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**Context counts:  
Leading educational reform  
in New Zealand secondary schools**

A thesis  
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**MICHELE MORRISON**



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## ABSTRACT

Educational leadership and organisational literature is replete with syntheses of effective leader behaviours, change sequences and reform models, yet few studies explore the nuanced manner in which individual leaders make sense of and respond to the dynamic influences shaping their thinking and practice over time. In posing the question, how do principals experience leadership during periods of intentional educational change, this study gains insight into the lived experience of five New Zealand secondary school principals as they lead school wide implementation of Phase 5 Te Kotahitanga, a reform initiative designed to reduce disparities in the educational achievement of indigenous Māori students through the introduction of a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations.

The case narratives arising from a three year dialogue with participants examine the genesis of each principal's commitment to equity in educational access, opportunity and outcome; their evolving thinking and practice; and the manner in which people and structures within each school field enable and constrain their leadership endeavours. Findings demonstrate that leading counter-hegemonic change is a situated, complex and demanding undertaking, the intensity of which eludes much of the leadership and change literature.

Hermeneutic reading of these rich qualitative accounts of lived experience suggests that, far from being detached observers, leaders both embody and are embedded in context. This exposes the shortcomings of literature that dichotomises the two and makes Bourdieu's lens on practice as a temporal, embodied, discursive and social activity an important heuristic through which to view the holism of change leadership.

The implications arising from this study are fourfold: leadership narratives open windows to natural and vicarious meaning making, personal biography is of central rather than peripheral importance, emotional and micropolitical literacy crucial, and professional mentoring a potentially powerful catalyst in building practice wisdom.

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*Ehara taku toa, he takitahi, he toa takitini*

*My strength is not that of the individual but that of the multitudes.*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AP	Assistant Principal
BES	Best Evidence Synthesis
BOT	Board of Trustees
CAPNA	Curriculum and Pastoral Needs Analysis
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CLT	Change Leadership Team
DP	Deputy Principal
ERO	Education Review Office
HOD	Head of Department
HOF	Head of Faculty
LOL	Leaders of Learning
MNA	Managing National Assessment
NCEA	National Certificate of Educational Achievement
NZCER	New Zealand Council for Educational Research
NZEI	New Zealand Educational Institute
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
PB4L	Positive Behaviour for Learning
PBRF	Performance Based Research Fund
PLG	Professional Learning Group
PPTA	Post Primary Teachers' Association
RTL	Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour

SEI	Student Engagement Initiative
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SMT	Senior Management Team
SPANZ	Secondary Principals' Association of New Zealand
STA	School Trustees' Association
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
TK	Te Kotahitanga

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Ako	a reciprocal learning relationship in which the teacher is also the student and the student also the teacher
Aroha	love, compassion, empathy
Arotake Paetawhiti	reviews carried out within 1-2 years when the Education Review Office has concerns about the “education and safety of students with regard to one or more of: Student engagement, progress and achievement; Māori student engagement, progress and achievement; the provision of effective teaching; leadership and management; governance; the provision of a safe and inclusive school culture; and engagement of parents, whānau and communities.” <a href="http://www.ero.govt.nz/Review-Process/Criteria-for-Timing-Decisions">http://www.ero.govt.nz/Review-Process/Criteria-for-Timing-Decisions</a>
AsTTle	formative <b>Assessment Tool for Teaching and Learning</b> , developed by University of Auckland
Awhi	to embrace, support and nurture
Board of Trustees	parents and community members responsible for governing schools
Decile	measure of each school’s student community’s socioeconomic (SES) position relative to other schools. The higher the decile, the lower the SES disadvantage
Hauora	sense of health and wellbeing (physical, emotional, spiritual, and social)
He aha te mea nui o te ao?	the first line of a whakatuakī or proverb that asks, “What is the most important thing in the world?”
<i>He Awhina Iti</i>	<i>A Little Help</i> – teacher resource booklet compiled, in 1987, by Waiiopehu College Taha Māori committee
Hui	meeting, gathering, assembly, seminar
Hui whakarewa	the initial meeting

Huarahi	method, process, way, route
Iwi	tribe
Kaiawhina	assistant, helper, advocate
Kaupapa	agreed way of being, covenant, protocols
Kawa	marae protocol
Kōrero	speech, narrative, address
Kuia	elderly woman, grandmother, female elder
Kura	school, education, learning gathering
Manaakitanga	hospitality, generosity, respect, care for others
Mana	prestige, power, authority
Mana motuhake	autonomy, independence, self-determination
Mana tangata	mana of the people, power and status accrued through leadership, human rights
Mana whenua	tribal territorial rights and authority
Māori	indigenous people of Aotearoa, New Zealand
Marae	tribal meeting place
Mokopuna	grandchild
Ngāpuhi	Northland tribal group
Pākehā	New Zealander of European descent
Pasifika	people who have migrated from or identify with Polynesian, Melanesia and Micronesian cultures in the Pacific
Pepeha	personal introduction that connects the speaker to people and place (mountain and water source)
Pono	truth, honesty, sincerity, authenticity
Rangatahi	Māori youth 15-24 years.
Taha Māori	a Māori worldview, perspective or dimension
Tamariki	children, Māori youth 0-14 years
Tangata whenua	people of the land, original inhabitants
Taonga	treasure, valuable object or resource
Tautoko	to support, endorse, verify, agree



Te Ao Pākehā	the Pākehā or European world
Teina	younger brothers, sisters, cousins, relatives
Te Kauhua	school-based action research project (2001-2009) focusing on Māori student achievement in mainstream settings.
Te miro pango	the black thread
Te miro mā	the white thread
Te miro whero	the red thread
Te reo Māori	Māori language
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	the Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand's founding document, signed 6 February 1840 between the British Crown and 43 Māori chiefs. Additional regional signings February-November 1840.
Tikanga	cultural values and practices
Titiro	to look at, examine, observe
Tuakana	elder brothers, sisters, cousins, prefects
Tuakana teina	elder brothers, sisters, cousins, prefects nurturing, guiding, taking care of younger whānau members; expert-novice
Tumanako	hope, optimism
Tūrangawaewae	place of standing, kinship rights of belonging and residence
Waka	single hull, double hull and outrigger canoes ranging in size and occupancy (1-80 paddlers)
Wero	challenge
Whakapapa	genealogy, lineage, descent
Whakarongo	to listen, hear
Whakawhānaungatanga	process of establishing extended family relationships
Whānaungatanga	extended family relationships
Whānau	family, extended family, family group
Whāngai	to bring up, foster, adopt, raise, nurture, rear
Wharenui	meeting house, main building of marae where guests are accommodated

## PROLOGUE

*Malfred knew that she was on no human terms with the "room two inches behind the eyes", that what lay there, treasure or no treasure, did not belong to her, had not been captured by her and given a name. Perhaps it would never be captured and named.*  
(Frame, 1966, p. 9)

### **Establishing context**

At his coronation in 1858, King Potatau I proclaimed, “Kotahi te kōhao o te ngira e kuhuna ai te miro mā, te miro pango, te miro whero” (Cowan, 1955, p. 446). The English translation reads, “There is but one eye of the needle, through which the white, the black, and the red threads must pass” (Cowan, 1955, p. 446). In the prologue to this study, I introduce the three threads that form the context for this research: secondary school principals, Māori students, and my teaching and leadership biography; each revealing glimpses of lived experience across diverse times and spaces.

### **Te miro mā: Secondary school principals**

While the room two inches behind the eyes might elude description, the room two inches in front poses little challenge, at least on the surface. The walls of the school foyer reflect the personalities and priorities of the inhabitants within, both past and present. Some walls are stark, others adorned with artefacts that variously privilege history and modernity, homogeneity and diversity, achievements and rituals. As a teacher educator, I often find myself in school reception spaces. It is here that I introduce myself, complete sign-in formalities and await the pre-service teachers that I am about to observe in the classroom. As the minutes pass, I am invariably drawn to the principal portraits that hang in prominent places. In some of these portrait galleries, the current principal is the most recent addition; in others membership is bestowed on predecessors alone, leaving me to ponder the difference that entry rather than exit portraits might have made.

As I return the gaze of the celluloid eyes that look austerely and warmly, benevolently and autocratically, beyond and directly towards me, I wonder what it was like for these principals. What inspired and compelled them as leaders? How did they understand, shape and were in turn shaped by this particular school context? What were the joys and frustrations of leading change in these schools? How did they articulate their conceptions and experiences of change leadership and, if they did, where are their stories? How might these stories resonate with peers and those who follow?

My musings run deeper than idle curiosity. For over two decades, I taught teenagers and held a range of senior leadership positions in secondary schools. During this time, I worked alongside six principals. In the bustle of the school day, conversations around leadership were rare and, while we worked together as a senior team, leading change was something we enacted rather than theorised. Artefacts and school archives tended to document decisions rather than deliberations and revealed little of the life of a principal, while autobiographies such as Charmaine Pountney's (2000) *Learning our Living* and Colin Prentice's (2006) *When People Matter Most* were scarce. Principals consequently had few opportunities to benefit vicariously from the experiences of others and fewer still to work directly alongside their principal peers.

### **Te miro pango: Māori students**

Not only are the narratives of principal leadership largely hidden from the record, so too are the voices of countless young Māori. The experience of Māori students in mainstream New Zealand education has been historically thwarted, both deliberately and unwittingly, by a hegemonic European colonial discourse that has variously sought to annihilate, assimilate, integrate, subjugate, regulate and otherwise alienate its indigenous Treaty partners. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Māori resistance, resilience, and “adaptive and innovative engagement with the things and thoughts of Europe” (Belich, 1996, p. 271) belied fatal impact theory and social Darwinism. Confronted with Māori survival, demographic recovery and a

“desire for varying degrees of inclusion within numerous areas of colonial life” (Howe, 1977, p. 84), the overwhelming response of colonizers was to systematically remove Māori from their economic base, restrict their participation in the socio-political activities of government, and confine them to the margins.

The European education system imposed a new, exclusively monocultural and monolingual canon of official knowledge, promulgated a discriminatory two-tier system and confined Māori participation to vocational subjects (Simon & Smith, 2001). The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw greater emphasis on equality of access and opportunity, but this ideology was strongly assimilative in implication (R. Harker & McConnochie, 1985). Far from producing equity in educational outcome, decades of reform devolved control from central government to locally elected Boards of Trustees (BOT), revised curriculum and assessment frameworks, reconfigured funding formulae, implemented school improvement and effectiveness initiatives, and did everything but reduce the disparities in educational outcome first identified by Hunn (1960).

### **The nature of disparity: Attendance, engagement, and achievement**

Designed to determine the readiness of 15 year olds to meet the challenges of knowledge societies, the sixth triennial Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) survey of mathematics, reading, science, problem-solving and financial literacy (May, 2016; OECD, 2018) indicates that while New Zealand students perform above the OECD average in the subjects and generic skills assessed, New Zealand has one of the highest measures of relative educational disadvantage. In mathematics, for example, 22% of the 2015 student population were achieving at below curriculum level 2, whereas 11% were achieving at curriculum level 5 and above (May, 2016, p. 20). The difference in curriculum level attainment between low achievers and top performers equates to approximately five years of schooling.

Māori comprise a disproportionate number of low achievers and are

over-represented in educational underachievement and non-participation statistics. In 2004, they constituted 18.83% of New Zealand secondary school students but formed 60% of alternate education enrolments and were granted 37.2% of all early leaving exemptions (Ministry of Education, 2004, pp. 51-55). In 2016, the early leaving exemption rate for Māori students was 16.7 per 1,000 15-year-old students, compared with 6.9 per 1,000 for their Pākehā counterparts (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 4). Of the students present in mainstream classrooms, Māori were three times more likely than Pākehā students to truant class on a frequent basis (i.e. three or more unjustified absences per week) and to be unjustifiably absent for sustained periods of time (Loader & Ryan, 2012).

In New Zealand, students may be formally removed from school for persistent and serious behaviour infringement. For students under 16 years of age, three escalating interventions disrupt schooling: stand-down, suspension, and exclusion. Students may be stood down from school for a period of no more than five school days in any one school term, and 10 days within the four term school year. Following a stand-down, the return to school is automatic. Suspensions involve the removal of a student from school until such time as the BOT disciplinary hearing decides the outcome. Boards have four options at their disposal. They may lift the suspension and allow the student to return to school (with or without conditions), they may extend the suspension (with conditions), and they may terminate enrolment. Termination of students within the compulsory attendance age cohort (under 16 years) is termed exclusion and boards have a responsibility to facilitate the enrolment of excluded students elsewhere. Students 16 years and over whose enrolment is terminated are expelled and may or may not enrol at another school.

It is important to note that stand-down, suspension, exclusion and expulsion statistics reflect schools' reactions to student behaviour infringements. For example, where one school may suspend a student for verbal assault on a teacher, another may engage in a restorative justice process. A raft of student engagement and suspension reduction initiatives

has been instrumental in reducing formal removal interventions and, in 2016, age-standardised stand-down, suspension, exclusion and expulsion rates were at their lowest this century (Ministry of Education, 2016). However, as Table 1 below shows, the stark fact remains that Māori are consistently stood down, suspended, excluded and expelled from school at higher rates than their Pākeha counterparts.

Table 1: Age standardised rates of stand-downs, suspensions, exclusions and expulsions from school, 2001-2016

Year	2001	2004	2007	2010	2013	2016
<i>Stand-downs (per 1,000 students)</i>						
Māori	49.4	52.6	51.4	48.1	38.0	37.2
Pākeha	17.4	19.2	19.5	18.7	15.9	15.7
<i>Suspensions (per 1,000 students)</i>						
Māori	16.4	14.3	13.2	11.9	8.7	7.6
Pākeha	4.3	3.8	3.7	3.6	2.5	2.3
<i>Exclusions (Students under 16 years of age, per 1,000 students)</i>						
Māori	4.9	4.8	4.7	4.5	3.4	3.0
Pākeha	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.1	0.9
<i>Expulsions (Students 16 years and over, per 1,000 students)</i>						
Māori	5.1	4.0	3.6	3.7	2.4	1.8
Pākeha	1.7	1.1	1.2	1.4	1.0	0.5

(adapted from Ministry of Education, 2016)

It is well documented that lack of a formal secondary qualification delays entry to higher education, reduces the chances of sustainable employment and higher incomes (those with a tertiary education earn, on average 33% more than those with a secondary qualification) and jeopardizes standard of living. Statistics indicate that Māori students are less likely to remain at secondary school than their non-Māori counterparts and nearly three times more likely to leave school without any formal qualification. In 2003, 45% of Māori school leavers and 20% of non-Māori school leavers left school without having attained NCEA Level 1 (Ministry of

Education, 2004, p. 123). By 2013, this situation had significantly improved, with 28.7% of Māori and 10.8% of Pākeha students leaving without NCEA Level 1, however ethnic disparities in educational achievement persist. In 2016, just 8.3% of Pākeha students left without achieving NCEA Level 1, compared with 19.5% of Māori students.

At NCEA Level 2, the achievement level deemed by government to provide the foundation level skills necessary to secure “better opportunities for further education, employment, health outcomes, and a better quality of life generally” (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 3), the pattern is similar. In 2013, 44.9% of Māori school leavers and 21.1% of Pākeha school leavers departed without having completed NCEA Level 2 (Ministry of Education, 2014). In 2016, the government announced that it was within reach of achieving its Better Public Services Target of 85% of students achieving NCEA Level 2. However, of the 83% of Year 12 students gaining NCEA Level 2 in 2015, only 70% of Year 12 Māori students attained this certificate (NZQA, 2016) and Māori students had the lowest participation rate in academic subjects (Johnston, 2016).

### **Rationalising disparity: Neo-colonial discourse**

Evidence thus confirms that disparities of outcome remain an enduring feature of the New Zealand education system, but the reasons for this are contested. Bishop (2005) suggests that people draw on three major discourses to explain disparities: children and their homes, systems and structures, and relationships.

Discrediting of native aptitude and eugenics theories during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century intensified focus on the home environment as the key determinant of educational outcome and research pathology switched from nature to nurture. Proponents of the cultural deficit theory (Ferguson, Horwood, & Lloyd, 1991; R. Harker & Nash, 1996; Hunn, 1960; Lovegrove, 1966; Nash, 1993) highlighted what they perceived to be inadequacies in ethnic background: low occupational status and aspirations, poor housing, malnourishment, deprived home environment, and a mismatch between

minority and dominant 'official' culture (R. Harker, 1979).

While the majority of Māori students belonged to lower socio-economic groups and attended low decile schools, Māori were deemed to have equitable educational access and opportunity. Their lack of academic success was explained not in terms of the “uglier features of opportunity includ[ing] racism, social-class entitlements, and prejudice, all of them amplified by the forms of poverty they create” (Bruner, 1996, p. 28) but in terms of cultural deprivation. The victim-blaming message was not lost on Māori:

The 'cycle of deprivation' seemed to incorporate within it, and to Māori at least, lay blame on, all aspects of Māori life, personality, home circumstances, family size, economics and educational achievement. What appeared to be missing consistently was any sense that there might be profound historical and political reasons which accounted for the socio-economic circumstances of Māori, that power relations may be a significant variable in any explanation of Māori society, or that the 'disorganised' society in which Māori lived might have within it the resources to resist and recover. (L. T. Smith, 1996, p. 144)

More recent evidence (Hattie, 2003) supports the view that socio-economic status is not the sole determinant of educational outcome and there are other destructive forces at work. AsTTle results relating reading achievement to socio-economic decile levels indicated that while Māori children in Decile 10 schools achieve at a higher level than their counterparts in Decile 1 schools, Māori children in all deciles achieve at a lower level than non-Māori children. Hattie's research found that differences between Māori and Pākehā students (commonly expressed as an effect size) were greater within deciles than across deciles. This led him to conclude that disparities exist even when socio-economic background is held constant and that teacher-student relationships are a more potent determinant of educational outcome than socio-economic resources:



We are doing something, or probably NOT doing something, to Māori and Pacific children within our schools *across all decile levels* that is just not connecting with them.... It is highly likely that we have not engaged Māori and Pacific students in schooling and we have not encouraged them to gain a reputation as learners within our school system. (2003, pp. 7-8, italics in original)

### **Addressing disparity**

Attempts were made to better meet the needs of ethnically diverse students during the 1970s and 1980s. Multiculturalism, and multiculturalism through biculturalism, replaced integration as the dominant discourse and curriculum reform reflected this. Taha Māori was introduced into schools in an effort to recognize tangata whenua as equal partners; validate Māori culture and language; raise identity and self-worth in Māori; and equip monocultural Pākeha teachers with the knowledge and sensitivities to better meet the needs of their Māori students.

Bishop and Glynn (1999) concur that the aims were laudable enough but the philosophy flawed:

Taha Māori sought to add a Māori perspective to the curriculum, the central core of which was decided by the majority culture, rather than incorporate Māori world views as a substantive component in the curriculum planning process. Māori people were seen as resources to be drawn upon rather than as partners to be included in the process of education. (p. 42)

They acknowledge that Taha Māori may have provided the catalyst for long-term attitudinal change amongst Pākeha New Zealanders but conclude that:

Even if Taha Māori was originally intended to address issues of Māori achievement in schools, it is most unlikely that it could have addressed the underlying issue of retrieving a colonized language and culture because Taha Māori (as an implementation of biculturalism) was designed to meet the aspirations of the Pākeha majority and not those of Māori people. (pp. 42-43)

### **Te miro where: My involvement**

During this period, I was teaching at Waiopēhu College in Levin and a foundation member of the school's Taha Māori Committee. In addition to meeting nationally espoused goals, we attempted to ease the formidable burden shouldered by our sole Māori colleague in providing pastoral care for Māori students, mentoring staff in all matters Māori, and liaising with our Māori community. Our well-intentioned and, in retrospect, sometimes token efforts included the production of *He Awhina Iti*, a collection of resource material including Māori kawa, kōrero, and whakapapa; the commissioning of carvings for the school foyer; and a series of staff professional development opportunities that included an overnight stay at Ngātōkōwaru, our local marae.

The latter involved immersing ourselves in Māori tikanga, sleeping overnight in the wharenuī and listening to the perspectives of prominent Māori educators. The second morning was momentous, not because of the broken sleep that results when 30 people spend the night together on mattresses on the floor, but for the assault on our personal and professional sensibilities that was to come. Turoa Royal, then Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Whitireia Polytechnic, began our contemplation of educational inequity and injustice in a conciliatory manner, suggesting that we actively partner with Māori to address grievances and fulfil Te Tiriti O Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) obligations. This was in marked contrast to the following speaker, Whatarangi Winiata, head of Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa, who vociferously argued that our history “screams out the proposition that it is not possible for people of one culture to formulate and implement policies for people of another culture and get it right” and that the best thing we could do as teachers would be to hand over the resources and let Māori get on with it: “Ka rahi, ka rahi, ka rahi: Enough is enough is enough!” (Winiata, 1998, para. 4).

This wero and the metaphorical slap in the face that accompanied it proved a sombre and salutary experience. The prospect of becoming disempowered and divested of agency awakened me vicariously to lived

experiences of injustice and brought home the realisation that my rhetoric around self-determination, economic independence and cultural revitalization was all very well, coming, as it did, from my relatively privileged position in society. If I truly believed Freire's (1970) thesis that solutions lie with the oppressed, not the oppressors, and Sleeter and Grant's (2009) subsequent contention that "people should not have to adhere to one model of what is considered "normal" or "right" to enjoy their fair share of wealth, power, happiness or respect" (p. 198), where did this leave me? Hand over the resources? Yes. Walk away? No way!

Addressing issues of initiation, benefit, representation, legitimation and accountability (Bishop, 1996) is essential if we are to build a socially just society that validates and celebrates diversity, eliminates disparities in participation and achievement, and repays the educational debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006). As a human being and educator, I am morally compelled and professionally obliged to confront injustice in its multiple guises. As a fifth generation New Zealander of European descent, this means engaging in joint political activism because for Pākeha educators to leave it all to Māori and "expect them to solve problems which have become systemic is to further past injustices, not to empower the people" (Bishop, 1996, p. 33).

My understanding of social justice is situated in a worldview shaped by working class roots, a brief period as a youngster living in a minority culture, an early and enduring love of history, over twenty years as an educator in less advantaged New Zealand secondary schools, and tertiary study, teaching and research that critiques hegemonic discourse and explores counter possibilities. These life experiences have fostered in me a strong belief in egalitarianism over privilege, and a concern for those less fortunate.

As a teenager, I clearly remember my mother saying, "You always support the underdog" and, while the significance of this observation eluded me at the time, my youthful rebelliousness has not diminished with age. It has been manifest in public protest that rallied against the 1981 Springbok tour and the visit of nuclear warships; in staffroom protest that

challenged attempts to deny pregnant teens an education while their babies' fathers remained in class, and to prevent same sex couples attending the school ball; in professional decision-making and risk-taking that secured the learning resources and support necessary for vulnerable students to remain, and succeed, in formal education settings (both mainstream and alternate); and in quieter actions that endeavoured to ensure that students were fed, clothed, and listened to on a daily basis.

Over a decade later, as a deputy principal in a large urban secondary school, student discipline consumed much of my time. A disproportionate number of the students referred to me by exasperated deans and classroom teachers were disenchanted, directionless, and depressed young Māori. I never once met parents and whānau who did not care and exhausted every creative strategy we could think of to support these young people remaining in school, including individual contracts, placement in homeroom classes, transition to work plans, and whānau presence throughout the school day.

For some students, enrolment in the school's off-site alternate education centre proved their salvation. In a more relaxed environment with lower staff: student ratios, less draconian but nonetheless consistently enforced rules, individual programmes, and an unwavering ethic of care, most students gained basic literacy and numeracy skills, and many flourished. Annual graduation ceremonies were truly emotional events, peppered with tears of joy on the faces of students whose mainstream teachers had written them off, on parents who had despaired for their children's future, and on teachers who believed in their ability to succeed and expected nothing less.

I became increasingly convinced that something had to change fundamentally at the classroom level and this led me, in 2006, to enrol in a postgraduate paper focusing on Māori students in mainstream educational settings. There, I was fortunate to meet Russell Bishop, Professor of Māori education at the University of Waikato and the principal architect of Te Kotahitanga (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop, Berryman, Powell, & Teddy, 2005; Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003), a kaupapa Māori

research and professional development programme designed to improve the engagement, retention and achievement of Māori students.

It soon became clear that Te Kotahitanga offered crucial new understanding and a promising way forward (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2007; Bishop & O'Sullivan, 2005 ), and this coincided with news of the Ministry of Education's intention to fund an additional phase of Te Kotahitanga. I knew my colleagues on the senior leadership team would welcome any initiative that had the potential to level the educational playing field and urged them to apply for the school's inclusion in Phase 4.

In the interim, I was invited to apply for a senior lecturer position and subsequently joined Te Kura Toi Tangata, Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato. Not only does this afford me the privilege of influencing the thinking and developing pedagogy of pre-service teachers, it enables me to connect with aspiring and practising principals who engage in postgraduate study. Within the educational leadership papers that I teach, a focus on the dialectical relationship between leadership theory and enactment requires students to grapple with new knowledge about leadership as they simultaneously apply this to their leading in diverse, real time educational settings. It is in the doing that these leaders make sense of their own biography, their context, and the knowledge claims that permeate the educational leadership literature. Yet, this sense making tends to be a private undertaking, largely unnoticed by colleagues, researchers, and wider constituents.

