect and appreciation.

The findings from this research suggest that distributed leadership is understood as containing elements of the terms shared, delegated and dispersed. The research participants consider that having opportunities to use initiative is important, thus sharing leadership. However, they also acknowledge the need for the principal to “direct” and see it as part of the principal’s role to delegate tasks and authority as appropriate. The word ‘participative’ was used in Chapter Two to define distributed leadership. The research in this thesis suggests that the prevailing view among those participating in it would concur with this definition, i.e. principal and deputy principal have the authority and ultimate responsibility

for the school but teachers participate in the decision-making processes and have a degree of freedom to exercise initiative and leadership. This leadership is exercised particularly through formal positions such as posts of responsibility but also, and very significantly, through teachers' leadership work within subject departments. The culture of the school plays a very important part in creating the climate that allows multiple teachers to exercise leadership.

The research findings suggest that distributed leadership is understood to be closely linked to teaching and learning. Collaborative work processes, and structures and systems that contribute to creating a positive learning environment, are some of the key features of distributed leadership identified in this research that have the potential to have a direct or indirect influence on teaching and learning. These features are discussed in the next section.

b) Features of distributed leadership

An emergent property of interacting individuals

The concept of distributed leadership as an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals was highlighted as one of the distinctive elements arising from the review of literature (Woods, Bennett et al 2004). In this research, the understanding of distributed leadership demonstrated by the research participants strongly supported this view. "Working together" was a theme that emerged strongly from the research and encompassed subject department meetings, sharing resources, discussing one's practice and consistently implementing school policy. The concept was extended beyond individual classrooms to working together as a school community in having a shared vision and "singing from the same hymn sheet".

The nature of the interaction is often informal, although formal interaction occurs through subject department, post holder and staff meetings. Informal interaction was very much in evidence and highlighted the importance of the prevailing culture in influencing teachers' work. Where the atmosphere was considered to be 'safe', teachers were more likely to enter into dialogue, seek advice and admit they needed help. The benefits of working together

were clearly outlined; teachers felt supported in their work, they exchanged new ideas, shared resources and received help in dealing with challenges. It increased their level of motivation and morale.

Opportunities for the development of multiple leaders

The opportunities to work together presented themselves in a variety of ways and require leadership to be distributed to different people, depending on the situation. Leadership may be provided formally by a “positional” leader such as a subject department coordinator, or informally by any teacher working with colleagues. In the three schools, from time to time there are structured arrangements in place for teachers to work together in teams on school planning or in subject departments. Both the school planning requirement (Education Act 1998) and the whole school evaluation processes contribute to this development in a positive way. Teachers expressed their reluctance to discuss teaching and learning prior to these initiatives. Other opportunities for teachers to work together to lead and influence each other to improve teaching and learning occur through the inclusion of special needs students in mainstream schools. As this is a relatively new phenomenon and most teachers have received no specific training, it appears from the research that it is ‘legitimate’ to go to the special needs teacher for advice and to work with her/him to learn how best to support the learning of special needs students. These practices not only allow for the development of multiple leaders, but require the leadership of a variety of people who have expertise in these areas.

Collaborative cultures

Distributed leadership includes the concept of collaborative cultures, but it is not always easy to develop and maintain a culture where people can work well together. In this research, barriers to working together were evident. The most significant of these was the very honest admission of lack of confidence on the part of teachers. This theme recurred through both post-holders’ and non post-holders’ focus groups and reflected the views of more experienced as well as younger teachers. For teachers who have spent perhaps twenty years working in the ‘privacy’ of their own classroom, they may have no significant

indicators of the quality of their teaching. For these teachers, it is difficult to either give or seek advice. For younger teachers, the lack of permanency of their position might militate against them asking for help, for fear of appearing incompetent. The discussion also raised cultural differences prevailing in different schools; the suggestion was made that it may be more ‘acceptable’ in a girls’ school with a predominantly female staff to discuss classroom practice and that a relatively ‘new’ school might also have a culture of being more open than a traditional school.

Leadership can be exercised by a wide range of people, if the culture and environment allow it.

A significant point of agreement across the three groups of participants in this research was that leadership is not confined to positions. While the leadership role of the principal, deputy principal and post-holders was recognised and deemed necessary, these were not deemed to be the only people who would exercise leadership. Leadership could be exercised by any teacher, depending on their disposition, if the culture and the environment allowed it.

Table 8.1 below sets out the theoretical framework incorporating key features of distributed leadership as outlined in Chapter Two and presents a summary comment from the research findings. These features are incorporated into the research participants’ understanding of distributed leadership, but not all of them are widely practised.

Table 8.1 Features of distributed leadership - summary

Statements from the literature	Summary comment from the research
Recognition that leadership does not reside solely with the principal and deputy principal	There was a consensus among all focus groups participants and very high level of agreement from questionnaire respondents with this statement.
Leadership occurs through interaction and influence and through organisational routines and practices	There was consensus on the influence teachers have on each other in both their formal and informal interactions. There was also agreement

	that when teachers work together student learning is enhanced.
Each teacher is valued and supported in his/her professional practice	There was agreement across all groups, principals and deputy principals, post-holders and non post-holders that this is very important
A sense of community prevails	Having a shared vision is an important aspect of developing community. Other practices, such as inclusive decision-making and teamwork are also important. However, in practice, further developments are required in schools to enhance and develop a sense of community
Relevant expertise is recognised, wherever it lies	There was agreement across principals, deputy principals, post-holders and non post-holders that expertise is recognised, but often only informally
A climate of trust exists	If leadership is to be truly distributed, trust is essential. Collaborative work practices are built on the basis of trust. The courage to show leadership also relies on a climate of trust.
All actions in the school have as their central focus enhancing students' educational experience	Schools strive towards this and increased awareness of it helps to ensure that the learning environment is improved <i>intentionally</i> through structures and practices
Context matters – there is an interdependence between leaders, followers and their situation.	There was unanimous agreement that the context matters and will differ from school to school. People can be leaders and followers, depending on the situation. This includes principals and deputy principals. However, the concept of interdependency could be explored further.
Ongoing learning is considered to be the norm for teachers as well as students	Informally, teachers recognised the need for ongoing learning. However, in practice, there is scope to develop this concept and practice further.

Recognition that each person contributes to the overall good of the school and the school is only as good as the people within it	There was consensus among all the research participants that each individual teacher should be affirmed and their contribution recognised.
Appropriate structures are formed and reformed to provide opportunities for collaboration and participative decision-making	The use of structures such as subject department, and other meetings was recognised as being important for providing leadership opportunities at informal as well as formal levels and as an opportunity for teachers to be involved in decision-making.
Leadership may be exercised through formal positions, as well as informal roles and actions	The potential for the exercise of leadership through formal positions was recognised but training and support is required.

c) The gaps between perceptions and practice

Differences between schools

While this study is not a comparative study between the three schools, differences between the respondents from the three schools emerged in the questionnaires. It was evident that distributed leadership practices are better developed in some schools than others. The analysis of students' examination results was taken as one example of distributed leadership practice. This routine involves a sequence of coordinated actions on the part of the principal, deputy principal, guidance counsellors and other teachers in order to use the information from the analysis to improve student learning. However, this practice was perceived to be a well established practice by only 39% of respondents in Louvain, whereas in both Eldorado and Heidelberg approximately 90% of respondents considered it to be well established and/or being refined. Although all three schools have engaged in the same leadership development programmes, their distributed leadership practices are markedly different.

Two issues which demonstrate the gap between perceptions and reality were highlighted in Chapter Four: one was the level of involvement teachers have in making decisions and the

other was the students' contribution towards decision-making and policy development in the school. In both of these examples, there was a very significant difference between the respondents' perceptions of distributed leadership and the current practices in the school. These gaps suggest that the respondents' understanding of distributed leadership is not matched by their experience of leadership in the school. This is an area that could be explored further in each school.

Middle Leadership: The role of subject departments and posts of responsibility

In Chapter One, middle leadership was described as holding much promise for relieving senior management burdens and capitalising on a wider range of expertise (OECD 2008a). In this research, middle leadership was interpreted as post of responsibility holders and subject department coordinators working with their subject teams. The findings of this research, however, suggest that middle leadership does not live up to the expectation expressed in the OECD report. Firstly, it appears that the roles are exercised differently in the different schools. The system for selecting post-holders and the expectations associated with their work differ between the voluntary secondary schools and the community school. In spite of that, however, the respondents to the questionnaire in all three schools showed a relatively low level of agreement that post-holders have a significant role in decision-making. In relation to teaching and learning, however, there was a noticeable difference between the community school and the voluntary secondary schools in this study, with 78% of the respondents in the community school agreeing that post-holders influence teaching and learning, while in both voluntary schools less than 50% of respondents agreed that they influence teaching and learning.

The focus group discussions highlighted further variations in the perceptions of the leadership role of post-holders. Some, but not all, post-holders exercise their leadership beyond the execution of the tasks assigned to their post; they consider it important to be good role models for students and colleagues. Both non post-holders and principals and deputy principals recognise the valuable role that post-holders *can* play in influencing the learning environment and supporting students in their learning. However, a clearer understanding and defining of their leadership role in the broader school context could lead to a more effective system which would hold the possibility of relieving senior

management burdens and enhancing teaching and learning by capitalising on a range of expertise closer to the classroom. . Changing the approach to defining the schedule of posts and to the method of selecting teachers for these posts would enable leadership to be *distributed*, not just *delegated* to the post holders. To effect this change, school needs would not be defined in terms of a range of tasks to be carried out but, rather in terms of identifying the leadership responsibilities for particular aspects of the school.

In relation to subject departments, this research did not include separate discussions with subject department coordinators but it emerged from the research that subject departments have become a forum for teachers to meet together to discuss teaching and learning issues. The full potential of subject department meetings has not yet been realised. A question arising from this research is: if there was more emphasis on leadership of subject departments would their influence on teaching and learning be greater? More emphasis could include a more formal approach to selection of leaders, training in leadership and the provision of regular meeting times.

The findings of this research suggest that teachers support the concept of collaborative work practices such as planning and reviewing their work together and sharing resources and ideas. In Chapter Four, the results shown in table 4.3 identified significant gaps between respondents' perceptions of distributed leadership itself and their view of leadership practice in their schools. Over 75% of participants agreed that teachers should work together in planning and reviewing their work, sharing ideas within and across subject departments and sharing their professional development experiences but less than 50% of respondents agreed that these practices were well established in their schools. While 95% of respondents agreed that a practice such as teachers working together enhances student learning, fewer than 50% of participants agreed that these types of practice occur.

d) Developing leadership capacity

Mayrowetz (2008) suggests that distributed leadership serves an important purpose in building capacity for school improvement. By developing multiple leaders, he argues, there is greater understanding and appreciation of the issues related to the school as an

organisation. The principals and deputy principals in this research agreed with that position and added specifically that the students would benefit. The principals and deputy principals also agreed that if leadership is distributed widely, some of the “nuts and bolts” of managing a school could be shared and that they themselves could then play a stronger *educational* leadership role. The concept of capacity building, therefore, in the context of this research, involves developing leadership for management and leadership for learning. Leadership for management, in this context, means taking responsibility for setting up systems and structures to ensure that the school is an efficient organisation, whereas leadership for learning means a direct focus on teaching and learning issues. One factor which is particularly relevant here is that teachers have the expertise in their own subject areas that principals and deputy principals may not have. If there is strong positive leadership at subject department level, the capacity is there to improve teaching and learning – the expertise is close to the site of learning.

The participants in this research highlighted many practices and conditions that contribute to developing leadership capacity. These ranged from a positive climate to structures. Principals and deputy principals recognised the importance of affirming individual teachers in their work and acknowledging their contributions. They saw it as their responsibility to provide opportunities for teachers’ leadership potential to be unlocked. The post-holders and non post-holders also agreed that leadership capacity was developed through individual recognition and affirmation and that opportunities must be provided for teachers to exercise leadership. They added that having a climate of trust was important, where teachers feel safe and comfortable about expressing their opinions and/or seeking advice.

e) Linking distributed leadership with teaching and learning.

Spillane (2008) suggests that distributed leadership can be used as a framework to focus on improving teaching and learning. In the teachers’ questionnaires in this research there was evidence that teachers believe that they influence each others’ work and through formal and informal practices, distributed leadership can enhance teaching and learning.

Southworth (2004) suggested that good leaders [principals] recognise that their influence on student learning is indirect: it is mediated through their teachers. Being aware of the indirect nature of their influence, principals actively seek to influence teachers and they do this in three ways; monitoring, modelling and dialogue. In this research the principals and deputy principals were aware of the important role they play in leading learning. They recognised the importance of distributing leadership so that teachers can influence their colleagues in a way which would not be possible for one individual. Monitoring student progress was seen as important and one example of this was the analysis of examination results. Other examples included the role played by the year heads in supporting students' learning, creating a positive learning environment and communicating with parents. The research highlighted the need for principals, deputy principals and year heads to support students' learning in a variety of ways and to ensure that teaching and learning issues are on the agenda at staff meetings.

The principals and deputy principals considered that they could model good practice by teaching classes. This enabled them to be part of a subject department team and to be directly involved in leading learning. However, this is not always possible, but by showing their interest in the progress of students and by setting up structures to enable teachers to meet, the principals and deputy principals model their enthusiasm to improve the learning environment for students. They also show that others can play leadership roles within subject departments, while they become followers.

If teachers are to engage in educational dialogue, they need to have opportunities to meet. The research highlighted the important role the principal and deputy principal play in setting up these meetings. However, setting up these structures is not sufficient to ensure improvements to teaching and learning. Leadership of these departments and a more formal approach to practices such as peer observation would provide better opportunities for teachers to engage in pedagogical dialogue. The concept of teacher leaders was outlined in Chapter Two as an aspect of distributed leadership. Harris et al (2003 p.79) identified four dimensions of the teacher leadership role that extends to the overall operation of the school. Teacher leaders:-

1. translate the principles of school improvement into the practices of individual classrooms (a brokering role);
2. assist other teachers to cohere around a particular development and foster a more collaborative way of working;
3. play a mediating role in school improvement. They are an important source of expertise and information;
4. forge close relationships with individual teachers where mutual learning takes place.

In this research the evidence suggested that teachers play informal leadership roles. They discuss their work informally and there was evidence of peer observation among a small group of teachers. In that way, some teachers were fostering a collaborative way of working and engaging in mutual learning. However, due to the lack of a formal, structured approach, the potentially positive impact on teaching and learning that could emerge from teacher leadership is reduced.

Principals and deputy principals believe in the importance of their role as educational leaders and see two key areas for development:-

- more intentional focus on teaching and learning within the post of responsibility and subject department structures;
- the development of individual skills and talents among teachers and providing opportunities for them to exercise leadership in informal as well as formal roles and actions.

It is not only the principals' and deputy principals' practices that influence teaching and learning; the teachers' own practices also have the potential to influence their colleagues. If teachers recognise their influence and have the courage to be leaders, they can make a very positive contribution towards helping themselves and their colleagues to improve their classroom practices and to provide a supportive learning environment for students.

8.2 Additional themes and limitations of the study

In examining distributed leadership and its impact on teaching and learning, a number of additional themes emerged that provide the basis for further investigation.

The changing role of post-holders

The role of post-holders emerged strongly as being significant in participants' perceptions of distributed leadership and in the potential for teachers holding these posts of responsibility to play a leadership role in student and teacher learning. One of the key points raised in both the principals' and deputy principals' and the post-holders' focus groups was that these roles have changed in recent years and that post-holders today play a more influential role in leading learning. However, this thesis did not explore the nature of the changes that have come about, and the implications of these changes. Further exploration of the changing role of post-holders, and the potentially positive impact these roles could have on teaching and learning, would serve to illuminate some of the important emergent issues in this research. It would also provide insights into an aspect of the Irish education system that is sometimes considered to be contentious.

Issues of power

Leadership is often associated with power and authority. This thesis did not focus specifically on this aspect of distributed leadership, but the issue was raised in the non post-holders' focus group when discussing the leadership role of post-holders. One participant referred to a teacher "taking on too much power" (Chapter Five). Developing the concept of distributed leadership and working to develop practices that enhance it will, inevitably, raise the issue of power and perceived power. The literature has already highlighted the caution shown by teachers to their colleagues when placed in a position of leadership (Weiss and Cambone 1994, cited in this thesis in Chapter Two). The findings from this thesis suggested that teachers have no difficulty accepting their leadership role and function when working with students but there was some resistance to being a leader among their colleagues. Further research into the reasons for and the nature of this resistance could provide invaluable insights that would inform future developments. If there are power

struggles among a staff, it may have a negative impact on the development of leadership capacity and on the ability or opportunity for teachers to exercise leadership.

Accepting leadership

A concept that might be related to that of “power”, as stated above, is that of teachers accepting leadership responsibility. It was evident through this research that post-holders had very different perceptions of their leadership roles. In some cases, they carried out their tasks as defined in their job description and did not see themselves as leaders in a more general context. That meant that, for example, if there was a situation of conflict with a colleague, they would refer this to a more senior member of staff such as the deputy principal or principal. Other post-holders, on the other hand, took a broader view of their leadership role. They extended it to include being a role model for other members of staff as well as students, and to dealing with issues among staff and students as appropriate to their role as a senior leader in the school, but not confined strictly to the tasks of their post of responsibility.

The principals and deputy principals agreed that there are some teachers who do not wish to accept any leadership responsibility beyond the classroom and, even when authority is delegated to them they may not accept it (Chapter Five)

In the literature it is also recognised that teachers derive most meaning from their work in the classroom and taking responsibility beyond the classroom may not be an attractive option. However, the results of this study suggested that the research participants were aware that their influence on students extends beyond the classroom and that student learning is enhanced when teachers work together. One would ask, if these two points are accepted, is it not linked to accepting leadership responsibility? However, further study is required to explore the nature of responsibility associated with different leadership roles, as well as functions, attitudes and implications of accepting, or not accepting responsibility for leadership beyond the classroom.

The voice of students and parents

In the questionnaire in this research, the respondents suggested that students and their parents should play a leadership role in the school but, in practice, their voices are often not heard in decision-making. A very significant perspective on distributed leadership is missing from this research by not including these two constituent groups. The author recognises the importance of their potential involvement in leadership in the school but the focus of this study was on teachers, deputy principals and principals. However, the author recognises that this is a limitation of the study and that further research should include both students and parents in the data-gathering process. Schools are now required to have both student and parents' councils and are expected to include them in policy development in the school. Active engagement in policy development opens the door to significant involvement in decision-making and leadership.