I have subsequently become even more intrigued about the room two inches behind the eyes and about what we might learn from principals who lead reform initiatives designed to lift individual and collective agency and secure greater equity in their schools and communities. Thus, the threads come together and the weaving begins.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

While ‘context, context, context’ appears to be the new mantra in recent educational leadership research, sustained attention to the experiences of individual leaders in negotiating unique contexts is rare, and the field of contextual leadership largely under-theorized (Bottery, 2006; Braun, Ball, Maguire, & Hoskins, 2011; Clarke & O’Donoghue, 2017; Gronn & Ribbins, 1996; Hallinger, 2018; Ribbins, 1995; Torrance & Angelle, 2019). In the current neoliberal educational policy environment, consideration of context typically includes an acknowledgment that particular situations require differentiated leadership responses. However, a reliance on rational, reductionist empirical data models and an emphasis on establishing direct causal relationships, for example, between leadership and student achievement (V. M. J. Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009), continues to dominate officially funded research initiatives.

Individual leadership narratives and other qualitative approaches are commonly viewed as idiosyncratic, inefficient uses of the research dollar and frequently discounted. A reluctance amongst researchers to “consider seriously what key activities mean for those who are expected to undertake them” (Ribbins, as cited in Gronn & Ribbins, 1996, p. 454) means that, in New Zealand and elsewhere, research is restricted to isolated case studies (Angelle, 2017; McNae, Morrison, & Notman, 2017; Notman, 2011) and doctoral theses that focus on topics as diverse as the manner in which principals respond to neoliberal policy (Riseborough, 1993; Strachan, 1997), lead from a values perspective (Notman, 2008), experience the first year of incumbency (Clarke, Wildy, & Pepper, 2007), and engage with Māori (Yukich, 2010). That a paucity of research extends beyond national borders is evident in Slater’s (2011) contention that international leadership narratives storying “the lives of principals expressed in their own voices” and “grounded in the historical and school context” offer a “promising way to study school leaders” (p. 219).

Multiple leadership narratives offer personal insights that embody the

humanity of leadership and the rich relational experiences that resonate with, comfort, sustain and inspire educational leaders in their daily practice. Yet few, if any, studies explore the manner in which individual principals understand the dynamic, relational nature of their leadership experiences and contexts over time.

Encapsulating the mercurial nature of leadership contexts is challenging. Porter and McLaughlin (2006) argue that research on leadership in context tends to be static, revealing at best “simple, one-time pictures of the interplay of the organizational context with leadership in organizations” (p. 574) and neglecting to capture how these relationships evolve over time. They conclude that “components examined at one point in time may interact dramatically differently with leadership following changes in the context” and that it is “this feature of change and dynamism that is missing from most of the extant literature in this area” (p. 574).

This gives rise to the overarching research question underpinning this study: How do principals experience leadership during periods of intentional educational change? Subsidiary questions focus on:

- (i) personal and professional life experiences that shape each principal’s approach to change,
- (ii) the manner in which people and structures enable and constrain the implementation of educational reform, and
- (iii) the nature and significance of the relationship between ‘context’ and principals’ leadership thinking and practice.

A study which focuses on the interplay between leadership and context in New Zealand secondary schools during a period of major intervention offers important insights into the “hard micro-level grind of situated and lived reality” (Gronn, 2009, p. 311); insights which may reassure and guide practitioners, challenge policy makers to pay real, rather than nominal, attention to the diverse contexts in which principals lead, and invite academics to reconsider the content and pedagogy of leadership preparation programmes.

This particular study aims to capture the nuanced manner in which

principals experience their leadership (D. L. Giles & Morrison, 2010) in unique school settings during a period of deliberate engagement with an externally driven educational innovation. Through continuing dialogue with principals whose schools have entered Phase 5 of the Te Kotahitanga professional learning contract, this study focuses on principals' perceptions of the manner in which their leadership thinking, practice and context evolves over time. A longitudinal approach invites principal participants to reflect on anticipated and unanticipated consequences of the selected educational innovation upon their leadership thinking and practice, and enables exploration of the ways in which changing contexts enable, constrain and shape this practice.

### **The context for this study**

Schools entering Phase 5 of Te Kotahitanga (Bishop, 2014; Bishop, Berryman, & Wearmouth, 2014; Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, & Peter, 2012; Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, Peter, & Clapham, 2011) share some contextual factors, including serious concern for the achievement of Māori students, a student demographic containing 240 or more Māori students who constitute 20%+ of the school roll, and commitment from the BOT, principal and cohorts of staff to engage with a proven, nationally resourced kaupapa Māori intervention (Meyer et al., 2010). While the theorised nature of this intervention and partnership with external developers ensures commonality in research design and implementation, the interplay of unique contextual factors ultimately determines how principals experience change leadership during this period of engagement.

### **Thesis organisation**

The prologue to this thesis outlined the three threads that gave rise to this research: secondary school principals, Māori students, and my teaching and leadership biography; each revealing glimpses of lived experience across diverse times and spaces.

Chapter two explores notions of organisational change, the models



used to conceptualise change processes, and the effective change practices gleaned from two distinct, yet interrelated fields: leadership and organisational development. Drawing on New Zealand and international literature, it traces the emergence, development and critique of the two theories of leadership dominant in contemporary school improvement research: instructional and transformational leadership. The literature review then explores diverse conceptions of context and canvasses the debate over the extent to which contextual variables influence the enactment of educational change. Finally, the origins, development and impact of Te Kotahitanga, the specific educational reform that forms the context for this study, are outlined.

In chapter three, I provide a rationale for the ontological, epistemological and methodological positions adopted in this study. I then explain my selection of a research design compatible with the purposes of this research; identify and evaluate the methods used to collect, analyse and represent data; and carefully consider the manner in which reflexivity and relationships with participants shape this inquiry.

Chapters four to eight contain the five case narratives germane to this study. These are careful and faithful co-constructions of the actions taken and meanings elicited by Peter, Olivia, Keita, Jim and Ross in the midst of enacting the comprehensive educational reform that is Te Kotahitanga. Authored in the recounting, and authorised by participants, these narratives reflect matters of significance to them, at the time and subsequently.

The empirical contribution this thesis makes to school leadership research forms the focus of chapter nine. I argue that extended narratives capture and bring to life the humanness of change; reveal the dynamic, enabling and constraining interplay of agents and structures; and demonstrate that leading is context. My research findings lend support to the proposition that much of the leadership and change literature illuminates invariant properties of school leadership but fails to encapsulate the situated, particular and thrown nature of the change phenomenon. They signal the potential for Bourdieu's thinking tools (habitus, capitals,

field, practice and strategy) to illuminate the complex social space in which educational leaders function. I conclude my discussion chapter with a visual representation of leading in context through an antipodean Bourdieusian lens.

In the final chapter, I summarise the contribution this thesis makes to the educational leadership field and consider the implications of leading as context for school leaders, professional learning providers, researchers and policy makers. Mindful of the limitations of single perspectives and small sample size, I suggest ways in which future research might augment the currently sparse narrative repository.



## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

This chapter offers a synthesis of literature pertinent to the overarching research question, how do principals experience their leadership during periods of intentional educational change? The sparsity of extended first-hand accounts of leading educational reform (Slater, 2011) means that principal voices are either silent or restricted to episodic illustrative snapshots. This necessitates examination of the wider leadership and organisational change literature, with a view to extrapolating key ideas surrounding the nature, process and implementation of change in diverse school settings.

Acknowledging the selective and time-bound nature of literature reviews, this chapter is written in two parts. The first addresses notions of organisational change, the models used to conceptualise change processes, and the effective change practices gleaned from two distinct, yet interrelated fields: leadership and organisational development. Drawing on New Zealand and international literature, I trace the emergence, development and critique of the two theories of leadership dominating contemporary school improvement research: instructional and transformational leadership. In the second part of the literature review, I explore diverse conceptions of context and canvas the debate over the extent to which contextual variables influence the enactment of educational change. I then trace the origins, development and impact of Te Kotahitanga, the specific educational reform that forms the context for this study.

As this chapter will demonstrate, leadership and organisational development literature offers theoretical and empirical insights that form important pieces of the change jigsaw. The omission of crucial pieces means, however, that the frame is partial, connections between pieces fragmented, and the totality of the whole picture imperceptible.

## Part I: Leading change

### Change concepts: Insights from organisational development literature

Half a century ago, Bennis (1966) criticised social change theories for identifying and explaining the

dynamic interactions of a system without providing a clue pertaining to the strategic leverages for alteration. They are theories suitable only for *observers* of social change, not theories for *participants* in, or practitioners of, social change. They are theories of *change* and not theories of *changing*. (p. 99, italics in original).

Drawing on Bennis, Poole (2004) similarly distinguishes between theories of change and theories of changing, the former focusing on why and how change occurs, the latter on the role of human agency in initiating, implementing and successfully institutionalising change. In the fifty years since Bennis first bemoaned the dearth of practical theory, a panoply of organisational change models (Kanter, 1983a; Kanter, Stein, & Jick, 1992; Kotter, 1996, 2012; Lewin, 1951; Nadler, Shaw, & Walton, 1995) has emerged, many of which originate in organisational development (OD) literature.

Seo, Putnam and Bartunek (2004) identify three generational approaches to organisational development. In essence, first generation approaches focused on improvement within existing frameworks of action, second generation approaches sought to discard the past and transform frameworks of action, and third generation approaches seek transformational change that acknowledges and incorporates the past. Applying this construct to the education field, Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) discern a 'first way' characterised by state provision of free secondary schooling and professional autonomy; a 'second way' during which 1980s neoliberal market ideology saw the introduction of prescriptive national curricula, uniform education goals, performance targets and high stakes testing; and a more recent 'third way' that seeks to address educational inequity through new public management and creative public/private

partnerships.

Originating during the mid-twentieth century, first generation approaches in the business domain reflected considerable debate over the “concrete action steps to be undertaken ... the conditions necessary for effective change, and characteristics of change agents” (Seo et al., 2004, p. 82). These diverse perspectives subscribed to one predominant theory of changing, however, that of Lewin’s (1951, 1997) force-field model.

One of the first theorists to suggest that change is a process rather than single event, Lewin identified three fundamental stages of change: unfreezing, moving, and refreezing. He contended that people remain in “quasi-stationary equilibrium” until “an emotional stir up” or disconfirming evidence “break[s] open the shell of complacency and self-righteousness” (1997, p. 330). The term ‘quasi-stationary’ is important because this denotes a period of time in which forces pushing for and resisting change are temporarily in balance, rather than static. In Lewin’s model, disruption of the status quo and subsequent emotional connection prompt people to experiment with new approaches and engage in a period of action research.

The second stage, *moving*, comprises a complex iterative learning process that is unsettling for all those involved. Even when change is intentional and to some extent planned, the fluid nature of relationships, organisational forces and other contextual factors typically means that precise “outcomes cannot be predicted but emerge on a trial and error basis” (Burnes, 2004, p. 993). When preferred outcomes become part of the cultural norm (the way we do things around here), change is institutionalised at the organisational level and *refreezing* occurs.

Although Lewin’s model has at times been dismissed as one-dimensional and mechanistic, *unfreezing-moving-refreezing* antecedents can be discerned (Burnes, 2004; Elrod & Tippett, 2002; Hendry, 1996; Hickman, 2010; Jabri, 2012) in the change models (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2010; D. Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2001; Kanter, 1983a, 1983b; Kanter et al., 1992; Kotter, 1995, 1996, 2012; Weick & Quinn, 1999) that followed and in the limited empirical change research (M. W. Ford & Greer,

2006):

Scratch any account of creating and managing change and the idea that change is a three-stage process which necessarily begins with a process of unfreezing will not be far below the surface. Indeed, it has been said that the whole theory of change is reducible to this one idea of Kurt Lewin's (1952). Most accounts of organisational change implicitly follow this pattern, and describe or employ a mix of cognitive and political strategies through successive phases of unfreezing, change and refreezing. (Hendry, 1996, p. 624)

In other words, no matter how sophisticated the delineation of change sequences might seem, subsequent change models are derivative in nature.

Of these, Kotter's (1995, 1996, 2012) eight-step model has been particularly influential (Appelbaum, Habashy, Malo, & Shafiq, 2012; Brisson-Banks, 2010; Mento, Jones, & Dirndorfer, 2002). Comparing this model with Lewin's, it is evident that the first step, unfreezing, involves establishing a sense of urgency. Kotter then delineates six key steps during the moving stage: creating a guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the change vision, empowering broad-based action, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains and producing more change. Anchoring new change in culture represents the final or refreezing stage.

Kotter's change model has been subjected to similar critique as Lewin's, with a number of authors (Appelbaum et al., 2012; Calegari, Sibley, & Turner, 2015; Hughes, 2016; Pollack & Pollack, 2015) contesting the rigid linearity of the eight-step sequence, change contexts that render some steps irrelevant, the omission of interpersonal influence tactics necessary to sustain commitment and overcome resistance to change, and the absence of the longitudinal dimension necessary to validate the full eight steps. With regard to 'evidence' supporting the model, Appelbaum et al. (2012) found that "in essence, Kotter validated Kotter" (p. 776). Whilst they conclude that the model remains "an excellent starting point", they caution that, "in practice, it may be useful to account for contextual variables and adapt the

model accordingly” (Appelbaum et al., 2012, p. 776).

Hughes (2016) is more strident, finding it somewhat “perverse” that an anecdotal and atheoretical account of change should frame the academic debate. His analysis of citation counts in books and journal publications, during the period 1978-2012, demonstrates the popularity of Kotter’s (1995, 1996) work:

Transformational leadership has been described as the single most studied and debated idea within the field of leadership over the past 30 years (Diaz-Saenz, 2011). Yet, the most cited transformational leadership publication (Bass and Riggio, 2005) by comparison received fewer citations than either of Kotter’s publications. (p. 450)

This suggests that readers were more interested in the mechanics of change (steps to follow) than how to support people to make the personal transition that change requires.

Hughes (2016) thus draws attention to the limitations of *n-step* guides (Collins, 1998) in which overt emphasis on co-operation and seeming obliviousness to power, political struggle and resistance results in “under-socialised” (p. 455) models of organisational change. While rational, linear and prescriptive models offer seductive managerial simplicity, they overlook the complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty inherent in academic/empirical accounts of change, and the need for design, improvisation and bricolage that the latter engender. Hughes (2016) thus recommends that leaders avoid off-the-shelf templates and “assemble their own n-step approach” (p. 455).

Critique of *n-step* models also comes from processual research scholars. In a reprise of seminal processual research (Pettigrew, 1987; Pettigrew & Whipp, 1991) conducted in the late 1980s, Pettigrew (2012) reiterates the need to:

Examine the juxtaposition of the rational and the political, the quest for efficiency and power, the role of exceptional men and of extreme circumstances, the untidiness of chance, and forces in the environment, and to explore some of the conditions in which mixtures



of these factors occur through time. (p. 1307)

In contrast to previous research that focused on successful outliers, Pettigrew and Whipp's (1991) examination of strategic change management in four UK industry and service sectors (automobile, book publishing, merchant banking and life assurance) included both high and low performers. In seeking to establish why companies "operating in broadly similar industry, country and product markets" (Pettigrew, 2012, p. 1310) performed differently, Pettigrew and Whipp (1991) focused on the role of strategic change management. Their findings revealed that:

High performing organizations differed from the lower performing ones in the way they: (1) conducted environmental assessment; (2) led change; (3) linked strategic and operational change; (4) managed their human resources as assets and liabilities; and (5) managed coherence in the overall process of competition and change. (Pettigrew, 2012, p. 1311)

Far from being straightforward and sequential, change is a political influence process that requires recognition of the interdependent nature of the five abovementioned management activities, learning through doing, experimentation, and "openness and flexibility of management thought and action" (Pettigrew, 2012, p. 1311).

That the 'Pettigrew triangle' of *content-context-process* (Sminia & de Rond, 2012) permeates the work of subsequent processual change researchers (Bidart, Longo, & Mendez, 2013; Cheah, 2015; Clark & Soulsby, 2007; Dawson, 2012, 2014; MacKay & Chia, 2013) shows the impact of Pettigrew's work. Simply put, *content* refers to the focus of transformation, *context* to the external and internal environmental factors that shape the milieu in which change takes place, and *process* to the actions, reactions and interactions of invested stakeholders. Pettigrew (1987) articulates this even more succinctly as the *what, why* and *how* of change. He contends that change is an iterative

multilevel and continuous process in context, where leadership is expressed through understanding and practical skill as well as the

purposive force of mobilizing often imprecise and inarticulate visions, which are used to challenge dominating beliefs and institutional arrangements.... Explanations of change [consequently] have to be able to deal with continuity and change, actions and structures, endogenous and exogenous factors, as well as the role of chance and surprise. (p. 658)

Consideration of the actions, reactions and interactions of invested stakeholders within the organisation invokes a concern with micropolitics and the manner in which individuals and groups use formal and informal power to advance their interests (Blase, 2005, 1991; Hoyle, 1982; Iannaccone, 1975, 1991; Mawhinney, 1999).

### **Micropolitics**

Micropolitics helps surface the different motivations and ways in which people exercise power and influence, generate and respond to conflict, form groups and coalitions, and use bargaining to achieve desired ends. It has both positive, cooperative and facilitative dimensions and negative, conflictive and oppressive ones (Blase, 1991; Clarke, 2003).

Ubiquitous on a daily basis, micropolitical activity intensifies during periods of change. This makes change problematic, not only “because it is technically difficult to accomplish, but because change inevitably challenges the status quo, and the interests that benefit from the status quo” (Angelle, Morrison, & Stevenson, 2016, p. 99). Divergent interests and inevitable tensions between individual and collective goals mean that change is rarely neutral in effect (Spiro, 2011).

Micropolitics pose a direct challenge to rational models of organisation that emphasise common vision, clear objectives, formal roles and channels of communication (Achinstein, 2002). As Hoyle (1982) observed over three decades ago, the “irrational, adventitious and peculiar” consequences of micropolitical activity create a “perennially turbulent ... organisational underworld” in which “every day brings a new organisational ‘pathology’ to disrupt well laid plans” (p. 87). In a similar vein, Ball (1994)

contends that while people might be energized by planned change, micropolitical patterns of influence and control mediate the extent to which change initiatives are implemented in practice.

This makes “change agency” (Fullan, 1993, p. 12), the ability to navigate roles, interests, power and organisational norms, an important leadership competence (Caruso, 2013; Clarke, 2003; Flessa, 2009). Leaders must be highly attuned to organisational pulse. In other words, they must continually discern the multiple variables shaping dynamic change contexts and gauge actual and potential impact on people within the organisation.

### **Change contexts**

Making sense of variables in flux is no easy task, as more recent theorising of change contexts demonstrates. Snowden (2005), for example, proposes three ontologies of organisation: order, chaos and complexity, the first of which underpins orthodox management approaches to change. Based on the assumption, however, that all systems, and human ones in particular, comprise multiple elements interacting in dynamic, nonlinear and often unpredictable ways, complexity explains why common leadership approaches “work well in one set of circumstances but fall short in others” and “fail when logic suggests they should prevail” (Snowden & Boone, 2007, pp. 69-70).

Deriving from the Welsh term for habitat, the Cynefin framework (see Figure 1, next page) posits that organisations are situated in external environments that can be categorised as ordered or unordered (Kurtz & Snowden, 2003; Snowden, 2005; Snowden & Boone, 2007). While ordered environments are instantly recognisable and straightforwardly comprehended, ‘unordered’ environments elude immediate rational determination. This continuum is further divided into five domains, in which the relationship between cause and effect is defined as simple, complicated, complex, chaotic, or disordered. Characterised by stability and easily discernible cause and effect relationships, simple contexts reflect the domain of ‘known knowns’ in which a single right answer is self-evident and

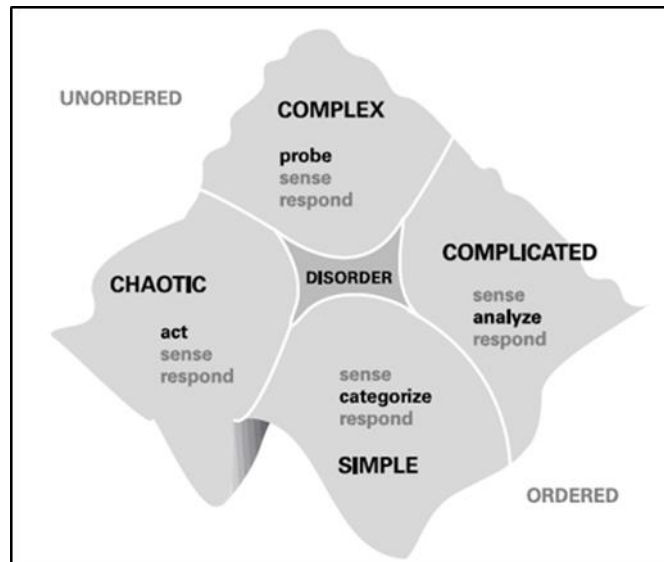


Figure 1: The Cynefin framework (Snowden & Boone, 2007, p. 72).

universally accepted. In this realm of best practice, leaders categorise data and respond directly. Complicated contexts reflect the realm of ‘known unknowns’ and the principle of equifinality, whereby multiple right answers exist to organisational issues. Decision-making in these contexts requires expertise and the ability to *analyze* alternative courses of action.

Where major change precipitates unpredictability and flux to the extent that data are inconclusive and right answers prove elusive, the context is more likely to be complex. While at least one right answer exists, this only becomes apparent in retrospect. Snowden and Boone (2007) use the analogy of a Ferrari and Brazilian rainforest to discern complicated contexts from complex ones. The former can be routinely disassembled and reassembled by an expert mechanic and retains the sum of its parts, whereas a rainforest is in “constant flux - a species becomes extinct, weather patterns change, an agricultural project reroutes a water source – and the whole is far more than the sum of its parts” (Snowden & Boone, 2007, p. 74). In complex organisational contexts replete with ‘unknown unknowns’, they recommend that leaders take the time to *probe*, encourage dialogue, debate, dissent and experimentation; resist hasty decision-making, and allow patterns to emerge. In chaotic contexts, constant turbulence, crisis

and ‘unknowables’ prevent the determination of cause and effect relationships. In this context, leaders must *act* rapidly and decisively to establish order. Their “immediate job is not to discover patterns but to stanch the bleeding” (Snowden & Boone, 2007, p. 74) and shift the context from chaotic to complex.

In addition to appropriate leadership responses within each distinct context, Snowden and Boone (2007) identify risks inherent in entrained thinking, “a conditioned response that traps decision makers in the practices, policies, techniques and rationales that have successfully put them where they are” (Dettmer, 2011, p. 12). In simple contexts, for example, leaders risk mis-categorisation and complacency; in complicated contexts, ‘analysis paralysis’ and a tendency to ignore non-expert or lay perspectives; in complex contexts, the temptation to revert to habitual command and control strategies that focus on facts rather than emerging patterns; and in chaotic contexts, over-inflated self-image.

Located at the centre of the framework, the fifth and final domain abutting the other four is that of disorder. This is an uncertain contested space in which the change context is unknown, “multiple perspectives jostle for prominence, factional leaders argue with one another and cacophony rules” (Snowden & Boone, 2007, p. 72). In this space, leaders should deconstruct the situation into distinctive parts, each of which can then be assigned to one of the other four contexts.

Snowden (2005) argues that because “humans in general” tend not to make “rational decisions based on a careful evaluation of available data ... [but] on a first-fit pattern match to individual experiences, or to their collective experiences as expressed through the narratives of culture in which they reside” (p. 49), the Cynefin framework disrupts entrained thinking and invites collective consideration of multiple change dynamics in times of uncertainty. It is a pragmatic sense-making heuristic that enables leaders to determine prevailing operative contexts, apply appropriate decision-making methods, and learn “when to run and when to stand still” (Kurtz & Snowden, 2003, p. 467).

While the Cynefin framework has been applied in business (Alexander, Walker, & Naim, 2014; Fodness, 2015; Vasilescu, 2011, December), health (Fulop & Mark, 2013; Sturmberg & Martin, 2008; Van Beurden, Kia, Zask, Dietich, & Rose, 2011) and information technology (Gardner, 2013; McLeod & Childs, 2013; O'Connor & Lepmets, 2015) domains, it has yet to feature in education research. And, like previous conceptualisations of change, it, too, has its critics. Cantore and Passmore (2012) perceive accurate identification of the change context as the framework's most problematic aspect, a point also noted by French (2013), while Vasilescu (2011, December) further suggests that "*disorder* is a space of not knowing which domain we are in, and we are there most of the time" (p. 72, italics in original). French (2013, 2015) also cautions against confusing Snowden's complex space with complexity science, arguing that the latter's concern with "computational issues relating to highly complicated models belongs more to Knowable and Known Spaces" (2015, p. 1639) than the complex.

### **Summary**

The diverse and contested conceptions of change outlined in this section lend credence to Van den Ven and Poole's (1995) assertion that change processes and the "sequences of events that unfold ... have been very difficult to explain, let alone manage" (p. 510). It certainly appears that theoretical pluralism has generated novel but only partial insights into organisational change: "a way of seeing is a way of not seeing" (Poggie, as cited in Van den Ven & Poole, 1995, p. 510).

Van den Ven and Poole thus advocate the integration of approximately 20 disparate change theories into four process theories of organisational development and change: evolution, life-cycle, dialectics, and teleology, each with its own philosophical foundations, event sequences and generative mechanisms or "motors" (p. 511). Of particular relevance to this study is the assumption that planned or intentional change is primarily teleological in nature and occurs when people experience a "disorienting

dilemma or experience” (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. 22) that triggers their action thresholds (Van de Ven & Sun, 2011). In the case of Te Kotahitanga, student narratives of what it is like to be Māori at their school provide the disorientation necessary for teachers to confront discourses of blame and reject deficit theorising.

Teleological theories assume that individuals, like-minded groups and collective organisational entities are purposeful and adaptive in envisioning a desired end state that they pursue through sequential goal formulation, implementation, evaluation, and modification cycles. Goals are socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) and, following the principle of equifinality, enacted in multiple ways. There is no prescribed sequence of events, and nor are development trajectories specified. Rather, the process is emergent and seeks to disrupt the status quo.