The role of subject departments

As highlighted in this research, the role of subject departments has become more prominent in schools in recent years, as a result of the school development planning and the whole school evaluation processes. In this research the role of subject departments in enhancing student learning was acknowledged. The respondents suggested that subject departments could provide a forum for sharing good ideas and resources, but it was also suggested that these opportunities were not fully utilised. There were suggestions that a more formal approach would improve the opportunities for these departments to influence classroom practice, for example by discussing pedagogy as well as curriculum provision. Further investigation into the leadership of subject departments would add considerably to the theory of distributed leadership. There are many issues to be explored: the organisation and content of meetings, formal or informal leadership of departments and professional development. The author's contention, based on this research and experience, is that this is an area of untapped potential. If teachers are trained in leadership in this area it would improve the functioning of a department and therefore improve teaching and learning. But it could go beyond that to improving teachers' confidence in their own abilities and encouraging them to become "teacher leaders" (in the sense used by Lieberman) thus building leadership capacity in the school and ultimately contributing to school

improvement. As Mayrowetz (2008) says, the collective capacity of the organisation would increase to the point where the school can address its own shortcomings.

Professional development

While professional development was alluded to in this study, the potential influence it has on the learning environment of the school is such that it requires further study. Different types of professional development are required to meet the needs of the school in developing leadership capacity. Some may be sourced externally to the school but the school-based dimension is also very important, and sometimes underplayed and underestimated.

Reflections on the thesis process

In setting out on this journey of exploration of distributed leadership, the author had concerns about discussing distributed leadership with research participants before defining or ascertaining their understanding of leadership in general. For that reason, a preliminary study was carried out in one school. This was a very useful exercise in that it produced ideas about leadership and how teachers perceived school leadership. It yielded a very broad interpretation of leadership but identified the fact that teachers accept that they play a leadership role – leadership is not the sole prerogative of the principal and deputy principal. However, in hindsight, more exploration of the difference between leadership and management would have been helpful.

A useful outcome of the research process has been the articulation by teachers themselves of their leadership role, and a recognition of the influence they exert not only on the students but also over their colleagues. Two key concepts are linked to this – the professionalism of the teacher and the culture of the school. One could argue that these themes are the subject of this thesis, but the author contends that by using the term distributed leadership, it has acted as a diagnostic tool to highlight certain issues that schools could focus on that would enhance teaching and learning. If the atmosphere is positive, then a culture of collaboration can be developed and the leadership role of post-holders can be discussed and articulated more clearly. Similarly, more training for subject

department teams holds the possibility of making a very positive contribution to school improvement. The leadership of the principal and deputy principal is very important. Firstly, they create the positive atmosphere by paying attention to each individual teacher – recognising that their influence on student learning is through their teachers. Secondly, they are in a position to form structures and systems that enable teachers to work together and to develop leadership skills. Thirdly, professional development is an important part of creating an atmosphere of learning among staff.

8.3 Using the research

At the outset, this thesis was placed in the context of leadership development. The author's involvement in the area of professional development for school leadership prompted the research questions. Having completed the study, the findings can be used by the schools themselves in a number of ways.

Each school will receive a report outlining their own school's responses to the questionnaire and a summary of findings from the focus group discussions. The key issues will have implications for the principals and deputy principals in that the findings highlight the importance of their leadership role in developing a positive learning environment but also in developing individual leadership skills in teachers and providing opportunities for leadership to be exercised among colleagues. All of these have the potential to improve teaching and learning. The reports could also be used as a basis for discussion among post-holders, focusing on their role in leading learning.

From the point of view of professional development, the findings could be used by providers of in-service courses to inform their work in the area of leading learning, leading people and leading the organisation.

From a policy perspective, this research could be used to illuminate how, by focusing on leadership throughout the organisation, teaching and learning could be enhanced. Beyond that, however, there may be some insights into leadership succession – if leadership is a common element of the discourse at school level and leadership capacity is consciously

developed with a focus on teaching and learning there are two possible outcomes; one being improved results for students and the second being the availability of leaders of the future who would be better equipped to assume senior leadership positions.

8.4 Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore what was meant by distributed leadership and to see, if practised in a school, would it contribute to improving teaching and learning. Through questionnaires and focus group discussions the concept of distributed leadership was explored and the results presented and analysed. A wide ranging definition emerged that recognised that all teachers can be leaders, but the extent of their leadership functions varies from within the classroom to their influence on students beyond their individual classroom, to their leadership influence over colleagues. Their understanding of distributed leadership encompassed structural and cultural issues, both of which had the potential to influence teaching and learning. This potential is not fully realised, but with a more intentional focus on teaching and learning and a conscious development of leadership capacity this situation could change to the benefit of students.

Development of leadership happens through a combination of opportunity and nurturing. This depends on consciously taking action, usually starting with the principal and deputy principal setting the example by being aware of the need to “let go” and the need to provide opportunities for others to lead.

In attempting to illuminate the current understanding of distributed leadership and its impact on teaching and learning, this thesis provides insights into three schools and the perceptions and practices of distributed leadership as seen by teachers, deputy principals and principals. It raises further questions about the leadership roles played by students and parents and boards of management. It also suggests further research into areas of school culture and the professionalism of teachers.

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Appendix 1 Leadership Development for Schools

Leadership Development for Schools is a support service set up by the Department of Education and Science in 2001 to promote professional development for principals, deputy principals and others involved in, or aspiring to, school management and educational leadership in first and second level schools.

The team consists of principals and deputy principals who are seconded from their schools on an annual basis to design and implement a variety of courses and to provide support and learning opportunities for school leaders. The courses offered include:-

Misneach – for recently appointed principals / acting principals

Forbairt – for experienced principals and deputy principals

Tánaiste – for recently appointed deputy principals

Cothú – for principals and deputy principals of Special Schools

Cumasú – for school leaders in disadvantaged schools

Tóraíocht – for teachers aspiring to positions of senior management and leadership.

For further information see www.lds21.ie

Appendix 2 The Post of Responsibility Structure in Irish Post Primary Schools

The Post of Responsibility (PoR) is a structure whereby a number of teachers are given additional remuneration to carry out specified tasks, duties and responsibilities in the school. It is also called the “in-school management” system.

There are two grades of post; Assistant Principal and Special Duties. The Assistant Principal post carries an additional salary allowance of almost €9,000 per annum and the Special Duties allowance is approximately €5,000 per annum. Teachers in receipt of either of these allowances are required to fulfil duties and take responsibilities in addition to their full teaching hours. The duties attached to the post are defined by the Board of Management following a consultation process involving all the staff. The consultation process includes an analysis of the school needs, agreement on the priorities and the drawing up of a “Schedule of posts” to match the agreed priorities.

Each school is allocated a specific number of Special Duties and Assistant Principal posts on the basis of school size, according to a formula based on the number of whole-time teachers in the school.

Appointment to a post of responsibility is by competitive interview among the teachers already employed in the school, whether full time or part time, permanent or temporary. Selection criteria have been agreed at national level and include credit for the number of years experience in that school and “the most senior suitable” (DES Circular Letter 05/98) candidate. Therefore, in most cases, teachers holding posts of responsibility are more likely to be the teachers who have been in the school for the longest number of years.

Appendix 3(a) Preliminary Investigation Report

The focus group meeting, as part of the preliminary research for this thesis, was held with a group of teachers from one school. There were six teachers present and the meeting lasted for one hour. The preliminary ideas explored included their perception of leadership relationships, a) the ideal type of relationship between the principal and deputy principal and b) their own leadership role in the school. Participants were presented with a set of pictures and asked to suggest the ideal relationship between principal and deputy, using the images presented. (See Appendix 3(b)). The predominant message arising from this exercise was that while principal and deputy co-operate and work in tandem, *“in some things the principal has to make the final decision”* (Participants #2, P2). The most commonly chosen image was that of the ship’s captain and first officer.

With regard to their own leadership role within the school, a rich variety of perspectives emerged. Participants were invited to represent their view in picture or diagram form. Four of the participants presented ‘mind-map’ type diagrams, emphasising the interactive nature of leadership. In some cases the teacher placed him/herself in the centre circle and drew other circles around them with words such as ‘principal’, ‘deputy’, ‘pupils’, ‘other staff’ and ‘curriculum’, ‘extra-curricular’ and ‘school social events’ in the circles. The circles were generally linked with lines and two-way arrows to depict the interactive nature of the relationships. *“To fit into a leadership role, (one) must have dialogue between all elements of a school environment, a holistic empathy to lead to a holistic approach”* (P3). *“People respond to good leadership. Leaders in turn respond to work and dedication of others. Conversely, poor leadership and example will adversely impact on the actions of others”* (P2).

In one case, the drawing was more hierarchical, but showing two levels of hierarchy, one being the ‘staffroom level’ and the other the ‘classroom level’. In the staffroom, *“the role of leadership is undefined, as ‘not a post holder’ therefore..... but opportunities present to sit on committees etc”* (emphasis placed by participant). In the classroom the *“perception of teacher by students as leader in lower echelons of a hierarchical structure”*. (P3)

Finally, one participant drew a bridge, 'the education bridge', with a student crossing the bridge, "*living through this transitional but crucially formative period*". The bridge was 'built' from bricks with words such as 'class teacher', 'year head', 'principal/deputy' 'subject departments', 'board of management' 'parents', 'extra-curricular' and 'policies' and 'pastoral care'. This participant saw each teacher as "*having a central degree of leadership as they occupy many roles in a school, in the life of each student and even of one another. We are all responsible to one another to get the students to where they need to be*" (P6).

Two key concepts seem to emerge from this data, 1) teachers show leadership within their own classroom and 2) interaction between teachers for the good of the students is perceived as a leadership issue. Leadership is perceived to exist or be developed through the interplay between the people in the different roles (class teacher, year head, principal etc) and the activities of the school (provision of curriculum and extra-curricular activities, policies and pastoral care systems). Perhaps this reflects Spillane's concept of distributed leadership as being embedded in the roles and rituals of the school; "*the tasks, actors, actions and interactions of school leadership as they unfold together in the daily life of the school*" (Spillane et al 2001. p.23.) The two quotations below capture the points above:-

"It is important that we have the same policies, apply the same rules, and give the same messages, ethos and value to our students. Therefore, each one of us has a leadership role" (P2).

"The Venn diagram places me, the teacher, in the middle of that. Not that I'm of central importance but you are in the middle of it all. You play a leadership role in the classroom" (P4).

The final question posed to the participants was "what contribution might teachers make to the overall leadership and management of the school? Responses were verbal and included the two statements below:-

“Each teacher takes ownership of a small part of the school, e.g. pastoral team. Even if not driving that team, you should be taking part and taking ownership of what’s going on”.
(P1)

“Trying to make the school a better place. Getting more people involved. Encouraging people to volunteer and to speak, e.g. a chair at a meeting should be aware that four or five people might dominate a meeting. Give silent teachers a voice.” (P3)

Overall, the focus group meeting provided some insight into teachers’ perceptions of leadership. It allowed some concepts to emerge which can be further explored through questionnaires and interviews, e.g. shared vision / taking ownership of small parts of the school / trying to make the school a better place / leadership at classroom level and leadership at ‘whole-school’ level / ‘positional leadership’ such as posts of responsibilities and the opportunities for all teachers to engage in leadership activities. Perhaps, even more importantly, it highlighted to the researcher some of the skills required to gather data successfully. It also highlighted some of the challenges of facilitating a focus group meeting, such as allowing enough time, allowing discussion to flow, interpreting the data and reporting the findings.

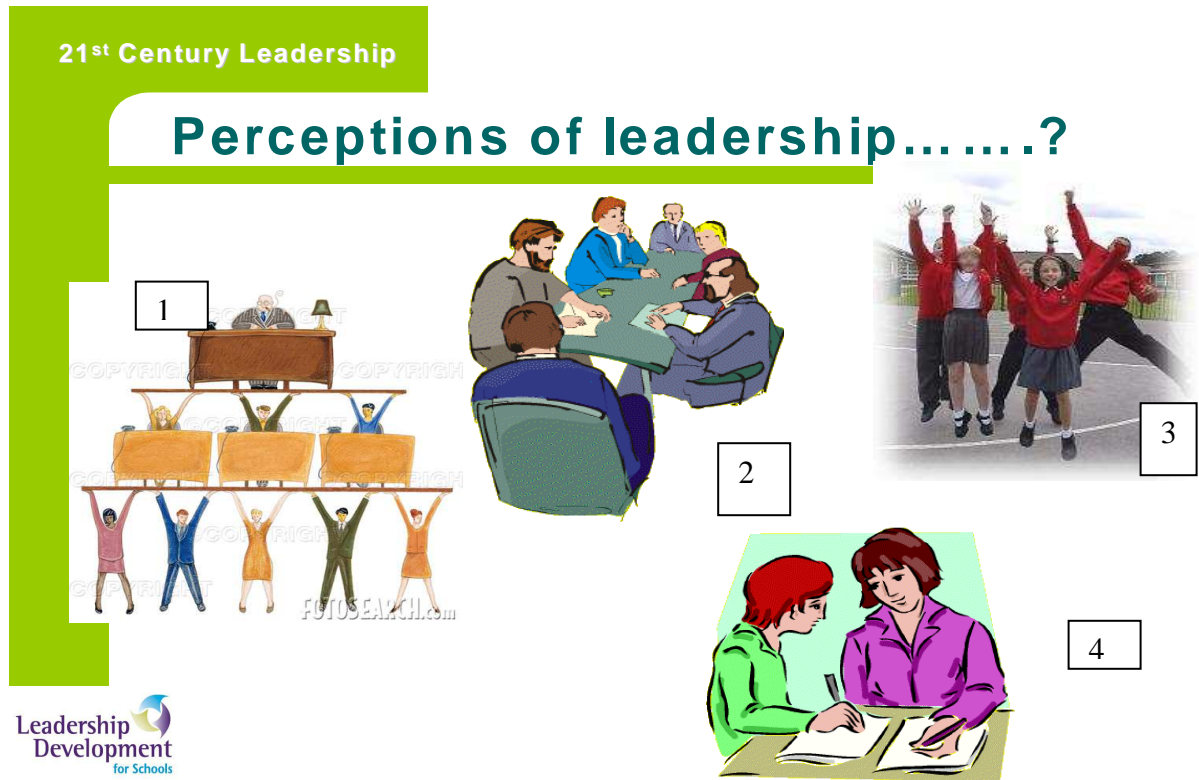
Appendix 3(b) Preliminary Investigation Questions

Picture 1



Task 1: Looking at Picture 1, what would you suggest is an ideal relationship between a principal and deputy principal in any school? You might like to give one or two reasons.

Picture 2



Task 2: Looking at Picture 2, comment on these images in terms of leadership roles and relationships

Task 3: Using the blank page provided, illustrate through diagram or drawing your leadership role in the school.

Additional questions for discussion:

4. To what extent is leadership discussed and developed among teachers?
5. How might your role as a leader be developed?
6. What contribution might teachers make to the overall leadership and management of the school?

Appendix 4 School Profiles – Posts of Responsibility

School No 1 Eldorado

Eldorado is a girls' voluntary secondary school in south Dublin. There are 413 students, 28 whole time equivalent teachers and four Special Needs Assistants.

There are six Assistant Principals and eleven Special Duties posts, including the Programme Co-ordinator.

Post	Classification	Duties
AP1	Pastoral	Year Head
AP2	Pastoral	Year Head
AP3	Curricular / administrative	Work Experience/Uniform
AP4	Pastoral	Year Head
AP5	Pastoral	Guidance
AP6	Curricular / administrative	School Development Planning
SD1	Curricular / administrative	PR/Extracurricular/Marketing1
SD2	Pastoral	Special Needs/Home School Liaison
SD3	Administrative / curricular	Laboratory Coordinator
SD4	Pastoral	Year Head
SD5	Pastoral	Pastoral Care Coordinator
SD6	Pastoral	Year Head
SD7	Curricular / administrative	PR/Extracurricular/Marketing2
SD8	Curricular / administrative	It Coordinator
SD9	Curricular / administrative	Examinations Secretary
SD 10	Pastoral	International Student Coordinator
SD PC	Curricular / Pastoral	TY Coordinator/Year Head

School No. 2 Louvain

Louvain is a boys' voluntary secondary school in west Dublin. There are 658 students, 54 whole time equivalent teachers and four Special Needs Assistants.

The post of responsibility structure includes nine Assistant Principals (AP), fifteen Special Duties (SD) teachers and one programme Co-ordinator at AP level. The schedule of posts is outlined below:-

Post	Classification	Duties
Principal		
Deputy		
AP1	Pastoral	Year head 1 st year
AP2	Admin	HSO. School maintenance. Stock control.
AP3	Admin	Administrative officer, ECDL Centre Manager
AP4	Curricular	Students' Council. Drugs awareness coordinator. Librarian.
AP5	Admin	Examinations secretary – internal and external.
AP6	Pastoral	Year Head 5 th year
AP7	Pastoral	Year Head 6 th year
AP8	Pastoral	Year Head 2 nd year
AP9	Pastoral	Year Head 3 rd year
Temp	Curricular	Programme coordinator
SD1	Pastoral	Assistant Year Head 3 rd year
SD2	Curricular	Staff induction. PGDE Coordinator. President's award.
SD3	Admin	Prefects. Board crew. Book rental scheme.
SD4	Pastoral	Assistant Year Head 1 st year
SD5	Curricular	School development planning coordinator
SD6	Pastoral	Assistant Year Head 2 nd year
SD7	Admin	Automated attendance system officer
SD8	Admin	Games coordinator. School transport
SD9	Admin / Curricular	Public relations officer. Environmental officer.
SD10	Pastoral	Year Head 4 th year. Transition Year coordinator

SD11	Curricular	Junior Certificate Schools Programme coordinator
SD12	Curricular	
SD13	Pastoral	Assistant Year Head 6 th year
SD14	Pastoral	Assistant Year Head 5 th year
SD15	Curricular Admin	Timetabler

School No. 3 Heidelberg

Heidelberg is a co-ed community school in south Dublin. There are 700 students, 50 whole time equivalent teachers and six Special Needs Assistants. Eleven teachers hold Assistant Principal posts and there are fifteen Special Duties teachers.

Post	Classification	Duties
Principal		
Deputy		
AP	Pastoral	Year Head 1 st year
AP	Pastoral	Year Head 2 nd year
AP	Pastoral	Year Head 3 rd year
AP	Pastoral	Year Head 4 th year
AP	Pastoral	Year Head 5 th year
AP	Pastoral	Year Head 6 th year
AP	Curricular	Transition Year coordinator
AP	Admin	Teacher substitution
AP	Admin	House and State examinations
AP	Curricular	School development planning
AP	Curricular Admin	Adult Education Director
SD	Admin	Health and safety
SD	Curricular	Special needs
SD	Pastoral	Anti bullying coordinator

SD	Curricular	Adult education
SD	Admin / pastoral	Attendance/punctuality assistant
SD	Admin	PRO/Year Book – communications
SD	Pastoral	School environmental officer
SD	Pastoral	Positive school spirit / lunchtime activities
SD	Curricular	Special needs coordinator
SD	Admin / curricular	LCVP and competitions coordinator
SD	Admin	Stock control
SD	Pastoral	Extra curricular coordinator
SD	Curricular / admin	IT development officer
SD	Curricular / pastoral	LCA coordinator
SD	Pastoral	Student Council

Appendix 5 LDS School Projects

School Number 1 Eldorado

Title of project: Fostering Learning and Achievement

General aims of project:

1. To encourage and facilitate students to take responsibility for their own learning.
2. To encourage active learning
3. To help students to value their achievements/progress.