Given the “twin features of intentionality and the ability to change goals at will” (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995, p. 523), teleological theories stress human agency and the purposefulness of actors in driving change. This power is not unbounded, however. A range of environmental and resource factors, some of which are “embodied in prerequisites defined by institutions and other actors in the entity’s environment” (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995, p. 516) enable and constrain both the scope and pace of goal accomplishment.

### **Change leadership: Insights from the business literature**

Although much of the organisational development literature pays scant attention to the nature of the relationship between leaders and other actors, useful insights into the relational dynamics that underpin human change initiatives can be found in the business leadership literature. With the caveat that this corpus contains numerous conceptions of leadership, a phenomenon that is equally if not more contested than change models, Burns’ (1978) and B. Bass’s (1985) work on transformational leadership is seminal. It is included here for two reasons: firstly, while Burns coined and conceptualised transformational leadership in the political domain, Bass’s

application of transformational leadership principles to the business domain led to a burgeoning of literature in this field (see, for example, J. M. Howell & Avolio, 1993; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996; Waldman & Yammarino, 1999); and, secondly, because during the 1990s Leithwood and colleagues transported transformational leadership theory from business to the education and schooling fields (Leithwood, 1992, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990, 1999; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999). Transformational leadership not only featured heavily in early educational leadership theorising; it continues to be influential today. So, what are the main tenets of transformational leadership theory?

### **Transformational leadership tenets**

Distinct from “mere power-holding and ... the opposite of brute power” (1978, p. 4), Burns argued that transformational leadership is a moral endeavour that motivates followers to transcend personal interest and transactional contingent rewards (salary, management units, recognition) for the benefit of the organisation. “Transformational leadership theory, then, identifies which internal states of organizational members are critical to their performance and specifies a set of leaders practices most likely to have a positive influence on those internal states” (Leithwood & Sun, 2012, pp. 388-389). Importantly, this is an ethical undertaking that “requires a leader with vision, self-confidence, and inner strength to argue successfully for what he/she sees is right or good, not for what is popular or is acceptable according to established wisdom of the time” (B. Bass, 1985, p. 17).

Leaders, who seek to transform, engage in four core interrelated behaviours that are often referred to in abbreviated form as the four Is: charisma or idealised influence (attributed and behavioural), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (Avolio, Waldman, & Yammarino, 1991; B. Bass, 1985, 1990b, 1997, 1998; B. Bass & Avolio, 1993, 1994). Idealized influence includes charismatic



traits and behaviours that generate loyalty, confidence and devotion to shared purpose. These include enacting espoused values, taking a principled stand on difficult issues, building trust, and setting high standards for emulation (B. Bass, 1997). Furthermore, leaders displaying idealised influence use recruitment and personnel strategies to foster “the internalization in all the organisations’ members of shared moral standards” (B. Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 188).

Use of the term ‘charisma’ has proven problematic, with some authors aligning this to Weberian concepts of charismatic leadership (Dartey-Baah, 2015; Nikezić, Purić, & Purić, 2012) in which exceptional leaders endowed with transcendent powers emerge during times of crisis (Weber, 1947, 1978). As Milosevic and Bass (2014) point out, Weber’s concept of charisma differs from more contemporary organisational research interpretations in three key respects. While B. Bass and others (Conger & Kanungo, 1998; House & Shamir, 1993) examined charisma as a measurable and relatively stable characteristic exercised by those in formal managerial positions, Weber positioned charismatic leadership as emergent in informal structures, emotional in nature, and temporally unstable.

In general terms, charisma can be defined as “a fire that ignites followers’ energy and commitment, producing results above and beyond the call of duty” (Beugré, Acar, & Braun, 2006, p. 54), but it can also evoke more negative connotations of narcissism, intransigence, derailment and dictatorship (B. Bass, 1990b; Bryman, 1992; Khoo & Burch, 2008; Levay, 2010; McCleskey, 2013; Parry & Proctor-Thomson, 2002; Pawar & Eastman, 1997; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006; Tourish, 2013). As early as 1990, Bass alerted readers to the “wide spectrum of meanings ... ranging from celebrated to flamboyant, exciting and personable” (B. Bass, 1995, p. 471). In an effort to distinguish the behaviours, attributions and effects of transformational leaders from Weberian charismatic leaders, he initially used the descriptor “charismalike” (B. Bass, 1990a, p. 184) and in later empirical work substituted the term “idealized influence” (B. Bass & Avolio, 1993, p. 51).

Other authors have removed charisma altogether. Barbuto (1997), for example, contends that while empirical research has struggled to differentiate between the two, charismatic and inspirational leadership are conceptually distinct. Arguing that the emphasis is on the articulated mission at hand, not the leader, Barbuto omits charisma from definitions of transformational leadership and contends that inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration are the three hallmarks of transformational leaders.

Inspirational motivation involves communicating a compelling vision of the future that unites followers in common purpose. Whether sole-authored or co-constructed, this exercise in collective meaning making inspires commitment, optimism and the enthusiastic pursuit of organisational goals. Morale and resolve are maintained through “the expression of positive and encouraging messages ... statements that build motivation and confidence” (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004, p. 332).

Intellectual stimulation promotes critical thinking and problem solving abilities that challenge normative structures and “generate new ways of looking at old problems” (B. Bass, 1990b, p. 26). By encouraging employees to question organisation practices and take risks, transformational leaders incorporate “an open architecture dynamic into processes of situation evaluation, vision formulation and patterns of implementation. Such openness has a transcendent and spiritual dimension and helps followers to question assumptions and to generate more creative solutions to problems” (B. Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 188).

Finally, the individualised consideration component of transformational leadership focuses on individual employees and the provision of tailored coaching, mentoring and growth opportunities that enable their self-actualisation (Avolio & Bass, 1995; B. Bass, 1995; J. M. Howell & Avolio, 1993). Not only does this empathic and symbolic act reflect intimate knowledge of individual needs and concerns, it also generates an organisational lever for leadership succession and sustainability. Indeed, Fullan (2003) argues that:

The principal who turns around the failing school and obtains substantial gains in literacy and mathematics, is not building enduring greatness. He or she improves the context but does not change it. Changing the context means that what you leave behind at the end of your tenure is not so much bottom-line results (although that too is apparent) but rather leaders, at many levels, who can carry on and perhaps do even better than you did. (p. 10)

Implicit in this perspective is the contention that professional commitment, loyalty and longevity are enhanced through a leader's idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration, rather than status and remuneration.

Transformational leadership does not, however, exclude transactional leadership behaviours, such as contingent reward. In contrast to Burns (1978), B. Bass (1985) contends that transformational leadership augments rather than replaces transactional leadership. The distinction is one of degree. Leaders perceived to be transformational exhibit the four Is with greater frequency and intensity than contingent reward and management by exception: "In their defining moments, they are transformational" (B. Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 184).

The nature of defining moments is a topic of considerable debate. In distinguishing between two types of transformational leaders, Burns (1978) alluded to the type of change sought: "The reformer operates on parts whereas the revolutionist operates on wholes. The reformer seeks modifications harmonious with existing trends and consistent with prevailing principles and movements. The revolutionist seeks redirections, arrest or reversal of movements and mutation of principles" (p. 170). More recent interpretations (Poutiatine, 2009; West-Burnham, 2009) challenge incremental conceptions of transformation. Rather than a series of modifications, Poutiatine (2009) perceives transformation as a particular type of discontinuous change that "starts, cycles, and stops in a somewhat predictable pattern" (p. 193). Whereas continuous change emerges from analysis and rational planning that typically preserves taken for granted

assumptions, notions or meanings, transformational change involves a radical and permanent paradigmatic shift.

Critiquing concepts of transformation in the education context, West-Burnham (2009) distinguishes three levels of usage, the first two of which he considers erroneous. At the surface level, 'transformation' refers to improved performance "most commonly expressed through the concept of transformational leadership" (West-Burnham, 2009, p. 10). At a deeper level, 'transformation' secures optimum system effectiveness; and at the most profound level, transformation "moves beyond incremental improvements to the prevailing system and proposes a radically different approach in response to external rather than internal imperatives" (West-Burnham, 2009, p. 12). While the first two levels arguably align with Burns' reformer notion, West-Burnham's thesis is that improved performance and system efficiency do not constitute genuine transformation.

Equally contentious is the impact of contextual factors on the emergence, exercise and effectiveness of transformational leadership. Ten years after B. Bass (1985) speculated on individual and organizational constraints that would be conducive to, or impede transformational leadership, Avolio and Bass (1995) noted that few empirical studies had systematically explored "the situation and/or context in which the leader's behaviour is embedded and ... [impacts] on followers/ colleagues over time" (p. 201). Extending the theoretical discussion, Pavar and Eastman (1997) posit that four organisational factors (orientation, task system, structure, and governance) collectively determine receptivity to transformational leadership. They contend that organisations "characterised by adaptation orientation, dominant boundary spanning units, adhocracy or simple structure, and clan mode of governance" are most receptive to transformational leadership, whereas those characterised by "efficiency orientation, dominant technical core, machine bureaucracy, professional bureaucracy, or divisional structure; and market or bureaucratic mode of governance" (p. 98) are least receptive.

Analogous to Burns' (1978) concept of the reformer and revolutionary,

context-harnessing transformational leadership would emerge in situations of high receptivity and context-confronting transformational leadership in situations of low receptivity. In the former, the leader utilises the prevailing context to initiate change, whilst in the latter, they must “undertake a thoroughly destructive process” (Pawar & Eastman, 1997, p. 100) to neutralise the context and induce change. Turning their attention to the external environment, Beugré, Acar and Braun (2006) argue that external contextual factors are as potent as internal organisation configurations and individual leader characteristics in determining the emergence of transformational leadership. Their “environment-induced model” (p. 53) posits that three different types of transformational leadership arise in response to perceived environmental volatility: revolutionary, evolutionary and transgressor.

Acknowledging that theoretical propositions such as Pawar and Eastman’s (1997) are an advance on theories of transformational leadership that assume uniformity of process and outcome in all situations, Yukl (1999) nonetheless calls for greater specification of situational variables. He suggests that “even if there is always some type of transformational leadership behaviour that is relevant for effective leadership, not every type of transformational behaviour will be relevant in every situation” (p. 291).

Although the subject of conceptual and methodological critique (DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011; Keller, 2006; Poutiatine, 2009; Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013), transformational leadership theory continues to be highly influential in the business sector, with Burns’ and Bass’ legacy evident in subsequent iterations of leadership models and measurement tools. Kouzes and Posner’s (2012) leadership challenge, for example, involves modelling the way (clarifying values, setting an example), inspiring a shared vision (envisioning an exciting and ennobling future, enlisting others), challenging the process (experimentation and risk-taking), enabling others to act (fostering high trust, collaboration, power-sharing and personal development), and encouraging the heart (recognising contributions, celebrating values and victories). Like Bass and Avolio’s

(1993) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) is deemed a reliable measure of transformational leadership (Vito, Higgins, & Denney, 2014).

### **Summary**

In summary, the value of transformational leadership theory lies in its concern for those who are expected to enact change. In contrast to the organisational development literature that positions resistors in largely pejorative terms, transformational leaders proactively engage with followers in order to build consensus, strengthen commitment, and maximise individual and collective performance. In the next section, I trace the emergence of transformational leadership research in education settings and assess the relative importance of this theory of practice.

### **Leading educational change in schools**

In her introduction to *Leaders and Leadership in Education*, Gunter (2001) makes the observation that:

The real-time real-life nature of educational work means that capturing, understanding and theorising the dynamism, even by those directly involved, is challenging. This does not invalidate the project but, instead, provides us with the opportunity to ask who the knowers are, why they are deemed to know and, perhaps significantly, where are the silences? (p. 2).

A review of the extensive educational leadership literature suggests that although the knowers are many and positioned in numerous discourses, two schools of thought dominate conceptions of leading educational change: instructional and transformational (Aas & Brandmo, 2016; Day & Sammons, 2013; Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Heck & Hallinger, 1999; Printy, Marks, & Bowers, 2009; V. M. J. Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, & Brown, 2014; Stewart, 2006). The impact of principal leadership is a recurrent theme in both.

Given the reform context for this study, and Te Kotahitanga's explicit

goal of raising Māori students' educational engagement and attainment, a review of the literature linking leadership with student outcomes is of fundamental importance. Tasked with “identify[ing] and explain[ing] characteristics of leadership in schooling that are linked to improving a range of desired outcomes for diverse learners in English- and Māori medium schooling” (Ministry of Education, as cited in V. M. J. Robinson et al., 2009, p. 48), the New Zealand *School Leadership and Student Outcomes ... Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (BES)* (V. M. J. Robinson et al., 2009) provides useful and influential insights into change leadership. With the caveat that their findings constitute a synthesis of the best available evidence, rather than an amalgam of best practice, - “there is no rule about what is best practice in any given situation” (pp. 48-49) - V. M. J. Robinson et al. (2009) examine 27 studies conducted between 1978-2006 that demonstrate direct and indirect links between school leadership (primarily although not exclusively that of the principal) and student academic and social outcomes.

Their analysis of this relatively small sample identifies two broad types of leadership: transformational and instructional. With regard to the former, five of the six identified transformational leadership studies were used to calculate 13 effect sizes. The resulting effect sizes revealed both positive and negative effects on student outcomes, with six reflecting no-weak impact (0 - 0.19) and six reflecting a small impact (0.2 - 0.39). The mean effect size of 0.11 revealed a “very weak relationship between transformational leadership and student outcomes” (V. M. J. Robinson et al., 2009, p. 87). By comparison, analysis of instructional leadership studies proved more fruitful, with 188 effect size statistics derived from 12 of the 13 identified studies. Wide variation in effect size persisted, with half having a weak or small impact, and the remainder moderate-to-large (0.4 - 0.59). Acknowledging the limited scope of their meta-analyses, V. M. J. Robinson et al. (2009) nonetheless concluded that “the impact of pedagogical leadership is three to four times that of transformational leadership” (p. 90).

While important caveats surrounding the abstract nature, grounding and convergence of the respective theories, the design of assessment tools, and the potential for bias accompany this conclusion (see V. M. J. Robinson et al., 2009, pp. 90-94), this statement has received considerable academic and political press, both in New Zealand (Boyd, 2012; Fenwick, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2008; Morris, 2014; Rawlins, Ashton, Carusi, & Lewis, 2014) and internationally (Day & Sammons, 2013; Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; V. M. J. Robinson, 2010). As a precursor to examining caveats in further detail, a synthesis of the origins, central tenets and potency of instructional and transformational leadership in lifting student outcomes seems prudent.

### **Instructional leadership**

Emerging from school effectiveness research during the 1980s, instructional leadership constructs (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Rosenholtz, 1985) focused on the role of the principal in standardising effective teaching and improving educational outcomes for American elementary students in poor urban areas. Direct involvement in curriculum and pedagogy meant that these instructional leaders were “hands-on principals, ‘hip-deep’ in curriculum and instruction, and unafraid of working with teachers on the improvement of teaching and learning” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 332).

Of the multiple iterations of instructional leadership (Bossert et al., 1982), Hallinger and Murphy’s (1985) model comprising three core dimensions, further delineated into ten instructional leadership functions, is the most widely applied and tested in empirical research (Day et al., 2010; Hallinger, 2003, 2005, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 1998; Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Hallinger, Wang, & Chen, 2013; Leithwood & Day, 2007; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006b; Southworth, 2002). The first dimension, *defining the school’s mission*, focuses on the framing (1) and communication (2) of the school’s academic goals. The second dimension, *managing the instructional programme*, includes modelling (3),



supervising and evaluating instruction (4), coordinating curriculum (5) and monitoring student progress (6). The third dimension, *creating a positive school climate*, involves protecting instructional time (7), maintaining high visibility (8), providing incentives for teachers (9), and providing incentives for learning (10). Hallinger (1982, 1990; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985) complemented this model with the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS), an empirical tool designed to measure the relative impact of instructional leadership dimensions.

While an ardent proponent of the instructional leadership model and PIMRS, Hallinger (2005) also highlights significant shortcomings with instructional leadership research. Firstly, it was grounded in research on primary schools with “few references to the obvious need for adaptation of the instructional leadership role in secondary schools” (p. 231). Secondly, “contextual differences were often glossed over in extrapolating the findings for policy and training purposes” (p. 231). Thirdly, rational assumptions underpinning the instructional leadership model failed to take into account the “nonrational, structural conditions that characterize schools” (p. 231), what Snowden and Boone (2007) would term unknown unknowns. Finally, high-stakes testing environments precipitated disproportionate interest in the instructional dimension of the principal’s role. Hallinger notes that the turn of the millennium saw the “American infatuation with performance standards ... become a global love affair ... Principals again find themselves at the nexus of accountability and school improvement with an increasingly explicit expectation that they will function as ‘instructional leaders’ ” (p. 222).

Hallinger is not alone in locating instructional leadership within a managerialist discourse that seeks compliance with a narrow standards agenda (Finkel, 2012; Smyth, 2001; R. Webb, 2005). Purinton (2013) similarly concurs that “instructional leadership began as a bureaucratically inspired performance improvement technique” (p. 291) and contends that the implementation distance between principals and teachers makes the “very idea of instructional leadership ... structurally confused” (p. 280).

Empirical research in school settings in the United States (Blase & Blase, 2004; Carraway & Young, 2015; Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013; Holland, 2007; Horng & Loeb, 2010; Spillane & Hunt, 2010), Canada (Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2015), Europe (Gumus & Akcaoglu, 2013; Kalman & Arslan, 2016; Kaparou & Bush, 2015; Salo, Nylund, & Stjernström, 2015) and elsewhere (Hallinger & Lee, 2014; Mattar, 2012; Mestry, 2013) highlights a number of factors that deter principals from engaging in direct instructional leadership. These centre primarily on multiple workload demands and the encroachment of managerial responsibilities (Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2010; Lemoine, Greer, McCormack, & Richardson, 2014; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Terosky, 2014), however a perceived lack of specific curriculum expertise, current pedagogical knowledge and relational skill (Kalman & Arslan, 2016; LeFevre & Robinson, 2015; Nelson & Sassi, 2005; Southworth, 2002; Stein & Nelson, 2003) together with pervasive professional norms that privilege principal managerial efficiency and teacher autonomy (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013; Marks & Printy, 2003) also feature.

Although more pronounced in secondary schools (Cooley & Shen, 2003; V. M. J. Robinson, Bendikson, & Hattie, 2011; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012), less than uniform enactment of direct instructional leadership in primary schools suggests that classroom doors remain a relatively impermeable boundary for principals (Hallinger, 2005). Reflecting on the 35 years “since instructional management was pushed onto the school administrator stage,” Murphy, Neumerski, Goldring, Grissom, and Porter (2016) conclude that “time devoted to instructional work has changed very little. Indeed, efforts to increase time on instructional matters are a bit like trying to carry fog in a satchel” (p. 455).

Cautioning that “by itself, instructional leadership is little more than a slogan, an empty bumper sticker,” Cuban (2014, para. 18) suggests that an exclusive focus on classroom activities is, moreover, unlikely to secure long-term performance improvement:

In some schools principals follow all the recipes for instructional

leadership: They review lesson plans, make brief visits in classrooms, check test scores, circulate journal articles that give teachers tips, and dozens of other instructional activities that experts advise. Yet they do not manage to create school-wide conditions that encourage teacher collaboration, high standards for student work, and a climate where learning flourishes for students and teachers. Creating these conditions is the essence of instructional leadership. (Cuban, 2014, para. 18)

In distinguishing between instructional actions and the instructional climate, Cuban thus alerts us to narrow (direct) and broad (indirect) definitions of instructional leadership.

Like many of their international colleagues (L. Bell, Bolam, & Cubillo, 2003; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006a; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Louis et al., 2010; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010), Bendikson, Robinson and Hattie (2012) also distinguish between direct and indirect instructional leadership. They contend that structural differences in New Zealand secondary schools, namely subject compartmentalisation and additional layers of hierarchy, typically mean that “a greater proportion of secondary principals’ interactions, relative to those of their primary counterparts, are likely to be with staff who have responsibility for a group of classroom teachers rather than with classroom teachers themselves” (p. 3). Bendikson et al. (2012) further suggest that secondary principals engage in two distinct forms of indirect instructional leadership. They oversee middle leaders (heads of faculty, heads of departments, teachers in charge of subject areas) who have delegated responsibility for curriculum delivery within their specialist areas, and create norms and routines, “everything from student management, timetables and resource and staffing allocation to professional development policies” that “set the conditions for what happens in classrooms and corridors between students and teachers. These managerial functions are the bedrock of principal instructional leadership in secondary schools” (p. 3).

The authors specify that not all management actions constitute indirect instructional leadership and argue that managerial functions devoid of academic press “may be no more than acts that maintain an unsatisfactory status quo” (p. 4). They go on to categorise three of five leadership dimensions identified in the BES as having a direct impact on student learning (setting goals, ensuring quality teaching, professional development) and two as indirect (resourcing strategically, ensuring an orderly and supportive learning environment).

Bendikson et al. (2012) surveyed 102 central North Island secondary schools, securing a response rate of 37% (n=29). Using an aggregate of five NCEA performance indicators (Bendikson, Hattie, & Robinson, 2011), schools were classified as high, mid or low performing. Two further indicators (school performance relative to prior performance, and school performance relative to the prior performance of Māori students) were used to identify improving schools, with the top quartile being classified as *improving schools*. The skewed nature of responding schools that were “both higher performing and higher decile than the wider school population” (Bendikson et al., 2012, p. 4) sounds an additional cautionary note when interpreting findings. Nonetheless, authors concluded that, with the exception of goal and standard setting, secondary principals typically engage in indirect instructional leadership behaviours, leaving heads of department to ensure quality teaching. Curiously, principals of both higher and lower performing secondary schools were perceived by their teachers to use instructional leadership behaviours (both direct and indirect) more frequently than principals of mid-performing schools. When compared against improvement indicators, the authors found that direct instructional leadership behaviours were more evident in improving schools. This led them to conclude that “while direct instructional leadership might be the better predictor of improvement, indirect instructional leadership might be the best predictor of performance” (Bendikson et al., 2012, p. 5).

In support of their contention that the developmental stage of the school presents different demands on instructional leadership and adds

complexity to the principal's role, Bendikson et al. (2012) provide the following illustration:

In a higher performing environment, a principal may find a depth of instructional leadership, in both the management team and wider teaching force, which enables them to focus on indirect instructional leadership (for example, ensuring an orderly environment, solving complex problems and resourcing strategically). But when principals are in schools where student outcomes need improving, that same depth of teacher leadership will probably not be found (or the school would be performing better). In that situation, the principal must take a more direct instructional leadership role. (p. 7)

In other words, achievement data is crucial in determining where instructional capacity resides within the school and how best to utilise this.

Rigby (2014) complicates matters further, arguing that the logic underlying practice is as important, if not more so, than observed and self-reported leadership behaviours. Attention to the language of logics would, she suggests, "add precision to research done on the principalship broadly, and instructional leadership specifically" (p. 637). Content analysis of scholarly journal articles, government documents, professional standards, and professional literature leads her to contend that three logics of instructional leadership shape school leader practice with regard to theories of organisational change, the role of the principal, the goals of instructional leadership, the focus of attention and the modes of assessment used to determine improvement. Rigby identifies a broad and ubiquitous prevailing logic that perceives principals to be both instructional leaders and school managers. Deriving from this, two peripheral logics (entrepreneurial and social justice) can be discerned, the first favouring business innovation and the second challenging systems that induce and perpetuate disadvantage.

Applying these logics to the role of the principal and the goals of instructional leadership serves to illustrate how "belief systems and associated practices that predominate in an organisational field ... at particular periods of time ... enable certain kinds of actions" (Rigby, 2014, p.

611). The prevailing logic holds that the role of the principal is to “lead teachers toward a common vision of student achievement broadly defined” (Rigby, 2014, p. 631), the entrepreneurial logic to introduce, enforce, support and monitor outcomes-focussed curricula, and the social justice logic (Bishop, 2014; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Freire, 1970; Shields, 2003, 2010) to create equitable school structures and ensure culturally responsive pedagogies. According to the dominant logic, instructional leadership goals will vary in focus and degree of specificity. The prevailing logic will generate broad student achievement and teacher satisfaction goals, the entrepreneurial logic tightly prescribed business-oriented goals such as “double-digit gains” (Rigby, 2014, p. 625) on standardised test scores, and the social justice logic goals that improve the engagement and achievement of marginalised students.

Critiquing Horng, Klasik and Loeb’s (2010) analysis of the time principals spend on 43 tasks, broadly grouped as “administration, organisation management, day-to-day instruction, instructional program, internal relations, and external relations” (p. 494), Rigby (2014) contends that the time principals spend on instructional leadership activities could be achieving any number of goals. Horng et al. (2010) are similarly alert to “researchers observing the same action ... and interpreting what they see differently” (p. 497). They also challenge the assertion that instructional leadership activities are a more potent influence on student achievement than transformational ones. In seeking to identify how “variations in principals’ actions [are] reflected in measurable school outcomes” (p. 499), they acknowledge that causal relationships may be both bi-directional in nature, and spurious. Their regression analyses of principal actions against four school effectiveness measures (state standardised test results, teacher responses to a district school climate survey, teacher satisfaction ratings, and parent responses to the district school climate survey) revealed that direct instructional leadership activities (day-to-day instruction) “are marginally or not at all related to improvements in student performance, and they often have a negative relationship with teacher and parent

assessments of the school” (p. 519) whereas indirect instructional leadership activities focusing on organisation management and the instructional programme positively affect student test performance. This leads the authors to conclude that:

organisation management activities are central to instructional leadership defined broadly.... hiring personnel, an organisation management task, may be the most influential role principals have in the instructional practices of their schools.... a single-minded focus on principals as instructional leaders operationalized through direct contact with teachers (e.g. classroom visits) may be detrimental if it forsakes the important role of principals as organisational leaders.  
(pp. 519-520)

Instructional leadership has thus been characterised as a hierarchical approach that focuses on first-order change through the top-down coordination and control of instruction, and relationships that are primarily transactional in nature (Hallinger, 2003). In contrast to an ‘inspect and direct’ paradigm, transformational leadership approaches foster second-order change through distributed leadership that empowers others to pursue school improvement “without specific direction from above” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 338). The next section considers the application of transformational leadership theory in school settings.