Specific team-building and leadership aims:

1. To present the project effectively to staff to ensure that they are fully briefed on the project, and to invite their participation.
2. There is a culture of encouragement of initiative within the school - an aim of the project is to nurture this culture by empowering A.P.'s as middle managers. This may be done by developing teamwork within the group and allowing time for regular meetings to take place.
3. To develop a sense of team work between students, parents and mentors.
4. Team members will develop relevant skills such as effective chairing of meetings, presenting material, conflict resolution and conducting surveys.

Description of project: To Date

1. Students would be given help to develop a personalised study plan and would then be monitored and assisted by regular meetings with a mentor, or cooperating teacher. It was decided that the target group would be second year.
2. The project was presented to the staff. Groups of three students were assigned to staff members who agreed to become involved, which included almost the entire staff.
3. A letter was sent to parents explaining the project, and inviting them to a meeting where they were given a presentation on how we hoped to proceed.

4. Each student, with a parent, then met her mentor to devise a plan of how she spent her time each day, and hence to draw up a plan showing where she would fit in the recommended number of hours of study.
5. Mentors met with students regularly over the next few weeks, leading up to the Christmas exams.
6. After Christmas, students completed an interim survey to see how they perceived the success or otherwise of the project. The survey results were collated and evaluated.

Outcomes of project (Evidence of success):

1. Consultation of parents has meant that they have become more involved in their daughters' learning, in cooperation with the teaching staff.
2. The response to the survey showed a varied level of satisfaction among students. However, all students had a raised awareness of the importance of study and the length of time which should be spent studying each week. Some students are intrinsically motivated to do well anyway. Others found keeping to the schedule gruelling and stressful. Almost all felt that the programme should be offered to next year's second years.
3. It was felt that this has been a good forum for facilitating A.P.'s to become a driving force for ongoing school planning. It is intended that this project be a starting point in a process whereby A.P.'s will fulfil a wider role in middle management. The project has highlighted a need for regular AP meetings with a tight agenda which should be circulated a few days before the meeting.

School Number 2 Louvain

Title of project: To promote the use of the College Journal as an aid to learning and as an effective means of communication between school and home.

General aims of project:

To improve learning by:

- Encouraging students to keep accurate records of work done/to be done.
- Developing a practice where teachers communicate both positive and negative progress.
- Fostering an increased involvement from parents to their son's progress through the journal.

Specific team-building and leadership aims:

- To hold effective meetings at regular intervals.
- To engage the support of all staff in the project — not just management' or members of the pilot programme.
- To maintain an open line of communication between members of the programme, the rest of the staff, the parents and the students.
- To encourage students and parents to have a more positive attitude towards the journal as a useful tool in education.

Description of project:

- Regular meetings were held by the committee.
- A survey was designed and carried out on all journals in the school to get an accurate understanding of current journal usage.
- The results of the survey were reported to the staff as part of a staff meeting — they were also informed of the proposed future goals and asked for any advise/input they wished to give. There was particular concern about the number of students who had not signed the code of discipline.

- Form teachers checked the journals paying particular attention to the signing of the code of discipline.
- A letter was sent home to all parents explaining why the journal is such an important tool in their son's education and encouraging them to check the journal regularly and to sign the code of discipline.
- A survey was held before Easter to check for any proof on the areas previously examined by the committee.

Outcomes of project (Evidence of success):

The staff was very positive towards the project as a whole.

- There was an increase in the number of students who had the code of discipline signed
- The standard of students' record keeping was only slightly improved.
- There was an increase in graffiti.

Future Directions:

It was recognised that the best way to tackle graffiti was as a separate issue from the beginning of the next school year.

Record keeping was harder to measure in the survey. It was recognised as a more difficult task to change as it involved changing students' attitude to the journal itself.

The importance of the journal has been prioritised by the staff. There is a review of the journal taking place amongst the staff at present. The staff is being consulted on their opinion on how the journal may be altered in design to make it more relevant to the students. It is hoped that an improvement in design will improve record keeping. It is hoped to examine prototypes used in other schools as part of this investigation.

School Number 3 Heidelberg

Title of project:- Raising Achievement

General aims of project:

To raise student achievement by:

- Reviewing & developing policy and practice relating to attendance & punctuality.
- Prioritising professional development needs and organising relevant in-service training.
- Developing structures to highlight and support more able students.

Specific team-building and leadership aims:

Through working collegially, engaging the wider school community, delegating tasks when appropriate and evaluating progress our aim is to:

- Embed a shared vision/focus within the team
- Further develop communication skills within the team
- Further develop Self Evaluation/Target Setting/Review within the team
- Create a culture of shared leadership amongst the team
- Create opportunities to work with colleagues in a leadership role, delegating tasks if appropriate.

Description of project:

The Project was divided into three areas. An outline of each is as follows:

In-service Training

- To engage in discussions with staff highlighting whole school in-service training needs.
- To organise externally facilitated in-service training
- To develop structures which facilitate the harnessing of 'in-house' expertise
- To put in place structure to evaluate the impact of in-service training

Attendance & Punctuality

- To formulate a draft Attendance & Punctuality Policy
- To target those students whose attendance & punctuality are causing concern

- To develop a rewards system to acknowledge students with excellent attendance & punctuality

Gifted & Talented Students

- To research available literature on the identification of Gifted & Talented students
- To put in place structure to identify (using prior attainment data) more able students and to disseminate this information to staff as appropriate
- To develop a Gifted & Talented Policy

Outcomes of project (Evidence of success):

In-service Training

- In-service training needs identified & whole school in-service training provided
- Re-organisation of staff meetings has been piloted making the time more conducive to in-service training which may be facilitated by staff.
- Structures have been put in place to allow staff to evaluate any in-service training provided in school

Attendance & Punctuality

- A draft Attendance Policy has been formulated
- Structures are in place to improve levels of attendance for those students whose attendance punctuality was of greatest concern.
- Various reward systems have been piloted across the school.

Gifted & Talented Students

- Whole School in-service training on identification and supporting Gifted & Talented students has taken place
- Brightest student (based on prior attainment data) have been identified in the Junior Cycle

Appendix 6 Distributed Leadership Questionnaire

Perceptions and practices – questionnaire for teachers.

Number of years in this school

Number of years in other schools, if applicable

Please indicate if you have a post of responsibility:

No post Special Duties Assistant Principal Other

Part 1: Perceptions of educational leadership:

Please indicate your agreement, on a scale of 1-5, with the following statements:

Strongly Agree 5 Strongly disagree 1

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| 1. Educational leadership is the job, primarily, of the principal and deputy | <input type="text"/> |
| 2. All teachers are leaders in their own classroom | <input type="text"/> |
| 3. Teachers' influence on students extend beyond the classroom | <input type="text"/> |
| 4. Post holders influence teaching and learning in the school | <input type="text"/> |
| 5. Subject departments should have a leader/co-ordinator | <input type="text"/> |
| 6. The objective of subject departments is to improve teaching and learning | <input type="text"/> |
| 7. Subject department co-ordinators play an important leadership role | <input type="text"/> |
| 8. Teachers have a more direct influence on student learning than the principal | <input type="text"/> |
| 9. The active support of the principal is essential when changes are being introduced in a subject department | <input type="text"/> |
| 10. School management should ensure that the student voice is heard in the decision-making processes of the school | <input type="text"/> |
| 11. All teachers should be given opportunities to exercise leadership beyond their classroom | <input type="text"/> |
| 12. Student learning is enhanced when teachers work together, (e.g. discussing ideas, sharing resources, analysing results, acting as critical friends for each other or observing each other teaching) | <input type="text"/> |

13. Each teacher should take responsibility for the achievement of all students in their classes.
14. Teachers should plan and review their work together with colleagues in the same subject departments
15. It is the role of the principal or deputy to encourage everybody to work together towards a shared vision
16. Teachers from different subject departments should share ideas about teaching and learning
17. Teachers should be given decision-making responsibilities beyond their own classroom
18. Each teacher has a professional responsibility to uphold/promote values such as respect, care and co-operation in their classroom
19. Teachers should be given the opportunity to lead new initiatives in the school
20. Teachers should exemplify the school ethos and values in their classroom
21. It is the responsibility of school management to ensure good pastoral care systems are in place
22. The principal or deputy should take responsibility for communication with parents
23. Decisions regarding whole-school policy should be made essentially by management (i.e. principal and/or deputy)
24. Post holders should be involved in decisions that affect the whole school.
25. All teachers should be involved in decisions that affect the whole school.
26. Analysis of student progress should be carried out by teachers as part of subject department meetings
27. Analysis of student progress should be carried out by Year Heads together with principal and/or deputy
28. When teachers attend professional development courses they should share their learning with colleagues
29. Subject departments should have designated meeting times
30. Principal and deputy have a significant influence on student learning

Open question:

1. **What is your understanding of ‘shared leadership’ in the school context?**

Part 2

Leadership Practices

Please place the appropriate number in the box provided:-

- 1 = We (the majority) do not do this in our school
- 2 = We are starting to move in this direction
- 3 = We are making good progress here
- 4 = We have this condition well established
- 5 = We are refining our well established practice in this area