### **Transformational leadership**

Leithwood’s (1992, 1994, 2012a; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990, 1999, 2000, 2005, 2006; Leithwood & Sun, 2012) work in applying transformational leadership theory in education has arguably been as influential as Hallinger’s instructional leadership model. Perceiving transformational leadership as more appropriate to school restructuring during times of uncertainty and rapid change, Leithwood’s empirical research highlights the size and complexity of secondary schools, the need for significant second-order change in support of desired first-order change, and the profession of teaching as key reasons why transformational leadership “ought to subsume

instructional leadership as the dominant image of school administration” (Leithwood, 1992, p. 8).

Early iterations of Leithwood and colleagues’ (Leithwood et al., 1999) school-specific transformational leadership model identify three core dimensions that are further delineated into nine leadership practices. The first dimension, *setting directions*, focuses on the development and articulation of a shared vision (1), building goal consensus (2) and holding high expectations (3). The second dimension, *developing people*, includes the provision of individualised support (4), intellectual stimulation (5), and the modelling of desired professional practices, beliefs and values (6). The third dimension, *redesigning the organisation*, involves strengthening school culture (7), building structures conducive to collaboration (8), and engaging parents and the wider community (9).

More recently (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005), a fourth dimension, *improving the instructional programme*, has been added. While knowledge of an organisation’s technical core is fundamental to the provision of intellectual stimulation and individualised support that develops people in all contexts, a focus on instruction distinguishes models of transformational leadership developed for school settings (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). This dimension includes practices that directly shape the nature and quality of classroom teaching and learning: “staffing the programme, providing instructional support, monitoring school activity, buffering staff from distractions to their work, and aligning resources” (Leithwood, 2012a, pp. 60-61).

Recent empirical research supports the contention that the four dimensions of transformational leadership have a powerful influence on student outcomes (P. Smith & Bell, 2011; Valentine & Prater, 2011); teacher efficacy, commitment and wellbeing (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016; Chin, 2007; Dumay & Galand, 2012; Eyal & Roth, 2011; Hoy & Smith, 2007; Ibrahim, Ghavifekr, Ling, Siraj, & Azeez, 2014; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010; Mehdinezhad & Mansouri, 2016); and organisational learning and innovation (Moolenaar, Daly, & Slegers, 2010). Valentine and Prater’s



(2011) analysis of the relationships between managerial, instructional and transformational leadership practices and student achievement in 155 public Missouri high schools found that “three transformational leadership factors, ‘providing a model’, ‘identifying a vision’, and ‘fostering group goals’ most frequently explained student achievement scores” (p. 23), while Hauserman and Stick’s (2013) analysis of Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) responses from teachers in 77 Canadian schools led them to proclaim that “the leadership teachers want from principals [is] transformational” (p. 184). Respondents indicated a preference for caring, collaborative, invitational and moral leaders who exhibited all four transformational leadership dimensions.

Furthermore, Printy’s (2010) review of quantitative and qualitative studies conducted in the United States between 2000-2010 and Kwan’s (2016) survey of 177 Hong Kong deputy principals led them to conclude that transformational leadership practices constitute a necessary prerequisite to instructional leadership. The implication here is that unless relationships are prioritised through the provision of individualised support and intellectual stimulation that meet higher order psychological needs for esteem, autonomy and self-actualisation, teachers are unlikely to fully engage in top-down initiatives to improve the instructional programme.

Like instructional leadership, transformational leadership has its detractors. Critique specific to its application in education also centres on shortcomings in predictive ability (Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Printy et al., 2009) and conceptual and methodological issues (Berkovich, 2016; Currie & Lockett, 2007; Printy et al., 2009). Leithwood and Sun (2012) acknowledge that transformational leadership struggles to “predict the behaviours of organizational members resulting from the influence of transformational leadership practices, much less the consequences of those behaviours for more distal organizational outcomes” (p. 389). This makes contingency planning problematic, something Leithwood recognised as early as 1994:

Whereas the dimensions of transformational leadership offer a coherent approach to school leadership, specific practices within each

dimension vary widely. So, advocating a transformational approach to school leadership does not entail the specification of a uniform or rigid set of leadership behaviours. (Leithwood, 1994, p. 515)

Berkovich (2016) argues that the “popularization of transformational leadership theory in educational leadership cannot be understood apart from the current, change-oriented policy environment, which emphasizes restructuring and transformation to meet twenty-first century schooling requirements” (p. 609). Using Bacharach’s theory evaluation criteria (falsifiability, utility and fit) to evaluate transformational leadership theory, Berkovich concludes that its strength lies in its utility for practitioners, that “shortcomings in the area of falsifiability” are not insurmountable and that if “reconciled with other theories in the field, it still has underdeveloped potential to contribute to the understanding of education as a unique area for working and learning” (p. 610).

### **Hybrid theories**

More recent theoretical hybrids such as cultural, transformative and relational leadership develop Burns’ (1978) emphasis on purposeful moral leadership, emotions, and the centrality of relationship. While these conceptualisations have yet to gain ascendancy in empirical educational research, they illuminate important considerations in leading change in schools.

#### *Cultural leadership theories*

Transformational leadership theory drew attention to the establishment and maintenance of organisational culture, an aspect of leadership largely overlooked in organisational change models, yet critical to change efforts. Exponents of cultural leadership theories (Barth, 2002; Bolman & Deal, 1984, 1997, 2013; Deal & Peterson, 1999, 2009; Sergiovanni, 1984, 2000, 2001) support Schein’s (1985) proposition that “there is a possibility underemphasized in the research that the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture” (p. 2). Schein defines culture as

“the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic ‘taken-for-granted’ fashion an organisation’s view of itself and its environment” (p. 6). Culture embodies the core beliefs, shared values and sense of mission that explicitly and implicitly shape norms of organisational behaviour. Bolman and Deal (1984, 1997, 2013) thus draw attention to four frames of organisation: structural, human resources, symbolic and political. Applying this to the education context, Sergiovanni (1984, 2000) identifies five levels of leadership forces in an ascending hierarchy: technical, human, educational, cultural and symbolic. He contends that technical and human leadership forces are generic and “thus share identical qualities with competent management and leadership wherever they are expressed” (1984, p. 9), whereas the higher order educational, symbolic and cultural leadership forces that determine excellence are “situational and contextual, deriving their unique qualities from specific matters of education and schooling” (1984, p. 9).

Recognising that school culture establishes the context of, and readiness for educational reform, highly effective principals heed Fullan’s (2002) warning that change efforts that ignore culture are doomed to fail. They consequently devote considerable energy to the management of meaning (Bennis, 1992) and to creating and fostering healthy cultural norms (Saphier & King, 1985) that include honest and open communication, trust and confidence (Branson, 2014; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Coleman, 2012; Gronn, 2011; Kwan, 2016; Tschannen-Moran, 2009, 2014; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008); traditions, high expectations and the protection of what’s important; collaboration, shared decision making and professional community (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Hord & Sommers, 2008); and tangible support, caring, celebration and humour.

### *Transformative leadership*

Acknowledging antecedents in Burns’ (1978) work and particularly his

recognition that leaders attuned to the historical use and abuse of power “build advocacy and conflict into the planning process in response to pluralistic sets of values” (Burns, 1978, p. 420), Shields (2010) argues that the “twin concepts of critique and possibility” (p. 569) distinguish transformative from transformational leadership. She elaborates a number of key differences between the two in terms of their starting points, key values, goals, processes, and leader foci. In sum, “transformational leadership focuses on improving organisational qualities, dimensions, and effectiveness; and transformative educational leadership begins by challenging inappropriate uses of power and privilege that create or perpetuate inequity and injustice” (Shields, 2010, p. 564).

Shields (2003, 2010, 2012) also alerts us to the necessary dissonance that transformative leaders experience when they seek to problematise the formal structures of power and authority they are charged with preserving. “Were this not the case, they would not likely have attained the formal recognition as leaders” that enables them “to work from within dominant social formations to exercise effective oppositional power, to resist courageously, and to be activists and voices for change” (Shields, 2010, p. 570). This is no easy task and even less so during ideologically conservative times (Weiner, 2003).

### *Relational leadership*

Moving away from a sole focus on the leader, relational constructs of leadership (Branson, Franken, & Penney, 2016; Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Fullan, 2011; D. L. Giles, 2011; Helstad & Møller, 2013; Henry & Wolfgramm, 2018; Liu, 2017; Marchiondo, Myers, & Kopelman, 2015; Rasmussen & Larsen, 2015; Uhl-Bien, 2006) position leadership as a socially constructed phenomenon: “We exist in a mutual relationship with others and our surroundings and ... we both shape, and are shaped by, our social experience in everyday interactions and conversations” (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011, p. 1432). Critiquing dominant educational leadership theories that privilege leadership behaviours at the

expense of “more fundamental relational requirements” (p. 158), Branson, Franken and Penney (2016) contend that the enactment of leadership requires more than positional title: “Simply stated, the person must first be accepted as leader before they can begin to behave as a leader” (p. 158).

While attention to the role of followers in conferring leadership is not new (Haslam et al., 2001; Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011; Hollander, 1993, 1995; Lord & Maher, 1990; Meindl, 1995), Branson et al. (2016) remind readers that in order to shape group identity and align this to wider organisation goals, the leader must be “authentically established as a member of the group and, as a consequence, ... readily and willingly champion, affirm and promote the activities of the group and its individual members in various forums” (p. 158). Furthermore, the building of collegial and collaborative relationships that authorise relational power constitutes not just one of a multitude of desirable behaviours but the “very essence” (p. 158) of leadership.

### **Integrated leadership models**

Subscribing to relational theories of leadership, Printy et al. (2009) posit that transformational leadership is a necessary prerequisite to shared instructional leadership in schools but does not guarantee collaboration on curriculum and instruction. They contend that high quality instruction and achievement requires a blend of transformational and instructional approaches, and advocate for an integrated model. In a similar vein, Day, Gu and Sammons (2016) recognise the complementary, interdependent nature of transformational and instructional leadership practices that are “too often dichotomized” (p. 221). In their view, successful principals draw differentially on elements of both “to progressively shape and ‘layer’ the improvement culture in improving student outcomes” (p. 253).

Other authors (Horng et al., 2010; Printy et al., 2009; Rigby, 2014) argue that empirical research struggles to discern between the two. “In truth, although quantitative methods such as surveys permit the isolation of transformational and instructional forms based on the content of questions,

these forms are likely to cohere in practice” (Printy et al., 2009, p. 511). For example, modelling teaching practice simultaneously serves an instructional agenda in making required practice visible and a transformational agenda in providing the individualised consideration necessary for required practice to become desired practice.

Alleged lack of methodological precision forms the basis for Leithwood and Sun’s (2012) two-pronged critique of V. M. J. Robinson et al. (2009). Firstly, they suggest that the latter’s failure to specify the meta-analytic techniques used, to distinguish the different types of effect sizes derived, and to combine direct and indirect effect sizes rather than discriminate between them, undermines the BES validity and conclusions. Secondly, they report that four of the five leadership practices deemed to have strong average effects on student outcomes are common to both instructional leadership (IL) and transformational (TSL) models “and so the claim that IL has much greater effects on students than TSL is more confusing than enlightening” (p. 413). This leads them to advocate an integrated model that is:

premised on the hard-to-refute claim that improving student learning entails improving both the classroom conditions directly experienced by students (the reputed focus of IL) as well as the wider organisational conditions that enable those classroom conditions (the reputed focus of TSL). (p. 411)

Indeed, greater focus on the instructional programme in transformational leadership models and attention to issues of school culture in instructional models points to convergence (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016; Hallinger, 2003; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Marks & Printy, 2003; Nedelcu, 2013; Printy et al., 2009; Scheerens, 2012). Boberg and Bourgeois (2016) conclude that far from being “competing leadership paradigms, these two approaches are not only compatible but reinforcing, suggesting that integrated models of leadership may provide greater insights into effective school leadership” (pp. 370-371). This is not necessarily a straightforward exercise, however. Shatzer et al. (2014) urge caution when

combining practices that may be theoretically incompatible:

For example, one cannot easily combine the practice “provide incentives for teachers” with transformational leadership theory because, as Bass (1998) has noted, transformational leaders are able to go beyond the short-term exchanges of providing incentives for teachers and instead motivate followers to provide additional effort by encouraging them to buy into a greater vision. (p. 457)

While Shatzer et al. (2014) speculate that an entirely new model of leadership may usefully transcend additive and integrated transformational/instructional leadership hybrids, Leithwood and Sun (2012) refute the need for new conceptualisations, recommending instead that future research “eschew[s] the exclusive use of whole leadership models and test[s] the more specific practices that have emerged as consequential from recent research and reviews of research” (p. 412).

Growing attention to the situated “bundles of activities” (Leithwood, 2012b, p. 5) that comprise effective practice reflects a shift of concern away from the validity of theoretical constructs towards a more pragmatic focus on leadership responses to contextual adaptive challenges. In fairness, it should be acknowledged that V. M. J. Robinson et al. (2009) identify, in addition to their declared preference for instructional leadership, eight leadership dimensions underpinned by four broad areas of expertise: leadership content knowledge, complex problem solving, relational trust and the ability to facilitate open-to-learning conversations. They also concede that because appropriate leadership responses must be discerned in situ, “it will never be possible to fully specify” (V. M. J. Robinson et al., 2009, p. 206) the requisite practices, knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to secure improvement. Other authors (V. M. J. Robinson, 2010; Yukl, 2012) are similarly wary of a polyphonic list logic (Barth, 1990) that assumes, firstly, that the messy and holistic everyday practice of school leaders can be encapsulated in catalogues of effective leadership behaviours and, secondly, that adoption of these practices will ensure effective performance.

Having focused early phases of Te Kotahitanga on the development of culturally responsive pedagogies of classroom relations, Bishop, O’Sullivan and Berryman (2010) turned their attention to the school and system-wide structural reform needed to sustain teachers in this endeavour. The resulting GPILSEO model encapsulates seven key elements considered essential to sustainable and scalable reform: goals, pedagogy, institutions, leadership, spread, evidence, and ownership. Applied to leadership at the school level, GPILSEO is an analytical and planning heuristic that attunes principals to key change leadership principles and practices that are instructional, transformational and transformative in intent. In *Scaling Up Educational Reform* (2010), Bishop et al. itemise 35 separate tasks that assist leaders to enact key elements of Te Kotahitanga:

GPILSEO	Tasks associated with each GPILSEO element
<p><i>Leaders establish and develop specific measurable <b>goals</b> so that progress can be shown, monitored over time and acted upon</i></p>	<p>Leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• build from the dissonance that is created when the difference between the current reality and the desired state is highlighted</li> <li>• learn how to set smart goals for student participation and achievement in its widest sense</li> <li>• develop specific goals and responsively adjust their practice or learning</li> <li>• have the capacity (self-belief) to meet goals from their current understanding, or be able to learn what is needed to meet the goals</li> <li>• communicate with others about performance in terms of goals</li> </ul>
<p><i>Leaders support the development and implementation of new <b>pedagogic</b> relationships and interactions in the classroom</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support the means of embedding the conceptual depth of the reform into the theorising and practice of classroom teachers, principals and national administrators (teachers’ conceptual depth is a major indicator of sustainability)</li> <li>• focus their relationships, their work and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, which increases their influence on student outcomes</li> <li>• create learning contexts in which learners gain the capacity and self-belief that they will be able to meet goals from their current understandings, or will be able to learn what is needed to meet the goals</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promote the cultural identity of learners as being fundamental to learning relations and interactions</li> <li>• engage in classroom observations and provide specific feedback and/or co-construct with teachers ways to improve classroom practice</li> <li>• provide specific professional learning opportunities for the consolidation of content and strategy learning</li> <li>• create and sustain effective school-wide professional learning communities</li> <li>• build capacity for teachers to take collective responsibility for student outcomes and collective action for changing teaching practice based on student experiences and academic performance</li> </ul>
<p><i>Leaders change the <b>institutional</b> framework, its organisation and structure, to support the reform within the schools</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• create opportunities for connections to, and collaboration with, other teachers (including teachers in other schools) engaged in similar reform</li> <li>• institutionalise the means for teacher collaborative decision making in a systematic manner</li> <li>• prioritise the establishment of new institutions so that they are seen to be supportive of the efforts of teachers and are aligned with school plans and policies, and which inform national policies</li> <li>• modify structural and organisational arrangements to accommodate new institutions (such as the Cycle Plus components of Te Kotahitanga</li> <li>• (re)prioritise funding to support the ongoing implementation of the reform’s professional learning processes beyond the initial project funding phase</li> <li>• ensure the reform is symbolically represented within the school</li> </ul>
<p><i><b>Leaders</b> need to be knowledgeable about their role in the reform</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focus on improving the performance of those least well served by the system</li> <li>• have a sound understanding of the theoretical foundations of the reform and of what that theoretical basis means for classroom practice, school structure and culture</li> <li>• accept responsibility for student learning outcomes</li> <li>• demonstrate their understanding that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) a focus on Māori has strong benefits for other students</li> <li>b) pedagogic leadership has powerful effects on student outcomes</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<p>c) no one person can provide all leadership needs</p> <p>d) proactive, responsive and distributed leadership is essential for the sustainability of a reform in a school</p>
<p><i>Leaders spread the reform to include all students, teachers and the community</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• spread the reform to others, within and outside the school, so as to align the new norms of the reform within the school and within the norms of supporting institutions, and within communities in association with the school</li> <li>• spread the reform so that parents whānau and community are engaged in a manner that addresses their aspirations for the education of their children</li> </ul>
<p><i>Leaders develop the capacity of people and systems to produce and use evidence of student progress to inform change</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop the capacity of teachers to identify and continually question their own discursive positioning and theories of action</li> <li>• provide professional learning opportunities for teachers that use alternative theories, evidence and vicarious experiences</li> <li>• develop and grow systems in their schools that accurately measure student attendance data, stand-downs, suspensions, early-leaving exemptions, retention rates and achievement data for formative and summative purposes</li> <li>• develop the capacity of teachers to learn how to both create appropriate evidence for learning and use student evidence to modify their classroom practice</li> </ul>
<p><i>Leaders ensure that the ownership of and responsibility/ authority for the goals of the reform must shift to the school/system</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify and take responsibility for the performance of students who are currently not benefiting from their school/system</li> <li>• take responsibility for ensuring that the integrity of the means of producing increased achievement gains for the target students (the Cycle Plus and the facilitation teams) is not jeopardised by conflicting and competing interests and agendas</li> <li>• take responsibility for building capacity among students, staff and other leaders so that they are able to take responsibility for student outcomes</li> <li>• work towards building a school culture that focuses on an ongoing reduction of educational disparities through the raising of student outcomes</li> <li>• work to create classrooms, a school culture and an education system in which new situations are addressed from an in-depth understanding of the</li> </ul>

	reform's aims and approaches rather than from past practice.
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(Bishop et al., 2010, pp. 109-111, italics and emphasis in original)

Insistent that sustainability and scalability require all key elements to be present “*from the very outset*” (p. 33, italics in original), the authors alert readers to the complex, non-linear and interdependent nature of these elements, and caution against broad, nebulous and prescriptive approaches to leading change: “The best that can be offered are *procedural guidelines* that ... reflect a framework for developing the optimal mix of professional development processes and technologies that will work best in a specific context at a particular point in time” (p. 43, italics in original). Therein lies the challenge. What constitutes context? How do principals interpret myriad cultural, human, symbolic, and political dimensions of school context in order to determine an optimal mix? Can optimal combinations only ever be determined in retrospect?

### **Summary**

If we accept the contention that pedagogical practice forms education's technical core, the distinction between transformational and instructional leadership theories is somewhat moot. The difference appears to lie in the philosophical foundations underpinning their emergence and the manner in which they are manifest in school leader behaviours. Whereas transformational leadership invokes particular concern for relationships between the leader and led, early iterations of instructional leadership rest in a performative direct and inspect paradigm.

In the second part of the literature review, I turn my attention to the manner in which context shapes the exercise of leadership.

## Part II: Context

### Defining context

Context appears central to contemporary educational experience and crucial to the practice of educational transformation (Seddon, 1994). Hallinger (2003) asserts that studying principal leadership without reference to context is “virtually meaningless.... The context of the school is a source of constraints, resources, and opportunities that the principal must understand and address in order to lead” (p. 346). A survey of literature this century reveals that, on the one hand, there is widespread support for the contention that diverse school settings demand contextually specific approaches to leading change (Bishop et al., 2010; Bottery, 2006; Braun et al., 2011; Clarke & O’Donoghue, 2017; Davies & Davies, 2005; Day & Sammons, 2013; Goldring, Huff, May, & Camburn, 2008; Gordon & Patterson, 2006; Gu & Johansson, 2013; Hallinger, 2003, 2018; Hallinger & Thang, 2014; Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki, & Giles, 2005; L. Johnson, Møller, Jacobson, & Wong, 2008; Keddie, 2014; Leithwood, 2012b; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Opdenakker & Van Damme, 2007; V. M. J. Robinson et al., 2009; Sergiovanni, 2001; Silins & Mulford, 2010; Thrupp & Lupton, 2006). On the other hand, however, there is less surety around context as a concept; the nature of contextual constraints, resources and opportunities; their interplay with leadership; and the extent to which unique contexts require unique leadership responses.

Acknowledging the importance of context is one thing, defining it is quite another. Although ‘context’ has crept into everyday leadership idiom, its precise meaning is unclear. Within the educational leadership field, Bottery (2006) draws on the Concise Oxford Dictionary definition of context as “the circumstances relevant to something under consideration” (p. 169). He warns against conflating context with terms like ‘culture’ that may be only constituent parts of it and further suggests that the concept of relevance means that context is “not some abstracted idealised realm encompassing all possible events or circumstances, but will involve

considerable individual preference and selection” (pp. 169-170). The perception of context as a set of situational variables influencing leadership responses dominates recent research, as we shall see shortly, but it is not the only one.

Some thirty years ago, Seddon’s (1986) review of literature led her to discern three broad conceptualisations: “the atomistic social context, the individual-structured social context, and the relational-structured social context” (p. 154, see also Seddon, 1994, 1995). The first frame envisions context as an abstract fragmented analytical phenomenon. Actors are conceived as exemplifications of simple categories, for example ‘leaders/followers’, leadership is treated as an exogenous variable, and changes in behaviour are measured in positivist terms (using scientific techniques such as hierarchical linear modelling, structural equation modelling and regression analyses). Context is perceived merely as a background stage upon which actors conduct their professional and personal lives: “the particularities of real-world circumstances and their constitutive role in structuring social action and the actors are ignored” (Gronn & Ribbins, 1996, p. 455).

The second frame highlights the lived experience of situationally embedded real-world actors and the implicative, reciprocal nature of the relationship between individual and context, which extends from the past into the present and beyond. In this frame, leadership simultaneously produces and is produced by context. The latter is not just a given situation, but actively created (Endrissat & Von Arx, 2013). Gronn and Ribbins (1996) thus suggest that “whereas categorical conceptions yield snapshots of leadership, analogously, interpretive conceptions provide dynamic moving pictures” (p. 455). While the interpretivist frame highlights the fluidity of relational practices, it restricts analysis to intentionality and is “blind to structural explanations ... which rest upon non-intentional (i.e., non-voluntaristic) action by individuals” (Seddon, 1994, p. 47).

Seddon (1994) argues that while entities and categories can be identified, they are “ephemeral social products which have been made and

can be remade through further practice” and this leads her to conclude that “what is at issue in this concern with practice is not so much ‘education and context’ or even more broadly, social being in social organisation, but processes of becoming” (p. 29). The relational frame suggests that “‘context’ is not understood as an entity within which events occur or exist, but as a social product which is constituted and reconstituted through practices within a social formation (‘society’) understood relationally” (Seddon, 1994, p. 47). The third frame recognises both the “intentional meanings, conscious understandings and deliberate actions of individuals within a particular context” and the “dense, complex and interconnected webs of relationships, underpinned by structures and processes which may never be fully recognised, never fully fathomed, but which influence thoughts and actions in myriad ways” (Bottery, 2006, pp. 171-172). These networks provide opportunities both for the expression and constraint of human agency (Bourdieu, 1990c; Giddens, 1982, 1984).

Returning to the categorical or atomistic frame, the identification of variables constituting “the internal situation in the organisation and the external context in which the organisation operates” (Fidler, 2000, p. 403) has commanded considerable attention in 21<sup>st</sup> century educational research. Empirical studies have investigated the manner in which:

- school sector (Belchetz & Leithwood, 2007);
- school size (Borland & Howsen, 2003; Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Egalite & Kisida, 2016; Hallam, 2010; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009; Luyten, 2010) and geographic location (Barnett & Stevenson, 2015; Drummond & Halsey, 2013; Mette, 2014; Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra, & Angelidou, 2011; Wong, 2011);
- student intake characteristics such as socio-economic status - both advantaged (Thrupp & Lupton, 2011) and deprived (Bhengu & Mkhize, 2013; C. Giles, Jacobson, Johnson, & Ylimaki, 2007; L. Johnson, 2007; Lupton & Thrupp, 2013; Medina, Martinez, Murakam, Rodriquez, & Hernandez, 2014; Naicker, Chikoko, & Muthiyane, 2013; Wilson, 2016), ethnicity (Dimmock, Stevenson, Bignold, Shah, &

Middlewood, 2005; Strand, 2010; A. Walker, 2007; Yukich, 2010), English language competence (Winton, 2013), special educational needs (Garner & Forbes, 2013; Mitchell, 2010), family instability (Cavanagh & Fomby, 2012) student attitude and behaviour (Akey, 2006);

- school trajectory or development phase (Gu & Johansson, 2013; Hochbein, 2012; Millward & Timperley, 2010);
- educational policy contexts (Belchetz & Leithwood, 2007; A. Harris & Jones, 2018; Keddie, 2013, 2014; Lárusdóttir, 2014; Moos, Krejsler, & Kofod, 2008);
- and principal demographics (Peters, 2012), reputation (Heffernan, 2018) and career stage (Clarke et al., 2007; Cowie & Crawford, 2008; Spillane & Lee, 2014)

influence leadership responses and student attainment.

Whilst some studies home in on, and attempt to control for single contextual variables, others endeavour to account for multiple factors. Hallinger (2003) suggests that “contextual variables of interest to principals include the student background, community type, organisational structure, school culture, teacher experience and competence, fiscal resources, school size, and bureaucratic and labour organisation” (p. 346). Following Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012; see also Braun et al., 2011), Winton (2013) groups school context dimensions into four categories that include the school’s “situated context (e.g., history, intake, location, and institutional narratives), professional culture (including teachers’ values, attitudes, and outlooks), material context (e.g., staffing, physical buildings, budget, infrastructure), and external context (including school reputation, policies, discourses, and social, political, and economic contexts)” (p. 5).

International School Leadership Development Network (ISLDN) social justice researchers perceive context as an “idiosyncratic mix of external environmental conditions, internal organisation dynamics, and leaders’ prior experiences/backgrounds that together constitute fluid, relational leadership environments” (Morrison, 2017, p. 60). Aligning with

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, the ISLDN conceptual framework (see Figure 2, below) depicts context as the aggregate of multiple and permeable layers of environment: micro, meso/exo and macro. Using this schema, personal career trajectories, leadership experiences and world view shape a principal's micro level leadership context; school and community influences determine the meso level leadership context; and national policy forces and global megatrends the macro level leadership context. (Morrison, 2017, p. 60)

The interdependent, dynamic and temporal nature of elements and sub-elements within the framework is indicated by the connecting arrows.

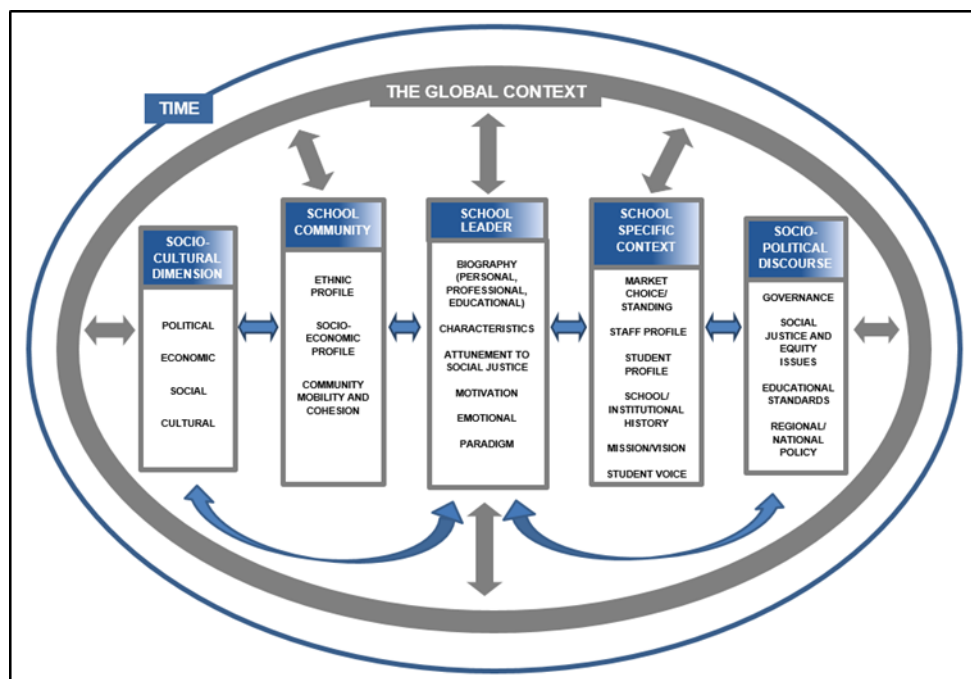


Figure 2: A Micro/Meso/Macro conceptual frame for social justice leadership in schools (V2) (International School Leadership Development Network (ISLDN) Social Justice Strand, 2014).

Unlike other conceptualisations that juxtapose leadership and context, or omit leaders entirely, the ISLDN frame aligns with interpretivist notions of context that recognise the duality of agency and structure:

As key actors on the educational stage, school leaders are both products of the contextual backdrops and shape the drama that



unfolds. Whether they adhere faithfully to a policy script or ad lib, what they do in one scene shapes what happens in the next” (Morrison, 2017, pp. 60-61).

Bourdieu (1990c) theorises this through the genesis of *habitus* or the disposition of agents to act. He perceives society as a series of overlapping, homologous and competing *fields*, each with their own logic of practice and hierarchy of capitals (social, economic, cultural and symbolic). To Bourdieu (1998), a field is a “structured social space” in which “constant permanent relationships of inequality” cause “various actors [to] struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field” (p. 40).

He argues that not only are the external boundaries of fields highly contested, so too are internal positions. In a struggle for distinction, agents operating within fields attempt to establish a monopoly over specific combinations of capitals by creating subfields. These subfields operate within the general logic of the field but have their own distinct rules. Applying Bourdieu’s theory of practice to the education field, Thomson (2001) posits that subfields comprising the educational field include the school, universities and organisational administration. She perceives organisational administration as a subfield of public sector management, which is in turn a subfield of the political field. Principals are positioned at the apex of the schooling subfield but straddle other subfields and are thus forced to negotiate conflicting discourses and mediate their effects both upward and downward.

This leads Thomson (2001, 2004) and others (Eacott, 2010, 2013; Gunter, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2006; Hardy, 2010; Lingard, Hayes, Mills, & Christie, 2003) to argue that leadership is better understood not in terms of trait (Stogdill, 1948), contingency (Fiedler, 1967), instructional or transformational theory, but in terms of social and power relations in specific contexts, places and times. Lingard et al. (2003) develop the position that leadership involves the “complex interplay of the personal/biographical, that is, the *habitus*, with the institutional/organizational context and the broader social, political and economic

context” (p. 59), while Thomson (2001) contends that this complex interplay allows us to “recognise simultaneously the invariant properties of the educational field and the situated specificities of leadership work in schools” (p. 15).

Principal habitus, the “capacity and disposition to deal with the wholeness of the school and the educational system as fields” (Lingard et al., 2003, p. 74) is formed through a long apprenticeship which begins with compulsory schooling and progressively includes classroom teaching, a hierarchy of middle management positions and ongoing leadership learning (Fullan, 2005, 2010, 2011, 2014; MacBeath & MacDonald, 2000; Scott, 2003). Reading context, discerning patterns and responding appropriately with a sureness of touch is an inherent skill that has its basis in more than gut instinct. It arises “from an emotional and social intelligence linked to a well-rehearsed cognitive databank of principles and experiential lessons internalized” (MacBeath & MacDonald, 2000, p. 27).

Eisner (2002) aligns the ability to deal with the dynamics of fields with the Greek concept of *phronesis*, a “morally pervaded practical wisdom ... acquired by a *phronimos*, a practically wise person, through experience” (p. 281). The exact nature of the experience and means most likely to engender wisdom in educational leaders has, however, remained relatively obscure. Branson (2010) suggests that while “there is something very wholesome and reassuring in associating wisdom with the leadership of educational change ... a detailed description of the practical implications of this association [has proven a] far more ambiguous, complicated and challenging” (p. 6) undertaking.

He argues that the particularity of things and situations means that *phronesis* cannot be acquired through didactic methods that assume change models are generalisable across contexts. Rather, learning to become a *phronimos* requires rigorous, honest and ongoing self-reflection: “No one can convey this essential knowledge to the leader: it has to come from within” (Branson, 2010, p. 42). Moreover, practical wisdom can only be gained through authentic working relationships. In simulated rather

than real contexts, “any reflection becomes a purely cognitive exercise devoid of personal, psychological, or subjective involvement ... [and] based on rationalism rather than embodied awareness” (Branson, 2010, p. 42).

Branson’s (2010) conceptual framework for guided self-reflection (see Figure 3, below) incorporates six perspectives that “are ever present within any form of educational change” (p. 45): contextual, dispositional, historical, political, cultural and strategic. Importantly, this framework highlights affective dimensions of leadership consciousness and focuses attention on the socio-political and structural dimensions of educational change that have been largely ignored in the rational, logical, instrumental

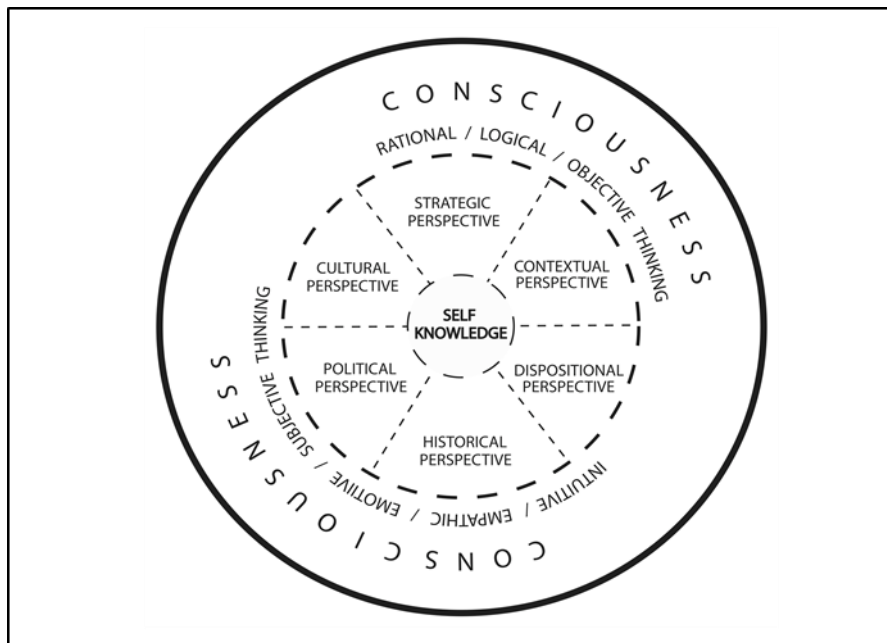


Figure 3. An illustration of the array of considerations integral to the self-reflection process of a wise leader of educational change. (Branson, 2010, p. 44)

and sequential approaches dominating organisational and educational change literature. Branson thus offers a more holistic conception of the factors shaping phronesis, but stops short of reconciling the duality between context and leadership practice. Context is framed as a single perspective, rather than an amalgam of all six.

### **Context matters: Or does it?**

Whilst researchers agree in principle with Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch's (2002) statement that "one cannot separate the leader(s) from the context any more than one can separate a flavour from a food" (p. 799), they differ over the extent to which unique contexts require unique leadership responses. Neumerski (2013) summarises this debate well: on the one hand, lists of decontextualized leadership behaviours ignore factors that compel leaders to enact certain behaviours at certain times whilst, on the other hand, the suggestion that "each context involves a completely different way of leading" that requires leaders to "invent their own unique wheel" is also problematic" (p. 328).

Belchetz and Leithwood (2007) suggest that principals respond to context in one of four ways: they expand their repertoire of leadership practices to accommodate new demands; they change the manner in which existing practices are enacted, but not the practices themselves; they employ a combination of new practices and enactments; or they respond no differently. With the intention of "drill[ing] down into the often voiced claim that successful school leadership is highly dependent on the context in which it is exercised" (2007, p. 132), Belchetz and Leithwood focus on the responses of six successful elementary school principals in Ontario. Finding only "modest support for the claim that successful leadership is context dependent" (p. 134), they conclude that "many claims about the importance of context in practice of successful school leadership would seem to be greatly exaggerated, at least in a highly accountable policy context" (p. 135). The qualification is an important one because the authors deliberately restrict school size and student population criteria, both of which are known to be "powerful mediators on leadership effects" (p. 124), less successful outliers, and schools in the secondary sector. That the outlier design and sampling criteria yielded only four schools in the first instance and six following relaxation of the principal tenure criterion from three years at the same school to two, reveals both methodological stringency and a comparatively narrow interpretation of context.

On a larger scale, International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) case studies conducted by Leithwood and colleagues (Day, 2005; Drysdale, 2011; Gurr, 2014; Leithwood & Day, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2006a; Leithwood et al., 2008; Merchant et al., 2012; Moos, Johansson, & Day, 2011; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2011) lend some credence to the claim that successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of instructional and transformational leadership practices but combine and sequence these in multiple ways. Put simply, “successful school leadership is context sensitive, but it is not context driven” (Gurr, 2015, p. 140). On balance, this implies that agency outweighs structure and that determined principals “do not comply, subvert, or overtly oppose. Rather they actively mediate and moderate within a set of core values and practices which transcend narrowly conceived improvement agendas” (Day, 2005, p. 581) and rational-linear change management models (Saka, 2003). Navigating multiple and competing discourses both demands and generates “contextual wisdom” (Davies & Davies, 2005, p. 24), the ability to understand the uniqueness of the school environment and its interaction with the wider community, and respond appropriately.

Contextual wisdom enables effective principals to recognise that while all basic leadership practices are important, at different times and in different settings, some will be more pertinent than others. Thomson (2001) thus argues that understanding of “the game and its logic requires an analysis of the situated everyday rather than abstractions that claim truth in all instances and places” (p. 14). Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki and Giles’ (2005) research in seven challenging US schools serves to illustrate this point. Applying Leithwood and Riehl’s (2005) model, they discovered that the principals’ exercise of core practices did not sufficiently explain what actually transpired during the change process:

The ways in which these practices emerged and how they interrelated over time was neither linear nor formulaic. Each principal, in his or her own fashion, had to constantly recalibrate the contextual conditions and constraints the school confronted and then adapt their

core practices to create the conditions necessary to enable school improvement. In each case, conditions and constraints varied over time depending upon the internal and external context of the school and/or its school district, as well as the stage of development a school had reached relative to its espoused goals. (p. 611)

Louis (2009) argues that the need for constant recalibration draws attention to the importance of “look[ing] beyond the *consequences of change* to incorporate the *experience of change*” (p. 132, italics in original). She concludes that it is the ability to “weave and bob around all of the opportunities and impediments they encount[er]” (p. 131) that distinguishes successful change agents. Should this be the case, texts that articulate six secrets of change (Fullan, 2008), seven core practices (Fullan, 2011), three keys to maximising impact (Fullan, 2014) and ‘the skinny on becoming change savvy’ (Fullan, 2010, 2013) are a poor substitute for experience. As their author, one of the more prolific writers on leading educational change, concedes, texts will increase “knowledge and insight about change but not your skills and competencies. For the latter, you need to also learn about action ideas from other practitioners, apply them in your own situation, and debrief in order to keep on learning” (Fullan, 2014, p. 4).

This points to the potential utility of narratives (Slater, 2011) that elucidate the thinking and actions of principals immersed in the “hard micro-level grind of situated and lived reality” (Gronn, 2009, p. 311) and counter “one-time pictures of the interplay” (Porter & McLaughlin, 2006, p. 574) between organizational context and leadership. Porter and McLaughlin (2006) suggest that heightened attention to the temporal dimensions of leading education change will more likely reveal how “components examined at one point in time may interact dramatically differently with leadership following changes in the context ... [a] feature of change and dynamism that is missing from most of the extant literature in this area” (p. 574, see also Eacott, 2010).

Locating leadership narratives is certainly more challenging than literature on change practices, strategies and tactics. The research record

includes some case studies which have a longitudinal dimension from the outset (see, for example, Bishop et al., 2014); others that extended research timeframes once issues of sustainability came to the fore (see Moos et al., 2011); sporadic principal auto/biographies offering career-long perspectives that include reflection on periods of change (Glickman, 2008; Pountney, 2000; Ribbins, 2005; Wah, 2012; V. S. Walker, 2009; Williams & Robinson, 2005); and unpublished theses documenting the experiences of school leaders. However, the literature is hardly replete with narratives of principals leading educational reform. The relative absence of rich, situated, and longer term accounts means that we know comparatively less about the manner in which change initiatives unfold and impact those who lead them (Leithwood, 2012a; Ribbins, 2003).

To understand how reform unfolds in the five distinctly different school contexts in this study, we first need to understand the context of Te Kotahitanga. In the next section, I outline the genesis of Te Kotahitanga, describe its fundamental tenets, trace its implementation from 2001-2013, and summarise Phase 5 outcomes.

### **The genesis of Te Kotahitanga**

Early in his secondary teaching career, Russell Bishop (Tainui, Ngāti Awa) wondered why culturally secure and seemingly well-adjusted Māori students were not achieving at the same level as their Pākeha counterparts. This nagging discontent led him, in 2001, with Mere Berryman, to collect the narratives of 70 Year 9 and 10 students in five schools, together with the perspectives of their principals, 80 teachers and 50 whānau members (Bishop et al., 2003). Approximately half of these junior students were “identified by their school as being engaged in what the school had to offer, and the other half were identified as not being engaged” (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p. 3).

The fundamental question of what it was like to be Māori in this particular school elicited both predictable and salutary responses from students, and their narratives contain powerful messages for adults who

presume to know best. Bishop and Berryman quickly discovered that students were astute commentators who accurately diagnosed the quality of their relationship with teachers, identified dominant cultural capital and curriculum bias, described differential expectations with regard to their achievement and behaviour, and distinguished the relational and pedagogical strategies necessary to engage them in learning. Many students expressed articulate and poignant insights into lived experiences of racism. They were dismayed and frustrated by the cultural dislocation experienced between home and school, at being marginalised by peers and teachers, and being silenced as participants in their educational future. While many young Māori voted with their feet, truanting on a selective and wholesale basis, others simply endured their formal years of secondary schooling, and a select few thrived. The illustrations of experience that follow come from students considered to be engaged in their schooling and most likely to be listened to by their teachers.

### **Knowing names**

The ability to recognise and address people by name constitutes the first point of intimacy in the teacher-student relationship, if not all relationships. Names evoke identity and the ability to correctly pronounce these conveys respectful acknowledgment of another person's being. Māori students feel mispronunciation as keenly as other students and, for Hinemaia, this led to her being called a different name altogether, something that she would never have condoned, had she been given a choice: "When I started at this school, I had a Māori name, but none of the teachers could say it. So now I am Tania" (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p. 80). In their narratives, students collectively urged teachers to learn how to say their names and "not shorten them unless we say so. Our names are very important. Some of us have been given them for a reason. You know, we might be named after someone famous. Like Jonah [Lomu]" (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p. 80). Inquiring into the meaning of students' names and endeavouring to pronounce these correctly signals a teacher's commitment to forming a positive relationship



and, as the following quotes demonstrate, students respond accordingly:

Ask us about our names. Find out about famous Māori names from around here. Ask Whaea Mere about our names. We might tell the teacher, or we might not, but at least they are interested in us when they ask.

... If we like them, we'll help them say it right. Some are hopeless, [laughter] especially Miss A and Mr B. Yeah, but Miss A at least tries, but Mr B doesn't even try .... He's racist, that's why. (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p. 80)

### **Cultural capital**

A number of students sensed that their cultural capital is undervalued and often ignored in the classroom. The excerpt below shows how one lamented being deprived of opportunities to share their knowledge and expertise, became particularly resentful when these opportunities were discriminatorily extended to others, and began to doubt their own worth:

We do a unit on respecting others' cultures. Some teachers who aren't Māori try to tell us what Māori do about things like a tangi. It's crap! I'm a Māori. They should ask me about Māori things. I could tell them about why we do things in a certain way. I've got the goods on this, but they never ask me. I'm a dumb Māori I suppose. Yet they asked the Asian girl about her culture. They never ask us about ours. Some of us here have been brought up by the olds [Nana, Aunty, Koro]. We know about this stuff. We can explain it better than the teacher can. They don't think we know anything. I haven't seen them peeling spuds at the marae! (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p. 76)

### **Work ethic**

When it came to work ethic and task completion, non-engaged students acknowledged their own shortcomings and expected teachers to enforce high expectations around learning:

You know there're times I wish my teacher would give me a kick up

the ass! I can do much better in some things, but they never expect any more from me, not like my primary school teacher. He'd be pissed off with me if he saw my books now because they're untidy, and not much work is finished. I've got one book, maths, that is okay 'cause the teacher expects me to do well. She knows my whānau well and would tell on me if I didn't work hard. [Student A]

.... Well, most of the teachers – they tell Pākehā kids that their work is not up to standard, and they'll need to see their parents if it doesn't improve. They don't say that to us! It's like they don't expect our whānau to get us going. [Student B]

Nah! It's not like that, they just don't think Māori have the brains to do better. [Student C] (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p. 33)

### **Behaviour expectations**

Not only do these non-engaged students perceive that they are made to feel less intelligent, they are also the prime culprits when it comes to poor behaviour inside the classroom and out:

People think Māori don't know how to behave. People think Māori are dumb. People think you're like your brother or sister, so if they were bad you will be bad; if they were good, you should always do better than you do! You can't win! (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p. 11)

Another student commented that monotony and boredom precipitated poor behaviour:

Well. It's like this. First of all, most of the teachers don't like teaching the dumb streams. They tell us they'd rather not be here. The worst teachers always teach the same way. Heaps of writing just to keep us going. I reckon they're scared of us. All the 'goodie two shoes' just sit up the front, so they don't have to come near us.... I reckon they can't control us and they can't control us because they don't prepare interesting stuff for us to do. Most of them either don't get out of their seat, or they always stand near the kids who work. Yeah, the problem is they have expected most of us to be pains since our first day in class.

So we ... oblige [raucous laughter]. (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p. 34)  
While, on one level, this reflects sophisticated knowing and a degree of power in rebellion, students crave boundaries which protect them from negative peer pressure:

If you want to do better in class but you've been mucking around up till now, then if the teacher gives you a rark up, you've got an excuse to settle down to work. You know, you can tell your friends that the teacher is on your case, so you gotta work! [lots of laughter]. (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p. 33)

### **Overt racism**

Sadly, some students feel the weight of oppression that being treated as second class citizens brings:

Some teachers are racist. They say bad things about us. We're thick. We smell. Our uniforms are paru [dirty]. They shame us in class. Put us down. Don't even try to say our names properly. Say things about our whānau. They blame us for stealing when things go missing. Just 'cause we are Māori. (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p. 11)

### **The best teachers**

While the above narratives represent the lived experiences of many young Māori teenagers, some students were fortunate to experience the kind of teacher every parent wants for their child. This made the contrast between demoralizing and uplifting experiences of schooling even more pronounced. The following narrative illustrates the relationally sensitive and culturally responsive attributes of teachers who support, inspire, and truly engage their students:

The teacher I liked best wasn't Māori, but he could have been. He knew all about our stuff. Like, he knew how to say my name. He never did dumb things like sitting on tables or patting you on the head [laughter]. He knew about fantails in a room. He knew about tangi. He never stepped over girls legs. All that sort of stuff. He never made us

sit with people we didn't want to and he never made a fuss if the girls couldn't swim or do PE. He expected us to work and behave well. He could take a joke, and he could joke us. He had the best April Fool's day tricks ever. What did he do? I'm not telling because I want to use it some time. He always came and saw our whānau at home, more than once during the year. He invited the whānau into our room anytime. We went on picnics and class trips, and the whānau came along. We always planned our lessons together. He was choice.  
(Bishop & Berryman, 2006, pp. 9-10)

### **Teachers and discourses of blame**

Bruner (1996) argues that teaching is inevitably based on a set of intuitive and omnipresent theories or 'folk beliefs' about learners' minds. While these folk pedagogies have the capacity both to enhance and counter learning, analysis of teacher narratives reveals that they rarely advantaged Māori students. Despite their best intentions, many teachers struggled to demonstrate culturally responsive relationships and pedagogy. Worse still, the majority positioned themselves within a deficit discourse, blaming students and their families (i.e. the home) for non-attendance, non-engagement and non-achievement, thus negating any efficacy on their part to positively enhance student educational outcomes. This led Bishop and Berryman to conclude that:

Deficit theorizing by teachers is the major impediment to Māori students' achievement for it results in teachers having low expectations of Māori students and reduced feelings of agency which in turn creates a downward spiraling, self-fulfilling prophecy of Māori student achievement and failure. (Bishop et al., 2003, p. 206)

This finding illuminates earlier analysis of 272 school policy documents on barriers to achievement (Education Review Office, 1995) because it suggests that teachers rather than principals were more inclined to identify underachieving students and their families as barriers to learning. Alton-Lee's (2003) best evidence synthesis found that teacher expectations varied

according to ethnicity, disability, gender, and other student characteristics unrelated to the student's actual capability. In the case of Māori students, consistently lower teacher expectations commonly materialised in the form of less frequent positive feedback/feed forward and inappropriate assessments.