In our school:-

1. Teachers work together in teams (e.g. to review practice, to design policies, create new ideas and implement plans)
2. Senior management (principal/deputy) listens to teachers’ voices
3. Students get an opportunity to make suggestions about their learning (e.g. subject choices, approaches to assessment, learning activities within the classroom, homework and the learning environment)
4. Teachers in the same subject departments share resources
5. There are opportunities for teachers to lead educational activities beyond their own classroom
6. New ideas about teaching and learning are discussed at staff meetings
7. New ideas about teaching and learning are discussed at subject department meetings
8. In our subject department we work together to systematically review our work
9. Self reflection on practice is encouraged
10. Every year we strive to improve learning by prioritising specific actions
11. Teachers are given opportunities for professional development that enhance student learning in their own subject area

12. Teachers are encouraged to engage in professional development related to whole-school issues (e.g. school development planning, special needs, pastoral care etc)
13. We work with members of the school community, including parents, to establish challenging but realistic expectations and standards
14. We work together, as a school community, to ensure that we are offering the best curricular opportunities for our students
15. We receive feedback from parents and students about student performance and school programmes
16. Discussion on the developmental priorities of the school form part of staff meetings every year
17. Individual teachers take responsibility for communicating student progress and achievement to parents
18. Year heads or post holders take responsibility for high quality communication systems between home and school
19. Teachers are given opportunities to chair meetings
20. Students' results in the state examinations are analysed
21. Student progress is carefully monitored by teachers
22. Systems are in place which ensure that students are supported in their learning
23. The Code of Behaviour is based on our school's ethos and values
24. All policies are designed with a focus on enhancing, improving and developing a high quality learning environment
25. Teachers have an opportunity to discuss their professional work with senior management on an annual basis
26. Teachers are encouraged by senior management to try out new ideas
27. Opportunities are provided to discuss new classroom practices with colleagues
28. All teachers are involved in decisions which affect the whole school
29. Post holders have a significant role in decision-making
30. There are structures and systems in place to involve parents in decisions about teaching and learning in the school

Open questions:

1. What factors enable you to do your job well?

2. What factors inhibit you from doing your job well?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Appendix 7 Questions for teachers' focus groups

Week beginning: 20th April 2009.

Introduction

The questionnaire responses suggested that almost everybody agreed that all teachers are leaders in their own classrooms. Let's take it that leadership is about taking action and influencing others. It is also about giving direction, offering inspiration, building teamwork. 'Educational' leadership is about doing all this with a view to improving student learning.

Section 1. The Educational leadership role of the teacher.

Teaching and learning – your work as a teacher and the educational leadership role that teachers play:-

1. In the questionnaire many people agreed that when teachers work together student learning is enhanced. Why do you think this is the case?

2. If this improves student learning then it's worth exploring a little further do teachers influence each others' work? How? (Formally and/or informally)

3. a) If you're looking for advice about your subject, or you want to discuss an idea about your teaching, who would you go to? Why this person? (Knowledge / attitudes / skills / personality or a specific role or position in the school?)

4. What encourages this kind of interaction between teachers? What is it, in your school that makes this kind of interaction possible?
(The general atmosphere? Time set aside? The creation of teams / subject departments? The leadership style of principal/deputy/senior management team?)

Is there more that could be done? Suggestions?

5. In what other ways do teachers lead beyond the classroom?

6. What opportunities are there for you to develop as a leader?

7. Do post holders play a special leadership role? Discuss.

8. Do you see (distributed) leadership as

(a) responsibilities or jobs that are the Principal's and DP's in the first place, but some of which they distribute to other people?

or

(b) do you see school leadership as something in which each teacher has some responsibility from the start (eg through the initiatives they take in their own teaching) and that the Principal/DP co-ordinates, refines, re-presents these different active energies in ways that make the sharing of leadership more coherent and vibrant?

9. The responses to the questionnaires suggested that your understanding of distributed leadership included:-

- Having a shared vision and goals for the school
- Working together
- Involvement in decision-making
- Teachers being listened to by management– having a voice
- Displaying leadership beyond management structures

Do you see these as important features of school? If so, why?

Do they contribute to improved student learning?

10. Are there particular ways that a principal and deputy might act in order to foster and develop leadership throughout the school?

Additional Questions for Post Holders:

As a post holder, do you play a special leadership role in the school?

Do post holders meet with the principal and/or deputy on a regular basis?

To what extent does your work / role influence student learning?

To what extent do you work as a team of post holders?

Do you have a special function in relation to decision-making?

Questions for Principals and Deputy Principals

1. What do you understand by educational leadership?
2. What do you understand by distributed leadership?
3. How and why might leadership be distributed?

Appendix 8 Letters of invitation and consent

Appendix 8(a) Letter to Preliminary Study Focus Group Participants

CONTACT ADDRESS

28/03/2008

A Chara,

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in the Focus Group meeting on 1st April. I appreciate your taking the time from your busy working day to participate. This is part of my preliminary research for a Doctoral Thesis currently being undertaken in NUI Maynooth. The information from this discussion will be used to refine my research topic and to inform further data gathering. I hope it will also prove useful to you in generating thoughts about your own involvement in leadership in the school.

The topic for discussion is *School Leadership – Teachers’ Views and Perspectives*.

The purpose of the focus group is to discuss your views and experience of leadership in schools, with particular reference to the distribution of leadership throughout the school and the leadership roles played by teachers.

With your permission, the session will be audio-recorded which will enable me to represent more accurately the outcomes of the discussion.

As this is a focus group meeting, information will be shared within the group. However, the outcomes of the discussion will be presented anonymously in the thesis; neither the school nor any individuals will be named. Only the group, the researcher, and the thesis supervisor will be privy to the specific data that is collected.

The raw data will be stored on the tape, with excerpts transcribed and stored on my laptop. These will be held for 5 years after the completion of the degree and then destroyed. You may, at any time, withdraw from the study by simply indicating your intention to withdraw.

The research findings may be used in presentations and publications as part of the dissemination of the research. If you require any further information or explanation, please contact me at eilishum@eircom.net.

Once again, thank you for participating in what I'm sure will be a lively and interesting discussion.

(Eilis Humphreys)

Research Consent

I have read and understood the conditions under which I will participate in this focus group meeting and give my consent to be a participant and to have the discussion audio-recorded. I agree that any data contributed by me may be published.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 8(b) Questionnaire Letter

CONTACT ADDRESS

10/12/2008

A Chara,

Thank you very much for agreeing to complete a questionnaire on “Distributed Leadership and its Impact on Teaching and Learning”. I appreciate your taking the time from your busy schedule.

This is part of my research for a Doctoral Thesis currently being undertaken in NUI Maynooth. The thesis methodology is a case study of leadership in a small number of post primary schools. The information from the questionnaire will be analysed and some of the key emerging themes will be explored further through focus group discussions and interviews. I hope it may also prove useful to you in generating thoughts about your own involvement in leadership in the school.

The questionnaires will remain anonymous and the identity of the school will not be revealed in the thesis. The raw data will be stored electronically and held for 5 years after the completion of the degree and then destroyed.

The research findings may be used in presentations and publications as part of the dissemination of the research. If you require any further information or explanation, please contact me at eilishum@eircom.net.

Once again, my sincere thanks for participating in this research.

Yours Sincerely,

Eilis Humphreys

Appendix 8(c) Letter to Focus Group Participants

CONTACT ADDRESS

22nd April 2009

A Chara,

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in the Focus Group meeting on 22nd or 23rd April. I appreciate your taking the time to participate. This is part of my research for a Doctoral Thesis currently being undertaken in NUI Maynooth.

The purpose of the focus group is to discuss your views and experience of leadership in schools, with particular reference to the distribution of leadership throughout the school and the leadership roles played by teachers. I hope it will also prove useful to you in generating thoughts about your own involvement in leadership in the school.

With your permission, the session will be audio-recorded which will enable me to represent more accurately the outcomes of the discussion.

As this is a focus group meeting, information will be shared within the group. However, the outcomes of the discussion will be presented anonymously in the thesis; neither the school nor any individuals will be named. Only the group, the researcher, and the thesis supervisor will be privy to the specific data that is collected.

The raw data will be stored on my computer, as an audio and/or text file. These will be held for 5 years after the completion of the degree and then destroyed. You may, at any time, withdraw from the study by simply indicating your intention to withdraw.

The research findings may be used in presentations and publications. If you require any further information or explanation, please contact me at elishum@eircom.net.

Once again, thank you for participating in what I'm sure will be a lively and interesting discussion.