Successful pedagogical innovation consequently has to “compete with, replace, or otherwise modify the folk theories that already guide both teachers and pupils” (Bruner, 1996, p. 45). Hattie (1999) suggests that this is a formidable task because not only do teachers have models of learning that are rarely externally elaborated or asked for, but they “seek evidence to buttress their models of learning and thus rarely seek to refute them or introduce major changes” (p. 2). Formidable this may be, but it is critical to improving educational outcomes for all students. Hattie's (2003) study of 357 meta-analyses indicates that teachers account for about 30% of the variance in educational achievement and that this is the one source of variance that can be enhanced with the greatest potential of success. Hattie (2003) concludes:

That which makes the difference is clear – it is the person who gently closes the classroom door and performs the teaching act, the person who interprets or ignores the many policies, and the person who is alone with students during their 15,000 hours of schooling. (p. 10)

### **Te Kotahitanga**

Drawing on the voice of young Māori, Bishop and Berryman developed the kaupapa Māori research and professional development model that is Te Kotahitanga. Developed iteratively through five phases and funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Education from 2001-2013, Te Kotahitanga provides teachers with a vicarious means of understanding how hegemonic discourses impact daily on the lives of Māori students in classrooms, the dissonance necessary for teachers to confront and re-examine their folk pedagogies, and opportunities in which to collaborate and co-construct new understandings.

Te Kotahitanga commences with a hui whakarewa, a three day immersion experience during which researchers establish whakawhānaungatanga (a family of relations) with participants in authentic indigenous settings and introduce them to research kaupapa (protocols). As the narratives of student experience unfold, teachers are challenged to locate themselves within three discourses of responsibility (home, school systems, teacher) and to fundamentally reject deficit theorising. Integral to the development of the culturally responsive pedagogy identified by students is the Effective Teaching Profile (Bishop, 2010; Bishop et al., 2003) based on the principles of manaakitanga (caring for students), mana motuhake (caring for performance), whakapiringatanga (classroom management), wānanga (effective teaching interactions), ako (strategies that support learning and teaching) and kōtahitanga (using student achievement data). This is more than just good teaching; it is a pedagogy of mutuality that underpins the establishment of learning communities and the shift from a didactic mode of instruction to a discursive one. While teachers must be knowledgeable about and implement optimal teaching methods, these strategies will not, in themselves, facilitate change. It is critical that teachers also hold high expectations of all learners, believe that effort rather than intelligence or family circumstance determines learning, and exercise agency in bringing about positive change.

Within the classroom setting, teachers are supported to develop a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations through shadow coaching and co-construction. The former involves a Te Kotahitanga trained facilitator observing classroom practice and recording interactions, the latter the analysis of evidence and identification of next practice steps. Teachers are deemed effective when they demonstrate on a daily basis “culturally responsive and reciprocal approaches to pedagogy” that meet “Māori people’s cultural aspirations for self-determination within nondominating relations of interdependence” (Bishop & Berryman, 2009, p. 32). Importantly, this requires the establishment of collaborative partnerships between teachers, students and whānau, in which power is shared and

students are active participants rather than passive recipients. In reflecting upon closely monitored student learning outcomes and modifying their instructional practice accordingly, effective teachers “share this knowledge with the students so that they can reflect on and contribute to their own learning” (Bishop & Berryman, 2009, p. 32).

While Te Kotahitanga initially focused on classroom interventions with volunteer teacher cohorts and junior (Year 9 and 10) students, differential outcomes and the progression of students to senior levels saw the introduction of a school wide approach. During Phase 3, Bishop, O’Sullivan and Berryman (Bishop, 2008; Bishop & O’Sullivan, 2005 ; Bishop et al., 2010) turned their attention to the elements necessary for schools to institutionalise and scale educational reform. The mnemonic GPILSEO, referred to earlier in this chapter, encapsulates the seven elements that they argue are essential for sustaining Te Kotahitanga and, indeed, any educational intervention, from the outset: a relentless *goal* focus on reducing disparities in achievement; *pedagogy* that transforms classroom practice; *institutions* structures and systems that support classroom initiatives; proactive, instructional and distributed *leadership*; teacher, parent, community and external collaborations that enable reform to *spread*; the use of formative and summative *evidence* to monitor progress, and the collective *ownership* necessary to protect, imbed and sustain reform.

Successfully implemented, Bishop (2008) argues that GPILSEO secures a culture shift whereby “teacher learning is central to the school and systems, and structures and institutions are developed to support teacher learning, in this way addressing both culturalist and structuralist concerns at the school level from a relational position” (p. 57).

### **Phase 5: 2010-2013**

The fifth phase involving 16 schools began in 2010 and concluded in 2013. Phase 5 schools had a Māori student population in excess of 200 students or 20% of the school roll, and a mean decile of 3.0. During the period 2010-

2012, some 11, 608 Māori students (9.4% of Māori secondary students) attended Phase 5 schools.

Data for 2010–12 reveals significant improvement in achievement, retention, and engagement. The academic attainment of year 11–13 Māori students in Phase 5 schools (as measured by NCEA results) increased by three times that of Māori in comparison schools. Of the 2011 year 12 cohort, two-thirds returned for their final year of formal schooling and there was a 10.6% increase in the number of students who were at least 17 years of age at the time leaving (twice that for Māori nationally). Rongohia te Hau survey measures reflected enhanced student belonging and wellbeing, with 87% of year 9 and 10 Māori students reporting that it “always” or “mostly” felt good to be Māori in their school, and more than 60% expressing confidence in their teachers’ abilities to help them learn (Alton-Lee, 2014).

### **Impact**

Te Kotahitanga is nationally (Education Review Office, 2010; Meyer et al., 2010; V. M. J. Robinson et al., 2009; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007) and internationally (Boyle, 2013; Ladwig, 2010, November; World Innovation Summit in Education, 2013) recognised as one of the few educational reforms to significantly reduce disparities in student achievement. Phase 5 results reflect improvement of a magnitude unprecedented in New Zealand educational history and rare in large scale education reforms (Alton-Lee, 2014; Hattie, 2009). When we consider that by 2012, just over a quarter (27.2%) of all mainstream Māori secondary students were in schools that were or had been involved in Te Kotahitanga, the programme’s reach is extensive and of “particular significance for New Zealand secondary schooling” (Alton-Lee, 2014, p. 16).

### **Implementation challenges**

Securing change of this magnitude is no easy task and Bishop (2012) identifies uneven implementation as one of three key impediments. If hard



won improvements are to be sustained rather than eroded, they need to be woven into the school's relational, pedagogical and organisational fabric. Coburn (2003) thus argues that a reform's progression from initiation to implementation to institutionalisation (Fullan, 2001b; M. Wallace & Pocklington, 2013) involves a fundamental shift in ownership from "externally understood and supported theory to an internally understood and supported theory-based practice" (Stokes et al., as cited in Coburn, 2003, p. 7).

By virtue of their position, principals bear ultimate responsibility for building and managing the school environment in which educational reform is implemented and institutionalised. While research suggests that leadership effects on student learning are indirect (V. M. J. Robinson et al., 2009), principals use a combination of power and authority to instigate change, to attract others to the cause, and to align school structures and systems accordingly. The endorsement of the principal is mandatory in the Te Kotahitanga application process, but of even greater import is their ongoing commitment to leading their schools in ways that preserves the reform's integrity and secures its full potential.

What this means, on a daily basis, is the focus of this thesis. How do principals navigate unique school contexts in order to initiate, implement and institutionalise Te Kotahitanga? How have personal and professional life experiences shaped their approach to leading change? In what ways is their leadership thinking and practice enabled, constrained, or otherwise shaped by the contexts in which they lead? If, as this thesis will argue, context counts, how does it count?

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the emergence, evolution and critique of change concepts, models and practices, in business and education settings. Specific to education, empirical and theoretical research reveals both strengths and limitations in instructional, transformational and integrated leadership constructs. While this research usefully identifies a range of successful

leadership practices, it struggles to illuminate combinations and sequences that secure desired reform in different school settings, and nor does it shed much light on the manner in which individual principals mediate contextual conditions and constraints over time. Context, itself, is a contested phenomenon, with the leader exogenous to context in atomistic conceptualisations and endogenous in interpretivist and relational ones.

The manner in which different ontological and epistemological conceptualisations shape our understanding of human experience in general and the design of this research study in particular forms the focus of the next chapter.



## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The function of research is not necessarily to map and conquer the world but to sophisticate the beholding of it (Stake, 1995, p. 43).

### **Introduction and overview**

To know, to do, to live together and to be are considered pillars of an educated life (Delors et al., 1996). The primacy of knowing and knowledge alerts us to the innate and insatiable human desire to understand the world in which we live, to explain the phenomena we experience, to reconcile divergent perspectives, and to seek answers to questions that perplex us. Any attempt to 'capture and name' the room two inches behind the eyes, to render the abstract concrete and thus write inner worlds into existence rests on fundamental assumptions about the nature of human knowledge. What constitutes knowledge? How do we know what we come to know and to what extent can we ever truly know?

This chapter identifies the ontological, epistemological and methodological positions adopted in this study. Well-traversed in the literature (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, 2007; Burr, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998; Denzin, 1989; Denzin & Giardina, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Goodson & Gill, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 2005), the nature and evolution of these theoretical underpinnings makes lengthy exegesis of ensuing paradigmatic contestation unnecessary. More germane to this study is the selection and justification of a research design compatible with the purposes of this qualitative research; identification and evaluation of the methods used to collect, analyse and represent data; determination of appropriate quality criteria; and careful consideration of the manner in which reflexivity and relationships with participants shape this inquiry.

### **Ontological and epistemological considerations**

Ontology focuses on the nature of social reality, including concepts of existence or being, reality and truth. At one extreme is the realist ontological position that a single, ordered, and universal reality exists

external to and independent of social agents. At the other is the relativist ontological position that social agents individually and idiosyncratically construct reality through intersubjective engagement in their world. These positions not only frame the relationship between reality and researcher but the manner in which reality can be captured or known. The former perceives reality as an entity open to objective scientific measurement, prediction, and control, whereas the latter's emphasis on individual consciousness, and the inability to separate ourselves from what we know, means that realities can only ever be interpreted.

Interpretation and, more specifically, what counts as correct interpretation, forms the central focus of hermeneutics. Initially concerned with the interpretation of religious scriptures, contemporary hermeneutics includes all forms of human expression. From an ontological perspective, this implies a pluralist position that countenances multiple 'true' interpretations of the same phenomenon. Drawing on Heideggerian and Gadamerian hermeneutics, Guignon (2002) contends that humans are knowing subjects who possess a vague, average and unfolding understanding of being that incorporates the past, present and future. Following Heidegger, he explains that our "*thrownness, or situatedness, in the world*" (p. 267, italics in original) means that human existence has both passive and active components:

We always find ourselves "already" bound up with a context of culturally and historically constituted possibilities of understanding that determine our possible choices and ways of understanding things. At the same time, as a projection into those possibilities, we are always articulating the background of intelligibility into a configuration of meaning that is our own. (p. 269)

In other words, interpretation inevitably begins with, and is coloured by, what we already know (our preunderstanding) but this does not prevent an openness to new perspectives shifting our frames of reference.

Truth thus becomes a mutable rather than immutable phenomenon that takes on multiple forms. Indeed, Gadamer (2004) adopts the position

that “there is something absurd about the whole idea of a unique, correct interpretation” (p. 118). In concurrence, this study adopts the nominalist view that while reality may transcend the boundaries of human existence, people engage with and make sense of this reality in diverse ways.

Acceptance of the proposition that knowledge is uniquely personal, subjective and acquired through interaction with others is commensurate with a social constructivist epistemology (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Vygotsky, 1978). Social constructivism is the view that “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42; see also Eisner, 2002; K. J. Gergen, 1999). Integral to sense making processes in the social context are societal conventions, history, and interaction with significant others.

Social constructivism recognises that conversation is a basic mode of human interaction (Kvale, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). From a hermeneutic perspective, people are viewed as conversational beings for whom language is a reality (Geertz, 1973). “Conversation is not just one of our many activities in the world. On the contrary, we constitute both ourselves and our worlds in conversational activity” (Shotter, 1993, p. iv). Epistemologically, then, knowledge can be socially constructed through conversation (Bakhtin, 1981; Gadamer, 2004; Kvale, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Schwandt, 1994; Silverman, 2003; Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2009). Indeed, Kvale (1996) argues that “the certainty of our knowledge is a matter of conversation between persons, rather than a matter of interaction with a non-human reality” (p. 37). When this conversation takes place between researcher and participant, a double hermeneutic is at work because researchers are endeavouring to interpret and operate in an already interpreted world (Giddens, 1982; Habermas, 1984).

### **Theoretical framework**

Research that seeks to explore experiences of leadership, within a particular

intervention and through the eyes of participants, sits naturally within a naturalist interpretive paradigm. The interpretivist approach looks for “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). It is sensitive to the idiosyncrasies of individuals and the social context in which data is generated. The focus of this type of qualitative research is on providing rich, ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) that both invites and reveals “insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (Merriam, 1998, p. 10). It seeks to explain, define, clarify, elucidate, and illuminate individual cases in order to re-view current understandings and open up new theoretical perspectives on what is known.

### **Case study methodology**

Case study methodology aligns well with an interpretive theoretical framework (Bassegy, 1999; Creswell, 2007; Kemmis, 1980; Macdonald & Walker, 1977; Stake, 1978, 1995, 2003, 2006; Stenhouse, 1985; Sturman, 1994; Verschuren, 2003; Yin, 1994, 2009). Case studies “investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 181). They recognise that context is a powerful determinant of experience and that the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

There are several different ways of categorising case studies, some discrete and others overlapping. Stenhouse (1985), for example, identifies four broad styles of case study: ethnographic, evaluative, educational, and action research. Conducted in single or multiple sites, educational case studies are “concerned neither with social theory nor with evaluative judgment, but rather with the understanding of educational action” (Stenhouse, 1985, p. 50). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest that this emerges from historical organisational case studies that trace an organisation’s development over time; observational case studies that focus on activities and specific groups within the school setting; life history case

studies that gather individual career narratives or home in on particular periods and dimensions within this; situational case analyses that focus on a specific event, and microethnographies.

The sustained immersion of researchers in specific school sites suggests ethnographic approaches and a consequent blurring of Stenhouse's (1985) categories. These overlaps are further compounded by Stake's (1995) distinction between intrinsic and instrumental case studies. While the former investigate a unique situation, the latter research one or more particular situations in order to try to understand an outside concern or issue. Complicating matters further, Stake concedes that cases can be both intrinsic and instrumental in nature, and the overarching purpose difficult to discern. This adds further weight to his contention that issues:

Are not simple and clean, but intricately wired to political, social, historical and especially personal contexts.... Issues draw us toward observing, even teasing out, the problems of the case, the conflictual outpourings, the complex backgrounds of human concern. Issues help us expand upon the moment, help us see the instance in a more historical light, help us recognise the pervasive problems in human interaction. (1995, p. 17)

This makes a concern for the particular rather than the general “the real business of case study research” (Stake, 1995, p. 8).

The case studies in this thesis are descriptive narrative accounts that seek to gather and make sense of each principal's lived experience of leading change (educational, life history, intrinsic). Their goal is to provide fulsome description of the specificity, complexity, and layering of particular circumstance in ways that inform, support and challenge existing interpretations of human experience. It is important to note that the 'leading as context' diagram (see Figure 6, p. 312) derives from a hermeneutic reading of all five cases rather than instrumental application of this model to each successive case. The major focus is thus on uniqueness rather than grand meta-narrative and there is no attempt to generalise findings from one case to the next.



### **The thorny issue of theorising from case study**

Qualitative research is often criticised for its lack of theoretical ambition and its inability to generate understandings that are scientifically explicit, universal, abstract, discrete, systematic, complete and predictive (Denzin & Giardina, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 2005). Drawing on the work of Dreyfus (1986) and Bourdieu (1977), Flyvbjerg (2001) makes the salient point that the attempt to study society in natural scientific terms gives rise to a fundamental paradox in that “a theory which makes possible explanation and prediction, requires that the concrete context of everyday human activity be excluded, but this very exclusion of context makes explanation and prediction impossible” (p. 41).

This does not prevent case study researchers making suppositions within the confines of a case, and across cases. Yin (1994, 2009), for example, conceives of the overarching understandings gleaned from collective instrumental case studies as analytical generalizations. These tentative propositions or “*petite generalizations*” (Stake, 1995, p. 7, italics in original) form the basis for theory building, a gradual process novelly contained in Walton’s (1992) nautical metaphor:

Cases come wrapped in theories. They are cases because they embody causal processes operating in microcosm. At bottom, the logic of the case study is to demonstrate ... how general social forces take shape and produce results in specific settings. That demonstration, in turn, is intended to provide at least one anchor that steadies the ship of generalization until more anchors can be fixed for general boarding. To be sure, researchers are careful about this work. We do not want to anchor the wrong ship or have our feeble lines snapped by too heavy a cargo. Better that the case study makes modest claims about what might be on the line. (p. 122)

Given the methodological debates raging at the time, it is not surprising that case study researchers were at pains to contest charges of meaningless relativism and pose credible alternatives to positivist approaches.

The small scale, qualitative case study research that forms the basis for

this study does not presume to suggest generalizations that might be applied from one data set to another. The experiences reflected upon and knowledge gained must therefore be “approached as ‘partial’ in all senses: neither complete, fixed, disinterested, universal, nor neutral but instead situated, local, interested, material and historical” (Horner, 2004, p. 14).

## **Plan of inquiry**

### **Research questions**

In seeking to understand how principals experience their leadership during particular periods of intentional educational change (the overarching research question), this study posed three subsidiary questions:

- What personal and professional life experiences shape a principal’s approach to change?
- In what ways do people and structures enable and constrain the implementation of educational reform?
- What is the nature and significance of the relationship between context and principals’ leadership thinking and practice over time?

### **Research design**

Although pre-existing professional experience as a deputy principal and knowledge of the leadership theories I teach are undeniable and necessary in positioning this research study, I was genuinely interested in participant experiences of leading change, curious to hear their stories, and keen to avoid the intellectual straightjacketing that a rigidly preconceived theoretical lens would have imposed. In other words, to somehow walk the tightrope between over-theorisation and under-theorisation (Bold, 2012; Silverman, 2014). Josselson and Lieblich (2003) articulate this dilemma well when they describe the need to:

hold the tension between personal and theoretical knowledge, to straddle the line between a necessary openness to phenomena that are as-yet-unknown and theoretical sophistication that, loosely held, but

firmly integrated intellectually, stands in the wings to illuminate the interviewee's words, readings of the texts, and understandings of the narrative that will emerge. (p. 263)

While this study's findings can be usefully understood using Bourdieu's concepts of agency, structure, practice and field, this was not a Bourdieusian study in design. While the exercise of power in micropolitical activity aligns with Foucault's concepts of power, this was not Foucauldian in design. And, while the pretence of an innocent approach to research conversations is exactly that, I wanted to limit the potential for a formalist approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) whereby predetermined theoretical positions funnel and channel participant views. Genuine interest in participants' stories over mine, and a desire to explore and discover meant that I deliberately avoided deep engagement with literature during the early stages of this study and endeavoured to tune out other theoretical voices.

Consistent with educational case studies, this research adopted an emergent research design (Morgan, 2008; Rubin & Rubin, 2005) that recognised the power of research conversations to elicit new learning for researcher and participants, and enabled both parties to probe the nuances and complexities of leadership experience in an increasingly sophisticated manner as the research progressed. The circularity of data collection and analysis processes meant that "research procedures and questions [could] be adjusted in an iterative fashion in response to what [was] being learned in the field" (Morgan, 2008, p. 246). This aspect of emergent design takes on even greater significance when research has a longitudinal dimension, as this study did.

### **Research participants**

Case studies are bounded in terms of time, place, events and processes, factors that indicate the breadth and depth of study within predetermined parameters (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995). As outlined in previous chapters, the educational reform context for this study is Phase 5 Te Kotahitanga. This meant a potential participant pool, or sample universe (O. Robinson,

2014), of 15 principals.

In qualitative research, sample size is often determined at a saturation point where additional data ceases to add new insight. Josselson and Lieblich (2003) caution, however, that because each participant brings something unique to narrative study, real saturation never occurs. Saturation point will more likely be reached, they suggest, when the researcher feels they have learned “more than they will ever be able to contain and communicate” (p. 267).

This raises important practical considerations which, together with the epistemological stance adopted in this study, determined sample size. Anticipating that commitment to a three year longitudinal study would mean more intense research relationships and voluminous data generation, I decided at the outset, in conjunction with my chief supervisor, to limit the number of participants to five. The decision to employ a purposive illustrative sampling technique (Mason, 2002) arose primarily through a desire not to overburden principals involved in other Te Kotahitanga research endeavours. I subsequently invited six principals to join this study (see Appendix One, p. 387). Peter, Olivia, Keita, Jim and Ross graciously agreed to do so.

While locating a representative, as opposed to illustrative, sample is not a major consideration in qualitative research of this nature, participants brought diverse principal experience to this study. Keita was a novice first time principal, and Ross an experienced and long serving one. Olivia was in her second principalship, Peter his third, and Jim his fourth. Serendipitously, three participants had prior experience of leading Te Kotahitanga, Keita as a facilitator, and Peter and Olivia as principals.

### **Access, ethics and informed consent**

One of the tensions inherent in this research is that between the rich contextual data that gives life to the study but exposes participants in the process, and the superficial empirical data that protects participant identity but strips the research of the very context that it seeks to explore. At the

time the ethics application was approved, 49 secondary schools (approximately 15% of New Zealand secondary schools) had been, or were currently involved in Te Kotahitanga. The unique nature of personal/professional and school contexts (the research focus), together with the small national, regional and local professional networks in which principals lead (Tolich, 2001) makes it highly likely that some New Zealand readers will be able to recognise participants. Anonymity was impossible and confidentiality could not be guaranteed.

While much of principals' thinking about leadership and context may already be in the public domain, this research enables colleagues, members of the community, and external bodies such as the Ministry of Education, Education Review Office, and news media to gain access to hitherto private thoughts. It was therefore important that the ethics application and preliminary material alerted participants to the potential for greater levels of public exposure and to the likelihood that the use of pseudonyms for personal, geographic and other identifiers would not prevent their ultimate disclosure.

Cognisant of this, participants nonetheless elected to use their Christian names. Concern focused more on the vulnerability of reform during early implementation stages and the potential for their views to both reinforce and undermine this process. Decisions around the use of pseudonyms were revisited towards the end of the study to ensure ongoing fidelity to the moral and ethical commitments underpinning respectful research relationships. Consistent with the University of Waikato's Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations (2008), participants had the right to withdraw information provided during the course of this research, and from the study itself. Documentation pertinent to access, ethics and informed consent is located in appendices Two (Information sheet) and Three (Participant consent form) of this study.

### **Immersion in the field**

One of the distinctive features of this study is sustained immersion in the

field that allowed continuing conversations with participants, commencing at the beginning of 2010 with the introduction of Te Kotahitanga reform in their schools and concluding just prior to the cessation of formal funding. There were two distinct phases to this research: establishing context (2010), and evolving contexts (2011-2012).

*Phase 1 Interviews: Establishing context 2010*

Of priority during initial interviews with participants was the establishment of rapport and respectful researcher-participant relationships. Conversation commenced with an open-ended narrative focus on each participant's personal and career biography, followed by semi-structured inquiry into each principal's perception of their current leadership context, their rationale for instigating or supporting school involvement in Te Kotahitanga, and the early stages of reform implementation. During this period, I met with principals once, at a time and location of their choosing, and communicated via email during the interim.

*Phase 2 Interviews: Evolving contexts 2011-2012*

Subsequent interviews during the following 24 months focused on the impact of Te Kotahitanga on each principal's leadership context, thinking and practice, from retrospective, real time and anticipated future perspectives. Participants shared with me practice anecdotes, documentary evidence, and their impressions of the factors enabling and constraining their change leadership. Their unfolding stories meant that schedules for second phase interviews emerged from the first and preceding second phase interviews. The final research interview afforded an opportunity to reflect on the written case narrative and to add an epilogue.

**Data collection methods: Interviews, documentary and visual data**

Case study methodology does not privilege one data collection method over another (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In this research study, data collection methods were selected for their ability to support an iterative process

focusing on the construction of a leader's way of being and meaning, through experience and in context. Because human interaction and knowledge production are interdependent, conversation is critical to this research endeavour. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggest that the research interview is a professional conversation which focuses on the conversations of daily life: "it is an inter-view, where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and interviewee. An interview is literally an inter view, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest" (p. 2). Interview knowledge is thus constructed, relational, conversational, linguistic, narrative and pragmatic.

It is the interview that enables principals to engage in dialogue between internal and external voices and to author themselves (Bakhtin, 1981). This made interviews the preferred research method. In this study, interviews took the form of biographical narrative (C. Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Chamberlayne, Bornat, & Apitzsch, 2004; Chamberlayne, Bornat, & Wengraf, 2000; Riemann, 2006; Wengraf, 2001; Wengraf, Chamberlayne, & Bornat, 2002) and semi-structured (Kvale, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) conversations.

In addition to interviews, I collected documents and took photos of artefacts relevant to our conversations. Reinharz (1992) notes that these possess a naturalistic quality because they are not produced for the purposes of research, nor are they affected by the process of being studied. Consequently, they help to establish consistency between what people say (espoused theory) and do (theory in action) (Argyris & Schon, 1978). Halverson (2004) adds that artefacts provide evidence of the manner in which principals "manage the complexities of particulars in order to implement innovative practices" (p. 91). Given the focus of this research on principals' experiences and perceptions, documents and artefacts played a minor supporting role. Of central importance were the multiple conversations during interview encounters.

## **Biographical narrative interviews**

Narrative ways of knowing are well canvassed in the literature (Bruner, 1986, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988; Reissman, 1993, 2008). In *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Bruner (1986) argues that narrative modes of knowing function as a central form of human thinking. Put more simply, humans are narrative beings, or *homo narrans*, for whom story is “a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375). Not only are we informed by story, we are formed by story. This makes the “storied descriptions people give about the meaning they attribute to life events ... the best evidence available to researchers about the realm of people’s experience” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 479).