(Eilis Humphreys)

Research Consent

I have read and understood the conditions under which I will participate in this focus group meeting and give my consent to be a participant and to have the discussion audio-recorded. I agree that any data contributed by me may be published.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 9 Questionnaire Results

School No.1 Eldorado

<i>Q No.</i>	Perceptions	Total number	% 5s&4s	% 2s&1s
6	The objective of subject departments is to improve teaching and learning	16	100.00%	0.00%
12	Student learning is enhanced when teachers work together	16	100.00%	0.00%
15	It is the role of the principal or deputy to ensure that everybody works together, that the vision for the school is shared by everyone	16	100.00%	0.00%
18	Each teacher has a professional responsibility to uphold/promote values such as respect, care and co-operation in their classroom	16	100.00%	0.00%
28	When teachers attend professional development courses they should share their learning with colleagues	16	100.00%	0.00%
2	All teachers are leaders in their own classroom	16	93.75%	0.00%
3	Teachers' influence on students extend beyond the classroom	16	93.75%	0.00%
5	Subject departments should have a leader/co-ordinator	16	93.75%	0.00%
8	Teachers have a more direct influence on student learning than the principal	16	93.75%	0.00%
10	School management should ensure that the student voice is heard in the decision-making processes of the school	16	93.75%	0.00%
19	Teachers should be given the opportunity to lead new initiatives in the school	16	93.75%	0.00%
14	Teachers should plan and review their work together with colleagues in the same subject departments	16	87.50%	0.00%
20	Teachers should exemplify the school ethos and values in their classroom	16	87.50%	6.25%
21	It is the responsibility of school management to ensure good pastoral care systems are in place	16	87.50%	0.00%
7	Subject department co-ordinators play an important leadership role	16	81.25%	0.00%
9	The active support of the principal is essential when changes are being introduced in a subject department	16	81.25%	6.25%
16	Teachers from different subject departments should share ideas about teaching and learning	16	81.25%	6.25%
17	Teachers should be given decision-making responsibilities beyond their own classroom	16	81.25%	0.00%
25	All teachers should be involved in decisions that affect the whole school.	16	81.25%	0.00%

School No.1 Eldorado (Perceptions contd.)

11	All teachers should be given opportunities to exercise leadership beyond their classroom	16	75.00%	0.00%
24	Post holders should be involved in decisions that affect the whole school.	16	75.00%	12.50 %
29	Subject departments should have designated meeting times	16	75.00%	0.00%
13	Each teacher should take responsibility for the achievement of all students in their classes.	16	68.75%	6.25%
26	Analysis, using data as evidence, of student progress should be carried out by teachers as part of subject department meetings	16	62.50%	12.50 %
27	Analysis, using data as evidence, of student progress should be carried out by Year Heads together with principal and/or deputy	16	56.25%	18.75 %
22	The principal or deputy should take responsibility for communication with parents	16	43.75%	12.50 %
30	Principal and deputy have a significant influence on student learning	16	43.75%	6.25%
4	Post holders influence teaching and learning in the school	16	37.50%	25.00 %
1	Educational leadership is the job, primarily, of the principal and deputy	16	12.50%	50.00 %
23	Decisions regarding whole-school policy should be made by management (i.e. principal and/or deputy)	16	12.50%	56.25 %

School No. 1 Eldorado: Leadership Practices

Table 2	Please Circle the most appropriate number:-1 = We do not do this in our school. 2 = We are starting to move in this direction. 3 = We are making good progress here. 4 = We have this condition well established. 5 = We are refining our practice in this area			
Item	Practices			
		<i>Number</i>	% 5s & 4s	% 1s % 2s
20	Students' results in the state examinations are analysed and used to review practices.	16	93.75%	6.25%
22	Systems are in place which ensure that students are supported in their learning	16	93.75%	0.00%
24	All policies are designed with a focus on enhancing, improving and developing a high quality learning environment	16	93.75%	0.00%
21	Student progress is carefully monitored by all teachers	16	87.50%	6.25%
23	The Code of Behaviour is based on our school's ethos and values	16	87.50%	0.00%
12	Teachers are encouraged to engage in professional development related to whole-school issues (e.g. SDP, special needs, pastoral care etc)	16	81.25%	0.00%
4	Teachers in the same subject departments share resources	16	75.00%	0.00%
18	Year heads or post holders take responsibility for high quality communication systems between home and school	16	75.00%	6.25%
2	Senior management (principal/deputy) listens to teachers' voices	15	73.33%	0.00%
11	Teachers are given opportunities for professional development that enhance student learning in their own subject area	15	66.67%	13.33%
17	Individual teachers take responsibility for communicating student progress and achievement to parents	16	62.50%	12.50%
5	There are opportunities for teachers to lead educational activities beyond their own classroom	16	56.25%	6.25%
16	Discussion on the developmental priorities of the school form part of staff meetings every year	16	56.25%	18.75%
28	All teachers are involved in decisions which affect the whole school	16	56.25%	25.00%
10	Every year we strive to improve learning by prioritising specific actions	15	53.33%	20.00%
1	Teachers work together in teams (e.g. to review practice, to design policies, create new ideas and implement plans)	16	50.00%	6.25%
14	We work together, as a school community, to ensure that we are offering the best curricular opportunities for our students	16	50.00%	12.50%
7	New ideas about teaching and learning are discussed at subject department meetings	16	43.75%	12.50%
8	In our subject department we work together to systematically review our work	16	43.75%	25.00%
15	We receive feedback from parents and students about student performance and school programmes	16	43.75%	31.25%

27	Opportunities are provided to discuss new classroom practices with colleagues	16	43.75%	25.00%
29	Post holders have a significant role in decision-making	15	40.00%	13.33%
30	There are structures and systems in place to involve parents in decisions about teaching and learning in the school	15	40.00%	33.33%
26	Teachers are encouraged by senior management to try out new ideas	16	31.25%	37.50%
13	We work with members of the school community, including parents, to establish challenging but realistic expectations and standards	15	26.67%	20.00%
25	Teachers have an opportunity to discuss their professional work with senior management on an annual basis	16	18.75%	50.00%
3	Students get an opportunity to make suggestions about their learning (e.g. subject choices, approaches to assessment etc)	16	12.50%	37.50%
6	New ideas about teaching and learning are discussed at staff meetings	16	12.50%	43.75%
19	Teachers are given opportunities to chair meetings	16	12.50%	43.75%
9	Self reflection on practice is encouraged	16	0.00%	43.75%

School No.2 Louvain

	Questionnaire responses School 2			
	Please place an X in the box that matches your perception of leadership in schools			
	Strongly agree 5 Strongly disagree 1			
	Perceptions (Louvain)			
<i>Q No.</i>		<i>Total number</i>	<i>% 5s&4s</i>	<i>% 2s&1s</i>
2	All teachers are leaders in their own classroom	39	89.74%	2.56%
6	The objective of subject departments is to improve teaching and learning	39	87.18%	10.26%
12	Student learning is enhanced when teachers work together	39	87.18%	7.69%
29	Subject departments should have designated meeting times	39	87.18%	5.13%
15	It is the role of the principal or deputy to ensure that everybody works together, that the vision for the school is shared by everyone	39	84.62%	5.13%
18	Each teacher has a professional responsibility to uphold/promote values such as respect, care and co-operation in their classroom	39	84.62%	5.13%
19	Teachers should be given the opportunity to lead new initiatives in the school	39	84.62%	7.69%
21	It is the responsibility of school management to ensure good pastoral care systems are in place	39	84.62%	5.13%
3	Teachers' influence on students extend beyond the classroom	39	82.05%	12.82%
25	All teachers should be involved in decisions that affect the whole school.	39	82.05%	2.56%

8	Teachers have a more direct influence on student learning than the principal	39	79.49%	7.69%
5	Subject departments should have a leader/co-ordinator	39	76.92%	12.82%
17	Teachers should be given decision-making responsibilities beyond their own classroom	39	74.36%	7.69%
9	The active support of the principal is essential when changes are being introduced in a subject department	39	69.23%	20.51%
14	Teachers should plan and review their work together with colleagues in the same subject departments	39	69.23%	7.69%
16	Teachers from different subject departments should share ideas about teaching and learning	39	69.23%	10.26%
20	Teachers should exemplify the school ethos and values in their classroom	39	69.23%	10.26%
11	All teachers should be given opportunities to exercise leadership beyond their classroom	39	64.10%	7.69%
24	Post holders should be involved in decisions that affect the whole school.	39	64.10%	7.69%
28	When teachers attend professional development courses they should share their learning with colleagues	39	64.10%	10.26%
13	Each teacher should take responsibility for the achievement of all students in their classes.	39	61.54%	12.82%
26	Analysis, using data as evidence, of student progress should be carried out by teachers as part of subject department meetings	39	58.97%	20.51%
30	Principal and deputy have a significant influence on student learning	39	56.41%	15.38%
7	Subject department co-ordinators play an important leadership role	39	53.85%	17.95%
10	School management should ensure that the student voice is heard in the decision-making processes of the school	39	53.85%	2.56%
27	Analysis, using data as evidence, of student progress should be carried out by Year Heads together with principal and/or deputy	39	48.72%	10.26%
4	Post holders influence teaching and learning in the school	39	46.15%	17.95%
22	The principal or deputy should take responsibility for communication with parents	38	39.47%	28.95%
1	Educational leadership is the job, primarily, of the principal and deputy	38	31.58%	36.84%
23	Decisions regarding whole-school policy should be made by management (i.e. principal and/or deputy)	39	20.51%	61.54%

	Please Circle the most appropriate number:-1 = We do not do this in our school 2 = We are starting to move in this direction 3 = We are making good progress here 4 = We have this condition well established 5 = We are refining our practice in this area			
Item no	Practices (Louvain)			
		Total number	% 5s & 4s	% 2s & 1s
23	The Code of Behaviour is based on our school's ethos and values	38	71.05%	10.53%
17	Individual teachers take responsibility for communicating student progress and achievement to parents	39	58.97%	20.51%
22	Systems are in place which ensure that students are supported in their learning	39	48.72%	15.38%
24	All policies are designed with a focus on enhancing, improving and developing a high quality learning environment	39	43.59%	20.51%
2	Senior management (principal/deputy) listens to teachers' voices	39	38.46%	25.64%
18	Year heads or post holders take responsibility for high quality communication systems between home and school	39	38.46%	23.08%
20	Students' results in the state examinations are analyzed and used to review practices.	39	38.46%	35.90%
21	Student progress is carefully monitored by all teachers	39	38.46%	23.08%
11	Teachers are given opportunities for professional development that enhance student learning in their own subject area	37	32.43%	32.43%
4	Teachers in the same subject departments share resources	39	30.77%	23.08%
12	Teachers are encouraged to engage in professional development related to whole-school issues (e.g. school development planning, special needs, pastoral care etc)	39	30.77%	35.90%
5	There are opportunities for teachers to lead educational activities beyond their own classroom	39	28.21%	43.59%
16	Discussion on the developmental priorities of the school form part of staff meetings every year	39	28.21%	48.72%
28	All teachers are involved in decisions which affect the whole school	39	28.21%	46.15%
1	Teachers work together in teams (e.g. to review practice, to design policies, create new ideas and implement plans)	39	25.64%	30.77%
10	Every year we strive to improve learning by prioritising specific actions	38	21.05%	60.53%
29	Post holders have a significant role in decision-making	39	20.51%	41.03%

7	New ideas about teaching and learning are discussed at subject department meetings	39	17.95%	38.46%
8	In our subject department we work together to systematically review our work	39	17.95%	43.59%
14	We work together, as a school community, to ensure that we are offering the best curricular opportunities for our students	39	17.95%	33.33%
6	New ideas about teaching and learning are discussed at staff meetings	39	15.38%	69.23%
26	Teachers are encouraged by senior management to try out new ideas	39	15.38%	43.59%
27	Opportunities are provided to discuss new classroom practices with colleagues	39	15.38%	56.41%
9	Self reflection on practice is encouraged	39	12.82%	61.54%
30	There are structures and systems in place to involve parents in decisions about teaching and learning in the school	39	12.82%	48.72%
19	Teachers are given opportunities to chair meetings	39	10.26%	71.79%
25	Teachers have an opportunity to discuss their professional work with senior management on an annual basis	39	10.26%	64.10%
3	Students get an opportunity to make suggestions about their learning (e.g. subject choices, approaches to assessment, homework etc)	39	7.69%	66.67%
13	We work with members of the school community, including parents, to establish challenging but realistic expectations and standards	39	7.69%	53.85%
15	We receive feedback from parents and students about student performance and school programmes	39	5.13%	69.23%

School No.3 Heidelberg

Please place an X in the box that matches your perception of leadership in schools				
	Strongly agree 5 Strongly disagree 1			
Perceptions (Heidelberg)				
<i>Q No.</i>		<i>Total number</i>	<i>% 5s&4s</i>	<i>% 2s&1s</i>
2	All teachers are leaders in their own classroom	42	100.00%	0.00%
12	Student learning is enhanced when teachers work together	42	100.00%	0.00%
18	Each teacher has a professional responsibility to uphold/promote values such as respect, care and co-operation in their classroom	42	97.62%	2.38%
25	All teachers should be involved in decisions that affect the whole school.	42	95.24%	4.76%

3	Teachers' influence on students extend beyond the classroom	42	92.86%	0.00%
5	Subject departments should have a leader/co-ordinator	42	92.86%	4.76%
29	Subject departments should have designated meeting times	42	90.48%	7.14%
14	Teachers should plan and review their work together with colleagues in the same subject departments	42	88.10%	4.76%
19	Teachers should be given the opportunity to lead new initiatives in the school	42	88.10%	0.00%
21	It is the responsibility of school management to ensure good pastoral care systems are in place	42	88.10%	0.00%
16	Teachers from different subject departments should share ideas about teaching and learning	42	85.71%	2.38%
20	Teachers should exemplify the school ethos and values in their classroom	42	85.71%	0.00%
6	The objective of subject departments is to improve teaching and learning	42	83.33%	2.38%
8	Teachers have a more direct influence on student learning than the principal	42	83.33%	4.76%
9	The active support of the principal is essential when changes are being introduced in a subject department	42	83.33%	4.76%
11	All teachers should be given opportunities to exercise leadership beyond their classroom	42	83.33%	4.76%
7	Subject department co-ordinators play an important leadership role	42	80.95%	11.90%
28	When teachers attend professional development courses they should share their learning with colleagues	42	80.95%	7.14%
24	Post holders should be involved in decisions that affect the whole school.	41	78.05%	14.63%
17	Teachers should be given decision-making responsibilities beyond their own classroom	42	76.19%	0.00%
10	School management should ensure that the student voice is heard in the decision-making processes of the school	42	73.81%	11.90%
13	Each teacher should take responsibility for the achievement of all students in their classes.	42	71.43%	9.52%
15	It is the role of the principal or deputy to ensure that everybody works together, that the vision for the school is shared by everyone	42	71.43%	4.76%
26	Analysis, using data as evidence, of student progress should be carried out by teachers as part of subject department meetings	42	69.05%	9.52%
27	Analysis, using data as evidence, of student progress should be carried out by Year Heads together with principal and/or deputy	42	59.52%	19.05%
4	Post holders influence teaching and learning in the school	42	42.86%	26.19%
30	Principal and deputy have a significant influence on student learning	42	42.86%	9.52%
22	The principal or deputy should take responsibility for communication with parents	42	38.10%	26.19%
23	Decisions regarding whole-school policy should be made by management (i.e. principal and/or deputy)	42	21.43%	47.62%
1	Educational leadership is the job, primarily, of the principal and deputy	41	19.51%	53.66%

School No. 3 Heidelberg Practices

	Please Circle the most appropriate number:- 1 = We do not do this in our school; 2 = We are starting to move in this direction; 3 = We are making good progress here; 4 = We have this condition well established; 5 = We are refining our practice in this area.			
	Practices (Heidelberg)	Number	% 5s&4s	% 2s&1s
23	The Code of Behaviour is based on our school's ethos and values	42	95.24%	2.38%
20	Students' results in the state examinations are analysed and used to review practices.	41	87.80%	0.00%
21	Student progress is carefully monitored by all teachers	42	83.33%	4.76%
22	Systems are in place which ensure that students are supported in their learning	42	80.95%	7.14%
18	Year heads or post holders take responsibility for high quality communication systems between home and school	42	78.57%	4.76%
24	All policies are designed with a focus on enhancing, improving and developing a high quality learning environment	42	73.81%	7.14%
14	We work together, as a school community, to ensure that we are offering the best curricular opportunities for our students	42	71.43%	11.90%
17	Individual teachers take responsibility for communicating student progress and achievement to parents	41	68.29%	7.32%
10	Every year we strive to improve learning by prioritising specific actions	42	61.90%	16.67%
25	Teachers have an opportunity to discuss their professional work with senior management on an annual basis	42	61.90%	19.05%
26	Teachers are encouraged by senior management to try out new ideas	42	59.52%	26.19%
4	Teachers in the same subject departments share resources	42	57.14%	30.95%
16	Discussion on the developmental priorities of the school form part of staff meetings every year	42	52.38%	19.05%
5	There are opportunities for teachers to lead educational activities beyond their own classroom	41	48.78%	26.83%
1	Teachers work together in teams (e.g. to review practice, to design policies, create new ideas and implement plans)	42	47.62%	21.43%
7	New ideas about teaching and learning are discussed at subject department meetings	42	45.24%	40.48%
11	Teachers are given opportunities for professional development that enhance student learning in their own subject area	42	45.24%	33.33%
8	In our subject department we work together to systematically review our work	42	40.48%	40.48%
9	Self reflection on practice is encouraged	42	40.48%	26.19%
13	We work with members of the school community, including parents, to establish challenging but realistic expectations and standards	42	40.48%	19.05%

12	Teachers are encouraged to engage in professional development related to whole-school issues (e.g. school development planning, special needs, pastoral care etc)	42	38.10%	38.10%
15	We receive feedback from parents and students about student performance and school programmes	41	36.59%	39.02%
2	Senior management (principal/deputy) listens to teachers' voices	42	35.71%	40.48%
29	Post holders have a significant role in decision-making	40	32.50%	35.00%
30	There are structures and systems in place to involve parents in decisions about teaching and learning in the school	41	29.27%	34.15%
6	New ideas about teaching and learning are discussed at staff meetings	42	26.19%	42.86%
19	Teachers are given opportunities to chair meetings	41	24.39%	65.85%
3	Students get an opportunity to make suggestions about their learning (e.g. subject choices, approaches to assessment, learning activities within the classroom, homework and the learning environment)	42	23.81%	50.00%
27	Opportunities are provided to discuss new classroom practices with colleagues	41	19.51%	39.02%
28	All teachers are involved in decisions which affect the whole school	41	12.20%	53.66%

Appendix 10 Abbreviations

AMCSS: Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools

CPD: continuing professional development

DES: Department of Education and Science

EPSEN: Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs

ESRI: Economic and Social Research Institute

EWO: Education Welfare Officer

ICT: Information and Communications Technology

JCSP: Junior Certificate School Programme

JMB: Joint Managerial Body (for voluntary secondary schools)

LCA: Leaving Certificate - Applied

LCVP: Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme

LDS: Leadership Development for Schools – an agency of the Department of Education and Science providing professional development for school leaders

NAPD: National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals

NCCA: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

NCSE: National Council for Special Education

NEPS: National Educational Psychological Service

NEWB: National Educational Welfare Board

NCSL: National College of School Leadership UK

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PGDE: Post Graduate Diploma in Education (the qualification generally accepted for new teachers)

SDPI: School Development Planning Initiative (Post-primary)

SEN: Special Education Needs

TY: Transition Year – a one-year optional programme taken by students, mid-way through their post-primary education. It is a year free from examination pressure with the emphasis on a school-designed curriculum which enhances personal, social and vocational development.

WSE: whole-school evaluation

WTE: whole-time equivalent