Narratives of lived experience have the potential to elicit personal and practical insights that illuminate tacit knowledge and organisational life (McMullen & Braithwaite, 2013), and help bridge the disconnect between generalist research in the field and the dynamic situated problems of the field (Fullan, 2001a; Polkinghorne, 1988). They “open up a multitude of human truths that are, albeit messy, far richer and more informative in both their complexity and simplicity” (Lewis, 2010, p. 1).

Narratives are variously defined in the literature and there is considerable debate over the terminology used to distinguish narrative from story (Reissman, 2008). This thesis adopts a minimalist definition of narrative as a sequence of connected events and the telling of those events (Alleyne, 2015; Grbich, 2007; Shenhav, 2015). According to Ospina and Dodge (2005), narratives possess five key characteristics:

- They are accounts of characters and selective events occurring over time, with a beginning, a middle, and an end.
- They are retrospective interpretations of sequential events from a certain point of view.
- They focus on human intention and action – those of the narrator and others



- They are part of the process of constructing identity (the self in relation to others).
- They are co-authored by narrator and audience. (p. 145)

Biographic narrative or life story (Atkinson, 2007) interviews are one means of eliciting these stories. Keen to develop rapport and to limit researcher imposition at the outset, I began the first interview by inviting participants to share with me aspects of their career biography. Posing a single question aimed at inducing narrative (SQUIN), such as, “Tell me about your teaching career,” derives from Wengraf’s (2001, 2008) Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM), an interview methodology that places the locus of control with participants. In choosing where to begin their stories, Peter, Olivia, Keita and Ross drew on formative early life events while Jim confined initial reflections to his professional experience. The open nature of this conversation meant participants reflected on matters of significance to them and were not constrained by predetermined questions. Having established some sense of what brought them to this particular place in time and, in the process, expanded personal and professional connections, conversation turned to the school’s involvement in Te Kotahitanga. At this point, I relinquished a non-directive appreciative listener role and employed semi-structured interview techniques.

### **Semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews enable exploration of predetermined issues in a manner that best elicits information about respondents’ attitudes, feelings, beliefs and behaviour (Bouma, 2000; Moore, 2000). They afford participants the opportunity to reflect at length, in their own words and preferred order, on aspects of the research that interest them most. This increases the likelihood that participant perspectives unfold as they see them, not as the researcher sees them (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Various referred to as ‘semi-structured’ (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Freebody, 2003; Kvale, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), ‘in-depth’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990)

and ‘focused’ (J. Bell, 1999), these interviews simultaneously offer participants a chance to shape the content of conversation and interviewers considerable latitude in pursuing a range of topics.

In the hands of skilful interviewers, a preponderance of open-ended questions and flexibility in the questioning process enable interviews to remain relatively conversational and situational. They provide a vehicle to probe responses and investigate motives, without jeopardizing rapport. Respondents are encouraged to seek clarification, to elaborate and to explain subtleties and complexities. In addition, these interviews provide a range of supplementary information (spontaneous reactions, kinesics, paralinguistics) that illuminates data analysis (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1981).

This makes semi-structured interviews superior to other qualitative methods in yielding ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973), rich data that will “more clearly reveal the existing opinions of the interviewee in the context of a real-world view than will a traditional interview where the interviewer’s role is confined to that of question-maker and recorder” (Tripp, as cited in Bishop, 1997, p. 33).

### **“Have I got a story for you!”**

Interviewing appears beguiling in its simplicity – to understand how people understand their world and life, you only need ask (Powney & Watts, 1987). While the questions might appear straightforward, ‘answers’ will likely be partial and complex re-presentations of lives that reshape the past, frame the present, and project imaginatively into the future (Byrne, 2004; Charmaz & Bryant, 2011; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). There are a number of reasons for this (Polkinghorne, 2007). Firstly, disjunction between experienced meaning and storied description of that meaning arises because language cannot fully capture the complexity and depth of human experience (Spence, 1982). Ghiselin (as cited in Claxton, 2002) suggests that while “inexplicable moments of sudden illumination and insight” do occur, more often “there is a softer, slower kind of groping for a way of

articulating something that is currently, tantalizingly, beyond our linguistic grasp” (p. 352).

Secondly, memory is a select rather than exact reflection of lived experience. Randall and Phoenix (2009) contend that, “at best, memories are trimmed-down, summed-up, backward-looking *facsimiles* of actual events” (p. 128, italics in original). Often sketchy, these narrative renderings bear limited resemblance to original occurrence, making narrative truth “a dynamic amalgam of fact and fictionalisation – a matter of *faction*, if you will” (Randall & Phoenix, 2009, p. 128, italics in original).

Thirdly, reflection fails to notice layers of meaning that lie outside current frames of reference. As stated earlier in this chapter, narrative truths are embedded in a temporal and situated lifeworld. Our thrownness means that “any event of truth, as a dis-closing or un-concealing, is at the same time a concealing” (Guignon, 2002, p. 272). This implies a commitment to what Bakhtin (1986) terms unfinalizability: “There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and boundless future)” (p. 170). Consequently, the meaning we ascribe to lived experience is never absolute or final, and always open to review.

Fourthly, in choosing what to relate and how to present this, respondents “claim identities of different forms at different textual levels in permanent interaction with their interlocutors” (Bernhard, 2015, pp. 356-357). As such, all interviews are performances, whether stories spontaneously spring forth or are strategically calculated and enacted. Even the most honest of respondents will draw on “oases of vivid memories within a desert of uncertainty” (Weiss, 1994, p. 148) and filter those they don’t want made accessible. This does not mean that truth is deliberately obscured and nor do the majority of people intentionally fabricate events, a deception that proves difficult to sustain when circuitous and successive interviews loop back over previous topics (Masip, Blandón-Gitlin, Martínez, Herrero, & Ibabe, 2016).

Finally, the very presence of the researcher and the subjectivities they

bring to the research conversation means that the stories of participants' lived experiences become entangled with those of the interviewer (Goodson & Gill, 2011). Interviews are thus active "interactional accomplishments rather than neutral communicative grounds" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2011, p. 150) and the resulting narratives both re-construction and co-construction.

### **Being a 'story-listener'**

Because narrative inquiry is a "voyage of discovery – a discovery of meanings that both constitute the individual participant and are co-constructed in the research process – researchers cannot know at the outset what they will find" (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003, p. 260). I found this lack of surety cause for both excitement and anxiety. While preunderstandings and prejudices made educated guesses possible, the prospect of learning something new required openness to the novel and unpredictable. This meant speaking as little as possible, something that required conscious effort, and quietening internal analytical voices in order to truly listen (Shenhav, 2015).

Resisting the temptation to intervene meant, on occasion, missed opportunities to probe and clarify and, even when mental notes were documented during or immediately following, returning to these topics in subsequent conversations was not always appropriate. The upside was that for the most part interviews took the path that participants wanted them to take. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest that interview quality can often be determined by a cursory perusal of transcripts: "If the parts labelled "subject" are long and those designating the interviewer are short, you are usually looking at good, rich interview material" (p. 108).

In this study, participants' willingness to talk at length in an articulate and topical manner meant relatively minimal intrusion on my part. Peter's first interview transcript shows, for example, that within the first hour Peter spoke 9,984 (95.5%) of the 10,458 words. My contribution was limited to the opening, "Tell me about your career as an educator", short questions emanating from Peter's story, and interactions that communicated interest and engagement. Questions elicited new information (e.g. "What language

did you speak at home?”), confirmation (e.g. “AERA, the American research association?”), illustration (e.g. “Such as?”, “What was it that offended you as a young person?”), clarification (e.g. “Why did you say, ‘As you would?’”), and elaboration (“Could we just talk about that a little?”). A number of spontaneous utterances signalled attentiveness (“Right”, “yeah”, “uhuh”), agreement (“Absolutely”), encouragement (“Its fine. Keep going”), rapport and empathy (“Wow”, “Comes as quite a shock doesn’t it?”).

The second interview transcript shows that within the first hour Peter spoke 10,194 (94%) of 10,853 words. In addition to the opening (“Where would you like to start?”), questions immediately arising and relational interactions, the second interview provided opportunities to revisit issues raised in the first (“So tell me about that, because you were concerned about the perception of the APs”, “I remember you telling me that last time, how you wouldn’t be rushed into a decision by people who had their own agendas”) and pursue new avenues (“I’m wondering about the management/governance divide”).

A similar pattern is evident in the third transcript, with reflection on the case narrative drafted between the second and third interviews an additional component. In addition to the deliberate ‘story-listening’ dominating the first two research conversations, participant views on my narrative reconstruction of their personal stories helped ensure fidelity to the original and opened up new thinking. While the former strategy served to minimise researcher imposition during initial stages, the latter provided confirmation that my interpretation of their lived experience largely mirrored that of participants.

### **Insider or outsider?**

Greene (2014) suggests that “the stories we are told, how they are relayed to us, and the narratives that we form and share with others are inevitably influenced by our position ... as a researcher in relation to our participants” (p. 1). Furthermore, she observes that while most researchers acknowledge theoretical and cultural preferences and biases, they “rarely address their

position in their research” (p. 1). Positionality refers to socialization and the intellectual and cultural closeness or distance of the researcher to the community being researched (Banks, 1998). Traditionally, researchers have been positioned either as subjective insiders socialized within the community they seek to investigate, or detached outsiders who bring a degree of objectivity not possible from within. The relationship between group affiliation and knowledge construction thus raises the thorny issue of truth claims and who can speak for whom. For, as Banks (1998) points out, “the cultural communities in which individuals are socialized are also epistemological communities that have shared beliefs, perspectives and knowledge” (p. 5).

Like others before her (Adler, 2004; Banks, 1998; Merton, 1972; Naples, 1996), Chavez (2008) posits that the insider/outsider dichotomy is a false one and that positionality is better represented as fluid points on a continuum, rather than fixed polar opposites. This leads her to distinguish between total and partial insiders. Whereas total insiders share multiple identities and profound experiences with the community they are studying, partial insiders share a single or few identities and “a degree of distance or detachment from the community” (Chavez, 2008, p. 475).

In this research, I position myself as a partial insider. As a university lecturer, member of the teaching profession, and former deputy principal of a large urban secondary school, I bring substantial professional experience and theoretical knowledge to this research. I am familiar with prevailing discourses, the acronym laden lexicon of education, legislative and external accountabilities, the legal and moral implications of privileged and sensitive information, the intense workload and tyranny of the urgent, and the burden of ultimate responsibility that sets the principal apart from senior colleagues, staff and BOT.

Chavez (2008) suggests that this ‘insider-ness’ is advantageous in understanding the “cognitive, emotional, and/or psychological precepts of participants as well as ... the historical and practical happenings of the field” (p. 481). It enables expedient access, establishment of a level footing

between researcher and participant, the building of rapid rapport, and arguably more nuanced interpretation. From my perspective, recent practitioner experience as a deputy principal accorded me immediate legitimacy, with participants assuming (often correctly) that I understood first-hand the intricacies of school processes and the human complexities of change. Familiarity with the New Zealand secondary school system meant, for example, that I did not need to disrupt the flow of conversation to ask, or make a note to ask, what a SUE (staffing usage and expenditure) report is. Similarly, the need for discretion as senior school leaders meant that the trust afforded me by participants was high from the outset.

As a partial insider, I was, apart from periodic visits to the school site, removed from day-to-day school operations and knew few of the people involved. My 'outsider-ness' in terms of proximity, role, and internal politics (Hanson, 2013; J. Howell, 2004) meant that participants could (and did) confide sensitive personal and contextual information that they would not have divulged to a total outsider. Generally prefaced with "You can't write this," these disclosures generated more nuanced understanding from a research perspective (Sikes, 2012) and, even more importantly, provided cathartic moments in which principals voiced raw emotions of anger, frustration, pain and despair. While this compromised data audit trail measures to some extent, the choice at the "crossroads where methods and morality intersect" (Fetterman, 1998, p. 136; see also Josselson, 2007) was a simple one. Ethical and respectful relationships demanded that the protection of saying things off the record remained sacrosanct.

### **Approach to analysis**

Drawing on hermeneutic traditions (Gadamer, 2004), data analysis focused on the construction of meaning through multiple readings of the text, ongoing dialogue with participants, and the use of contextualizing and categorizing analytic strategies (Butler-Kisber, 2002). I used both a case-centred approach to emphasize individual agency, particularities, and context, and a thematic analysis to enable cross-case comparison (Bruce,

Beuthin, Shields, Molzahn, & Schick-Makaroff, 2016).

Discerning the contiguous, storied dimensions of field texts was an iterative process that entailed continual movement from particular parts of the transcripts to the story as a whole. Bruner (1991) refers to this as “hermeneutic composability” whereby:

The accounts of protagonists and events that constitute a narrative are selected and shaped in terms of a putative story or plot that ‘contains’ them.... But that whole cannot be constructed without reference to such appropriate parts. This puzzling part-whole textual interdependence in narrative is, of course, an illustration of the defining property of the hermeneutic circle. (p. 8)

The circularity of this analytical process is time-consuming but “implies a possibility of a continuously deepened understanding of meaning” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 210).

During the first phase of data analysis (see Figure 4, below), I immersed myself in participant stories, circling between transcripts and

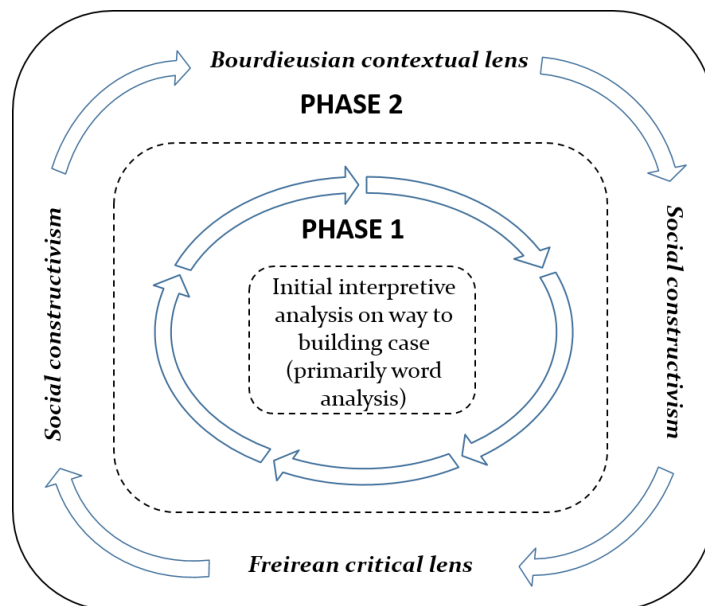


Figure 4: Data analysis cycles

digital recordings to gain a sense of chronology and the manner in which each participant experienced the events relayed. I noted key words and highlighted sections of transcripts that illuminated aspects of who the



person was, and how they were as leaders in context. I looked for significant quotes and repeating ideas, and revisited content not highlighted with a view to identifying blind spots.

During the second phase, I brought two main theoretical perspectives to bear, both of which bubbled up from multiple readings of individual case narratives and rippled across case narratives. Given the emancipatory intent of Te Kotahitanga, I was interested in what motivated these principals to support counter-hegemonic reform (Freire, 1998a, 1998b). Recognising the nuances within, conscientisation and a desire to build social capital and community appeared to fuel personal vision, political engagement, and a commitment to change. It seemed that context did indeed matter, both personally and professionally. The manner in which the agency-structure dialectic supported and thwarted change leadership made Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of habitus, practice and strategy potentially fruitful ways to interpret case narratives. Within a qualitative interpretive paradigm, any number of theoretical lenses might be brought to bear, however my engagement with the case narratives beckoned a Bourdieusian reading that forms the major focus of the discussion chapter (see Chapter 9).

### **Coding and categorising**

Analysis of textual material by coding is one of the most widely practised techniques in narrative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Coding involves assigning “summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 3) words and phrases to events, topics, ways of thinking, patterns, irregularities, and emerging themes. These range from field-data driven inductive codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to theoretically driven deductive codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While all coding involves subjective fragmenting of field text, the predetermined and rigid nature of deductive codes imposes far stronger attempts to control meaning.

In this study, following multiple readings of each field text, I used broad, tentative inductive coding to help make sense of each participant's

story and deductive coding to theorise from the case narratives. In writing the case narratives, I privileged narrative description over frequencies of contingent happenings (Stake, 1995), annotating transcript margins with broad, often single-word event, strategy and perspective codes, such as ‘childhood’, ‘first appointment’, ‘advocacy’, ‘academic failure’, ‘worldview’. To preserve the unity of the whole, these were minimal in number and levels of specificity (units rather than subunits).

While codes and categories are useful for cross-case comparison, “particular relations within the individual case/individual text/individual narrative ... [are often] lost sight of as we code, extract and analyse sections” (Alleyne, 2015, p. 44; see also, Butler-Kisber, 2010; M. Gergen, 2003). I consequently sought to minimise chunking and the decontextualisation that accompanies this procedure. The resulting case narratives were largely pretheoretical records of lived experience (Atkinson, 2007) initially produced for participants’ and, later, readers’ subjective meaning-making.

During the second phase of data analysis, I focused on thematic interpretation (Reissman, 2008) within and across the five case narratives as a basis for theorising my findings. This saw me annotate case narrative margins with deductive theoretical codes such as ‘transactional’, ‘transformational’, ‘micropolitics’, ‘pace’, ‘context’, ‘structure/agency’; references to leadership and change literature; and cross references to other narratives.

### **From field texts to case narrative**

I transcribed all interviews, a laborious undertaking that generated just under 192,000 words of transcription. While less than proficient typing skills necessitated ongoing listening and re-listening to small sections of conversation, prolonged immersion in audio recordings meant increased familiarity with both the parts and the whole. Transcripts formed the basis for initial participant checking, followed by the crafting of individual case narratives in the form of situated leadership portrayals (F. W. English, 2006; Gronn & Ribbins, 1996). The term ‘case narratives’ is used here to

distinguish the layering of my interpretation over the stories Peter, Olivia, Keita, Jim and Ross told me (participant narratives).

### **Case narratives**

Case narratives in this research study took two forms: extended and abridged. The initial case narratives were close renditions of the stories told during the first two interviews, a chronological threading of field texts into extended narratives of up to 15,500 words in length. For the purposes of this thesis, these were subsequently abridged, with aspects pertinent to the principal's role but peripheral to leading change either condensed or excluded, and insights from the final interview added.

The rationale for constructing case narratives from field texts was twofold: firstly, as an act of reciprocity and, secondly, as a means of gaining a more holistic understanding of participant experiences than transcripts ordinarily allow. With regard to the former, I wanted to recognise each participant's commitment to this study with a written record of her or his lived experience, as I understood it. With regard to the latter, the literature suggests that narratives enable readers to better grasp the totality, complexity, multiplicity and contradiction of leadership experience (Squire et al., 2014). Written narratives endeavour to:

create interpreted description of the rich and multi-layered meanings of historical and personal events. The search is for truths unique in their particularity, grounded in first-hand experience, in order to extend and enhance conceptualisation and/to sensitise practitioners to their occurrence. (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003, pp. 259-260)

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) similarly conclude that the selective, iterative and continuous nature of experience makes narrative the perfect vehicle for inquiry.

It is important to acknowledge at this point that the translation of oral into written text shifts the balance of authorial voice from participant to researcher. In writing narratives, the researcher ultimately organizes material, plots it and produces a story (Alleyne, 2015). "What was once the

participant's story now becomes a co-constructed text, the analysis of which falls within the framework of the interpretive authority of the researcher" (Josselson, 2007, p. 548).

Grbich (2007, p. 186, italics in original) identifies four approaches to theorising from qualitative data. In the first, *'pre-chosen theoretical positions'* tightly determine data collection and analysis. In the second, *'methodological underpinnings'* orient the processes of data collection, whilst in the third *'researcher choice'* permits eclectic application of multiple conceptual models. When writing case narratives, I adopted the fourth approach of *'theory minimization'* in the hope that "minimal interpretation but maximum display of data" (p. 186) might heighten reader proximity to participant experiences. The aim was to connect events in a storied manner rather than fit each case narrative to predetermined classification schema (Alleyne, 2015).

### **From case narratives to thesis**

During the second phase of data analysis, my attention turned to analysis of the case narratives themselves. This involved a fundamental shift in focus from the personal meanings of the participants' experiences to an academic focus on the conceptual implications of these meanings. Josselson (2007) argues that, at this point, researcher and participant interests significantly diverge. Shenhav (2015) further suggests that while people are generally skilful in discerning information from complex narratives and "well attuned to the nuances of their tone," daily use of narratives does not necessitate "attention to theoretical questions about narratives or which narratives illuminate.... The upshot is that, when analyzing narratives, researchers are under constant tension between the agendas of the stories and their own analytical goals" (pp. 1-2).

In this thesis, I distinguish between 'analysis of narrative' and 'narrative analysis', the former focusing on thematic interpretation of the story told by participants and the latter concerned with narrative character, discourse, process and structure (Polkinghorne, 1988; Reissman, 1993;

Squire et al., 2014). Holstein and Gubrium (2012) also differentiate between analytical approaches that concentrate to varying degrees on the stories told (the content and organisation of narrative texts), the storytelling (the discursive production of social interaction) and the societal storying (the social circumstances of narrative production). Acknowledging that “all narratives involve content, organization, interactional production, and social context,” they suggest that “what is narratively at play takes place to some degree within the purview of all three domains. Taken together, the parts are mutually informative” (2012, p. 5).

There are, of course, more complex ways of analysing data (discourse analysis, semiotics, and conversation analysis, for example), however I contend that this study’s objectives and research questions lent themselves to descriptive and thematic analysis. This involved recursive cycling among transcripts and digital recordings, and attunement to what Gadamer (2004) terms narrative “alterity” (p. 271). By this, he means the potential for text to challenge existing assumptions and offer new interpretations, something that requires researchers to declare subjectivities, preunderstandings and biases. This is important because the writing of a narrative or thesis is a:

Journey away from the data – what Latour (1987, p. 241) called ‘a cascade of representation’ – as we move from the experience itself, to representation as transcripts or field notes, to incorporation into an argument, and finally to creation of a text that submits to the rhetorical and theoretical structures of the field. (J. Wallace & Loudon, 2000, p. 11)

The prologue to this study thus situates my personal interest in the research topic, while adoption of an interpretive framework makes clear my methodological positioning, and consideration of reflexivity later in this chapter reveals other presuppositions underpinning this study.

### **Justifying claims in qualitative research**

Qualitative and narrative turns towards subjectivity, interpretation over explanation, words over numbers, particularization, and blurred knowing

render positivist measures of validity, reliability and objectivity incapable of assessing research quality. The folly of applying positivist measures within a qualitative paradigm is well documented (Bochner, 2000; Brockmeier, 2009; Butler-Kisber, 2010; Donmoyer, 2006; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Gadamer, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mishler, 1990; Polkinghorne, 2007), with Guba and Lincoln (2008) drawing on religious analogies of “Catholic questions directed to a Methodist audience” or “Hindu questions to a Muslim” (p. 268) to illustrate the nonsensical nature of questions to audiences for which they were never intended. For example, the ability to repeat a scientific study and secure comparable, if not identical outcomes aligns with a worldview of a single external reality capable of objective measurement, but this measure of reliability holds little store if one subscribes to the view that reality is multiple and constructed. Not only does the temporal and situated nature of this research study make replicability impossible, it is unlikely that participants, researchers and audiences will interpret data and findings in the same manner.

While the polemic ‘paradigm wars’ (Denzin, 2010) have abated to some extent, the question of how best to determine the rigour and veracity of interpretive narrative work remains. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) suggest that “acceptance of the relational and interactive nature of human science research, the use of story, ... focus on a careful accounting of the particular... [and] the tentative, variable nature of knowledge” (p. 25) means that findings are established through their authenticity, resonance and trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985, 2005) thus propose trustworthiness and its four components - credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability - as the main criteria for quality. Formulated in their 1985 book, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, these criteria are widely accepted within the qualitative research community (Loh, 2013). In this study, therefore, trustworthiness will be determined by the extent to which participants, readers and other researchers find the case narratives and thematic analyses accurate, authentic and credible.

## **Credibility**

Judged in terms of persuasive suggestion and convincing evocation, credibility refers to the “believability” or verisimilitude of research accounts (Bruner, 1991). Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify seven separate techniques for establishing credibility: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checks; with the caveat that the form and purpose of research will determine which strategies are most appropriate (see also Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 2005; Polkinghorne, 2007; Reissman, 1993). For example, persistent observation is of crucial importance in ethnographic field research but less relevant to phenomenological research. Triangulation is easily achieved when multiple perspectives are sought but more problematic when the focus of study is one person’s lived experience.

In this study, prolonged engagement, member checks, and referential adequacy were the major strategies used to establish credibility. Conversations over a three-year period meant sustained immersion in the field that allowed topics to be revisited and member checks (Creswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1989) helped ensure fidelity to participant thinking and meaning making. This involved more than a cursory review of transcripts. During the data collection and analysis phases, participants were invited to confirm the accuracy of information, to reflect upon sensitivities and contradictions inherent within it, and to engage in reflexive elaboration and collaborative meaning making (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Grundy, Pollon, & McGinn, 2003; Mauthner, 2000; Tracy, 2010). Their involvement was pivotal to the production of case narratives that struck a chord, not only with participants but also with those whom they chose to share them with. One partner’s response - “She’s got you to a tee” - suggests that this particular case narrative conveyed in authentic and resonant ways a strong sense of the life lived.

For the case narratives to be perceived as credible by a non-partisan audience there must be sufficient detail for readers to conclude that the account is plausible. This requires thick description of culturally situated

meaning and events (Geertz, 1973) and the privileging of participant voice. While the case narratives in this study are abridged versions of the original, they are by no means short vignettes and this, along with participant verification, arguably increases their veracity. The use of extended transcript excerpts enhances referential adequacy and the mixing of first and third person tenses makes explicit my presence in narrative construction.

Readers will ultimately determine for themselves whether the narratives ring true and whether the interpretation is reasonable and convincing. This will be determined by their angle of repose (Richardson, 1997, 2003), making narrative truth a plural and multifaceted, rather than singular and unidimensional phenomenon. This leads Richardson to propose crystallization over triangulation as a measure of research quality. Crystals “reflect externalities and refract within themselves ... we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves” (2003, pp. 517-518). Our angle of repose means that we gain “deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic” and, if we subscribe to a nominalist ontological view, paradoxically “know more and doubt what we know” (Richardson, 2003, p. 518).

### **Transferability and utility**

Lack of surety does not prevent insights from qualitative research being usefully applied to other settings. As Charmaz (2005) states, findings from good naturalistic studies can be “extrapolated beyond the immediate confines of the site, both theoretically and practically” (p. 528). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) caution, however, that the “contextuality and heterogeneity of social knowledge” (p. 171) make this process far from uniform.

Case narratives that invite transferability tend to be evocative accounts of experience replete with rich description and direct testimony (Tracy, 2010). This enables readers to engage vicariously in the experiences of others, to filter that which resonates with their own experiences and to discern ideas and strategies for potential future use. Stake and Trumbull



(1982, as cited in Stake, 1995) term these transferable understandings ‘naturalistic generalisations’.

Stake (1995) contrasts readers’ private naturalistic generalizations with researchers’ public assertions or ‘propositional generalizations’. He contends that readers will form naturalistic generalizations from narrative description *and* use researcher assertions “to work with existing propositional knowledge to modify existing generalizations” (1995, p. 86). While case study research does not pretend to generalize across an entire population, propositional generalizations contribute to gradual theory development (Tsang, 2013; Welch, Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki, & Paavilainen-Mantymaki, 2011).

Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) counter criticism of the subjective nature of this work, arguing that, done well, “theory building from cases is surprisingly ‘objective’, because its close adherence to the data keeps researchers ‘honest’” (p. 25). This leads them to conclude that theory building from cases constitutes “one of the best (if not the best) of the bridges from rich qualitative evidence to mainstream deductive research” (p. 25). Tsang (2013) has subsequently outlined a sequential four stage approach to theorising from multiple case studies: interpretive sensemaking, contextualized explanation, empirical regularities, and theory testing.

Given the small number of cases in this study, theorising primarily derives from the interpretive sensemaking and contextualized explanation stages, while the third and fourth stages lie beyond the remit of this research.

### **Reflexivity**

The design of interviews, the selection of artefacts, the recording of researcher observations, and the interpretation of text is not presuppositionless. My personal and career biography colours my worldview and shapes the traditions of understanding in which I live. As Wengraf (2001) states, interviews are not asocial or ahistorical events:

You do not leave behind your anxieties, your hopes, your blindspots, your prejudices, your class, race or gender, your location in global social structure, your age and historical positions, your emotions, your past and your sense of possible futures when you set up an interview .... Nor do you do so when you sit down to analyse the material you have produced. (pp. 4-5)

In a similar vein, Baker (1982) notes that “when we talk with someone else about the world [we live in], we take into account who the other is, what the other person could be presumed to know, [and] ‘where’ that other is in relation to ourself in the world we talk about” (as cited in Silverman, 2014, p. 172)

Reflexivity requires simultaneous attunement to the experiences and meaning systems of others and awareness of the impact that my own biases and preconceptions have on the interpretive process. At the outset, I assumed that principals would have a clear sense of vocation and be committed to achieving equitable outcomes for all students. I thought they would be articulate and reflective practitioners, knowledgeable in their being as leaders and skilled in surfing the waves of change. I anticipated that leading Te Kotahitanga would be demanding work and that a variety of contextual factors would support and thwart change efforts. I suspected that transformational leadership activities would play a critical role in securing this change.

Ethics compels me to act reflexively by acknowledging my conceptual orientation, declaring personal biases and coherently linking these to the study and its field material (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Muecke, 1994; Powney & Watts, 1987). Acknowledging researcher orientation is not sufficient, however. Reflexivity is an active ongoing process of critical reflection that saturates every stage of the research, including publication (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). This includes the decision to research a particular topic, the extent to which the interviewer shapes narrative texts and materials, and “considering how research may impinge on the lives of the researched, both during research and the dissemination of research

insights” (Squire et al., 2014, p. 31). Expanding on the latter point, Rohatynskyj and Jaarsma (2000) suggest that the relationship between the researcher and their audience is of equal significance to the relationship between researcher and participants because “the writing of [research], its publishing, as well as the dissemination of the texts in the world are social acts that impinge on the social activities and identities of those implicated in these processes” (p. 3). Once published the narrative takes on a life of its own (Alasuutari, 1995). Lu (2004) develops this further when she suggests readers also have an ethical responsibility to become more self-reflexive about the politics of representation. Reader responsibilities lie outside the scope of this research, however.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has described the ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations of this research. It has situated the research design and intrinsic case study methodology within an interpretive theoretical framework and justified the selection of interview methods commensurate with a narrative approach. I have outlined the hermeneutical analytical process underpinning the translation of oral to written text, and case narrative to thesis. Procedural and situational ethics have been considered and quality issues appraised.

Research into the lived experiences of key individuals seeks to sophisticate the beholding of understanding that is embodied and vicarious, practical and theoretical. Rich insight into multifaceted ways of seeing and being as leaders makes a Cartesian mapping and conquering of the human world not only antithetical but impossible. It can thus be argued that inherent in the limitations of qualitative research lie its strengths.

In the co-constructed case narratives that follow (Chapters 4-8), Peter, Olivia, Keita, Jim and Ross recount formative biographical events and influences, reveal their career biographies, relate their perceptions of the Te Kotahitanga change process and reflect on the manner in which this has shaped their leadership thinking and practice. Each case narrative is written

in two parts, the first focusing on early leadership and career foundations, and the second on their three year involvement with Te Kotahitanga.



## CHAPTER FOUR: PETER

### Part I

The artefacts on the wall behind his desk reveal much about the man sitting in the principal's chair. A poster of the Croatian coastline suggests a distant, ancestral homeland, an ageing sepia photo of a gum digger points to a northern New Zealand tūrangawaewae, a "Private fees can't buy uni success" newspaper clipping hints at socialist working class politics, and student art work urges viewers to "Know your face ... to earn your place." These geographical and political referents constitute both a leadership anchor and compass, forces that sustain and consume, comfort and compel. Knowing face and earning place are central to each conversation we have.

A first generation New Zealander on his father's side, and second on his mother's, Peter grew up on an orchard in West Auckland. Both parents were Croatian and their determination to "never forget where you come from and who you are" made Dalmatian heritage a strong and enduring influence. This is Peter's pepeha, ethical principles that guide his daily being as an educator.

### Outside eyes

Being a migrant meant Peter "learned to live two lives." As a youngster, he spoke Dalmatian at home and was "pretty close to not being able to speak English when I started school. I'd answer my Dad in English and he'd talk to me in Dalmatian." Peter understands first hand that the cultural divide between home and school can be vast.

I have some empathy. It's one of the things that pushes me hard here. One of the reasons for taking this job is the importance of identity. Each and every staff member has their pepeha and so should the kids. No kid should have to leave their identity at the door to 'become'. I was a generation that did that.

## **Egalitarianism**

Family loyalties are bound up in socialist working class politics and a healthy disrespect for the rich who build wealth on the backs of the poor. But we applaud people who work hard. So I can't walk away from that and nor do I want to. I quite like the notion of migrants who are poor, wanting to rise out of the ashes, rather than those who are rich and looking for tax breaks and various other [perks].

Immigrating to New Zealand meant an opportunity to "shape a new world" and Peter shares his family's passion for egalitarianism. This is encapsulated in another of his father's pithy sayings: "There's no-one better than you and you're better than no-one."

The idea was that you treat people for who they are, be hospitable. So that's partly why I've gone into a school like this because I come from working people. I'm a very strong believer in egalitarianism. I don't think there should be titles. You should live a good life and die knowing that you've made a difference.

Making a difference means rallying against injustice. As a child, Peter distinctly remembers being affronted by discrimination against African Americans.

I remember as a young boy, an angry young boy, watching black and white TV, and seeing civil rights, Martin Luther King, and J. F. Kennedy. I was only a little kid, but I was deeply offended at the things that were happening there, the sense of injustice that people weren't allowed to go to washrooms, or restaurants.

When he voiced this outrage at home, the response was, "Oh, shut up Peter" but the rebuke was a light-hearted one. Animated political discussion was commonplace at home: "Dalmatians are very political. They're very heated. Politics is life, what you believe in. People are passionate about things. Politics is what you have your dinner around."

## **Education predicated on success for all**

Peter believes that a socially just, egalitarian world has at its foundation

equitable educational access and outcome.

My personal belief about education, in a nutshell, is that it should be predicated on everyone being successful. Everyone's got a talent, or an interest, and our job is to find what that is, for society's sake, and polish that up, and make them find jobs in which they really express themselves. If you have a system which only passes 50%, it seems crazy, and why we have to make people do stuff they're no good at beggars belief. I'm a bit of a convert to Ken Robinson's *The Element*. We just need to find everyone's element. Of course, not many people know their element unless you expose them to some things.

Peter recognises that formal schooling is not a sure fire predictor of success and cites one of his friends as an example:

He got into 3 Practical, which was the bottom class and was always considered slow, but every Saturday night he was off to the speedway. I would chat to him at the bus stop outside our place and he knew all the scores and lap times. It shows what motivation can do.

Peter's beliefs are encapsulated in the motto of the school he leads. During his second principalship at [school F], Peter changed the motto to 'Achievement for All'. He recalls driving to work one morning and listening to a student being interviewed on the local radio station: "She'd won a prize and was chatting away, and the announcer asked, "What's your school's motto?" I think, Christ, I hope you know. We've been working on this." The student did know and Peter remembers the interviewer responding, "Oh, that's pretty good. A bit socialist, though."

In his current school, the motto "Successful learning is the only option" conveys an even stronger statement around student achievement. "Any school that I'm in charge of is very outcomes oriented."

### **Deliberative moral leadership**

The expectation to do well at school and the view that "education is your pathway to success" was instilled in Peter at a young age and he recognises that his childhood has been extremely influential in shaping the principal



he is today. Not only do his father's pithy sayings "haunt" him, so, too, do his mother's.

Probably the one I live by most is 'To thine own self be true.' I always think, you know the right thing to do, Peter. Do the right thing. Be a man. It sounds very Dalmatian. We're a very patriarchal side. You've got to stand up for the things that are right. You don't walk away. That might sound a bit corny, but those are the things that drive me. Sometimes I take time to make a decision because I want to think about the right thing to do. I don't like people trying to force decisions on me because I know there's usually a reason for that: they want the decision to be in their favour. I'm very much into moral imperatives and also ethical leadership - what is the right thing to do?

Personally I don't think there's enough of it, probably in the world, I'd have to say, but I think New Zealand's got problems. I find New Zealand an interesting place to have strongish beliefs, because it's quite a beige country. There's this air of pragmatism which masks a whole lot of other things. I suppose what I mean by beige is that there's real injustices in education and they're not being addressed. And that's partly because of your deciles. We throw money and just walk away from major interventions.

### **East, west, south and north**

Peter served his apprenticeship in four Auckland schools and describes his pathway to principalship as conventional. After five years teaching geography at the school he attended as a student, Peter moved east to another city school. He enjoyed leading the geography department in a hugely competitive environment and "got some amazing results there, as you would." When I asked him why he added the qualifier 'as you would', Peter responded:

Because I think you would and you should with that cultural capital that resides there. While I thought there were some great teachers, I wonder how some of them might go in a lower decile [school] where

you didn't have the push. And the kids were very geared towards exams.

Although he learnt a lot about what high expectations look like, Peter "wasn't into their whole school ethos that much." Teaching in east Auckland confirmed for him a need to return to his roots.

With due respect, I knew that I didn't want to be changing the lives of rich kids. It wasn't what I wanted to do, but I learnt a lot from that. I needed to go to [school B] to know that's where I shouldn't be, or didn't need to be. I wanted to be working in a more authentic environment. When [school C] came up, I liked it because it was a real cross section of humanity.

At [school C], Peter was grateful for the opportunity to take on short-term senior leadership roles. These afforded him a more holistic view of schools and a greater sphere of influence. As a result, Peter "started to think beyond geography." Reflecting on that time, Peter describes himself as "a young man in a hurry." He relished the postgraduate study, Woolf Fisher and Nuffield scholarships that enabled him to see the world differently.

I did a DipEd through Massey University very early on, because I wanted to find out about education and learning. I didn't really feel the year at Teachers' College prepared me for that. I just had this curiosity. I started off being a geographer who happened to be an educator and felt passionate about geography, and I switched, I think, to being an educator who happened to be a geographer.

Peter was fortunate to have a good mentor in his principal, who guided him in his next career move. "He would say, 'Look, Peter, don't go for that job. That guy's an idiot; you don't want to work for that guy. You want to work for someone who is a good principal'."

While experience at [school C] positioned him well to apply for deputy principal positions, Peter was initially unsuccessful and this came as quite a shock.

I've been a person who has been very lucky. I tend to get whatever I apply for, and I missed a couple. That's the first time in my life, even

since, and I'm not saying this as an ego thing. I found out later that I wasn't what they're looking for. Fair enough and quite right. I ended up getting [school D] and that was an interesting and challenging school in its own right.

What made [school D] interesting was the loss of community support evidenced in the falling roll, and internal struggle between principal and staff. During his two and a half years there, Peter introduced a modular curriculum and "did the hard yards" in terms of student discipline. The latter was critical in gaining colleagues' respect and the return from "non-uniform into uniform" met with community favour. "The regime that followed probably got the kudos for that. That's fine. Now it's got a pretty healthy roll. I don't think you have to lose a liberal spirit to do that." Peter also learnt much about the organisational dimensions of leadership and valued the willingness of the principal to engage in genuine dialogue: "I think, for those times, it was probably a more collaborative structure than I'd been in before. While it had a principal, a DP and two APs, they had lots of meetings which were non-hierarchical in nature."

Principalship had always been part of the plan because that was "about effecting change" and his early career certainly reflects a man on a mission. The urgency remains - "Now I'm an old man in a hurry" - but the focus has changed from career progression to impatience with the educational status quo.

### **Early principalships: Growing bicultural awareness**

It was during his first principalship that Peter became sensitised to the needs of Māori students in particular.

[School E] was the start of a bicultural experience for me. Although I lived two worlds, I hadn't lived much in the Māori world. I had been on a marae before, but I was just starting to gain more knowledge about protocols and to touch my toes in bicultural matters. I engaged very strongly with the community on some initiatives for Māori there. School assessment data exposed savage disparities in achievement between

Māori and Pākehā students and provided the catalyst for leadership actions designed to redress iniquitous outcomes. Disparities were even more pronounced during his second principalship at [school F].

I was horrified to see Māori achievement levels. I'm actually quite evidence and data-driven. I looked at the data and saw that, on the surface, [school F's] doing really well, but these kids aren't making it; they're not even sitting, they're leaving before they even sit School Cert. I wanted people to tell me what the achievement was because there was fudging for results.

Peter believes that there are teachers who "need some real challenging" in this arena and cynically suggests that multiculturalism is "the new default place to do nothing." For his part, Peter is committed to the biculturalism that is integral to New Zealand identity.

A lot of my stuff, if you wanted to summarise it, is about identity-based education. Kids have got to feel that they are valued for who they are, what they bring. The very time that adolescents need identity is when schools don't take advantage of that; they strip it. If I want to be a New Zealander, I can't walk away from the fact that Māori are tangata whenua. And why should I be frightened of that and not bring that in? I'd want my granddaughter to learn Māori ahead of French any time.

### **Homecoming - the final principalship?**

A determination not to walk away from who he is and what he believes in compelled Peter to head north for his third principalship. The photo of his grandfather prompted me to ask whether there is a feeling of homecoming:

Yeah, there is. I come from West Auckland and it's very patriarchal. You trace your whakapapa on your father's side, but my mother's family comes from up north, and our family would go there every school holidays. My wife's also got northern heritage.

And I felt - you know that map of mine? There was one more path to go and that was to go north. I like adventures and I felt I had an

adventure left in me, hence the northern thing. My brother said, “Oh, I thought you might do this because you were always close to Mum.” Part of my journey was to go back where my mother came from, but it was more about the completion of what my father said to me: “This is your country.” The bicultural pathway is actually part of that end point. I think it’s something you can’t avoid, or shouldn’t avoid, as a New Zealander.

While Peter has stood in the village and “felt” where his ancestors came from, he considers New Zealand his turangawaewae.

[Croatia’s] not, you know. I get buried back in [location] with my parents, not far from the orchard where I was raised. In fact, people are amazed that I’ve left West Auckland. I say, you’re going to be a long time dead; you have to see the rest. So, in some ways, it’s a more challenging journey to come here. Being Tarara (that’s what they called Dalmatians) is good up here. There is a lot of Māori and Dalmatian intermarriage. It’s almost as if second class citizens in the north got together, so there are linkages you can draw on.

Peter decided against applying for a higher decile school, opting instead to apply for his current decile one school when the principal’s position became available in 2008. For him, the main appeal lay in “a feeling of possibilities open” and the chance to do “something more meaningful.”

Peter recommends principals do their homework carefully and endeavour to match the personal with the professional.

I think leadership of schools is actually very personal. If you’re HOD Geography, I reckon you could work in a decile 1-10, but I don’t think you can be a principal if you haven’t got some passion for the community and people. It worries me when I see principals picking up second and third principalships and running foul, or going under, because the context doesn’t fit.

He invests considerable effort in finding out about school context and culture, a strategy he advises aspiring leaders to emulate.

You’re trying to work out, why am I here? How do I fit in? And you’ve

got to do that before you apply. That's the danger of applying for a job: you might get it. You've got to leave them in no doubt about who you are, where you come from, why you want the job, and what you offer - give lots of examples, not of what you are going to do, but what you do that fits in. You also need to know who they are.

Doing his homework well means that Peter is now "in a comfortable place."

I've aligned myself to this school and this school's probably aligned itself to me. I think it's co-constructed, really, and the Board are very happy with it. So I'm quite at peace with myself because I'm working in a school and in a job on things I believe in.

Because the move from a larger to smaller school involved a substantial salary cut, most comforts have been spiritual rather than material. Peter didn't "mind getting a lower salary, that's a conscious decision," but he challenged the Ministry of Education's position regarding relocation costs. While teachers appointed to decile 1-4 schools qualified for a \$3,000 relocation grant, there was no such provision in the principals' collective contract. In "semi-provocative" style, Peter expressed his frustration to Ministry officials and the Minister of Education: "That's a crock of shit,' I said, 'On one hand you're telling me that you want to raise the tail and yet experienced principals are going to lose money'." Despite lack of discretion in the existing contract, Peter successfully negotiated payment of his removal expenses and prompted eventual change to the Secondary Principals' Collective Agreement whereby principals "moving to a school that has a lower U-grade, and a lower decile to the principal's current school" (PPTA, 2011, p. 31) are now eligible for removal expenses.

It is at this point that Peter tells me that health issues mean that his third principalship may well be his last: "I thought I had one more school left in me but where I go next is the bit I don't know." A recent diagnosis of early onset Parkinson's disease has "put things into context. That hasn't changed my journey but it's sharpened the focus."

## Part II

### **Sensing context in the early days: Titiro, whakarongo, korero**

Peter felt strong affinity with his new school, but not everyone in the school community reciprocated this. His appointment met with initial apprehension from some who voiced their concern that the incoming principal would create upheaval rather than continuity. Grapevine reports were sufficiently strong for his niece to be warned, on a school sports exchange, that her uncle was going to get a hard time.

There obviously was some trepidation that I would suddenly take the school away from its general direction. I don't think we have. I like to think we've bolstered it and made it more structured in a sense. I have to pay tribute to [predecessor], who's quite an enthusiast and charismatic in his own way. He did a great job of lifting morale here, and I really wanted to pay tribute to that.

During the first year, Peter was determined to make haste slowly and believed that the context allowed this. He likened himself to an anthropological sleuth undertaking a cultural audit and placed priority on building relationships.

I came here for a year looking for what 'The [School] Way' was. You've got to respect what's there. I didn't make too many structural changes because I needed to see if what was in place was working. The first thing was to tell people who I was, my background and so on. I worked very hard on establishing relationships within and beyond the school, with the local marae, and with other schools. I'm just trying to recap my first year - it was virtually all about understanding the culture and why [predecessor] did things the way he did.

Peter's initial assessment of school climate led him to suggest that it is easier for Māori students to be Māori at this school. He offers two reasons why:

One is the percentage; I think we're about 75% Māori. There were bones, really good solid bones to build on and we've hopefully

enhanced some of those practices. It's not just about having a great Māori department, which we do have. In fact, we have quite a cohesive staff around the fact that relationships are important.

Peter perceived that the ground was ripe for Te Kotahitanga. "I came up here thinking, well, if ever a school is going to be in Te Kotahitanga, this should be it" and deliberately cultivated an already fertile environment.

We had our staff development day at the marae. We did the pepeha thing, and [colleagues] also ran a session on Māori pedagogy: this is what Māori pedagogy looks like. This isn't going to work with Māori kids. These are the things you should do. And it was really powerful and really well done. This was before TK and, in fact, some pretty heartfelt stories were told. The setting was there.

Then we told people we were applying for Te Kotahitanga. I told people what it involved, how I'd been through it as a teacher, and how it challenges you. So, yeah, I'd like to think there was a state of readiness. We were going to do this anyway, it fitted our plans and people knew that I came with that history.

A range of potentially useful data complemented the priority on relationships and provided the foundation for a review of student achievement goals.

One of the things I think the school did really well was that we had numbers for everything. We had the NZQA [New Zealand Qualifications Authority] report, we had online surveys from kids, we had department reports, all sorts of analyses. We had a lot of data but didn't do a lot with it. We were drowning in data and needed to swim in evidence. I wanted explicit targets, like three sub-levels for each kid in literacy and numeracy. In NCEA, we wanted to be at least as good as last year. We wanted to be at decile five, well above the national average. We were actually sitting at better than a decile two, but not as high as we would like. When we broke down Māori and European results, there was still quite a gap, particularly amongst the boys. So we looked at that data, and said we're really about raising



achievement. Let's get the runs on the board, let's show these parents. Other things also portended well, including strong support among middle leaders, and other initiatives compatible with Te Kotahitanga objectives. Having discovered that most resistance resided in the middle at his previous school, Peter found the former refreshing and he welcomed assistance from the influential Komiti Māori, a group whose role included advice and guidance around Māori aspirations and tikanga. In addition, the school had begun working with Starpath and, as part of an engaging Tai Tamariki initiative funded by Te Puna Kokiri and the Ministry of Social Development, targeted and mentored 20 students at risk of not getting NCEA. "So, in a way, that burnt off some energy while we were waiting for Te Kotahitanga. And when we got it, I got hugged. People were hugging me, 'Oh, we got it!' You know, that was good."

### **Implementing Te Kotahitanga: A whole school approach**

This is Peter's second experience of leading a school into Te Kotahitanga and hindsight has led him to approach things quite differently. Compulsion has replaced voluntarism and Peter's involvement is more direct. In his previous school, Peter focused his attention on Te Kauhua and other strategic initiatives while 12-15 interested staff attended the Te Kotahitanga hui whakarewa.

They sort of drove that and looked for enthusiasts. We worked on the idea of 'feeding the hungry', getting those people on board and going with it. It's a big staff and I don't think we had it planned as much as we would now. The lead group always knew I was there, backing their efforts to raise Māori achievement. But had I known – hindsight's a wonderful thing. Te Kotahitanga's worked out to be a longer lasting initiative than I thought it might be.

Peter's strategy was for the lead group to drive Te Kotahitanga, in the belief that the enthusiasm of converts would win people over, however this brought them into conflict with colleagues. He recalled the events of an early staff meeting in which racism surfaced:

We had a lot of staff who were enthusiasts, a lot of people in the middle – “Oh yeah, well it could be good but I’m busy” – and there were a few others that were silent. What happened at this meeting was that we had a session on the Treaty of Waitangi and a couple of nutters raised their ugly heads. The guy got up and made some slamming statement about Māori boys’ and girls’ schools, and someone made offensive, they wouldn’t think so, but they were offensive statements. That was bloody useful actually because it got them into the open. The TK team were upset, but it helped get the neutral towards it and won a few people over. I think you need more of those conversations.

Reflecting on the implementation of Te Kotahitanga at [school F], Peter acknowledges that conversations alone will not suffice, and nor will a partial, incremental approach. For Te Kotahitanga to succeed, it must become a whole school reform initiative.

I think you need more than that, to be honest. I think you need really unambiguous statements from principals about why you’re doing it. This is where we’re all going, not just some of you. How dare people operate their own agenda in a school that’s committed? I think the school needs to be more explicit that this is what we’re about. You need a board that’s right on your side. If you haven’t, you’re in big trouble. You have to sell it to your board first, and then you need to have the language out there: “We are a Te Kotahitanga school. This is not optional.”

Second time around, Peter has been more deliberate in laying the groundwork.

It was almost like setting up a kaupapa, really. I was committed to us all going in the same direction. This was something we had to work together, collaboratively. I suppose we’ve used the rhetoric cleverly this time. We haven’t said, “We want you to sign up.” There’s no bloody option here, really. This is where we are, this is where we’re going. That’s where I’ve used ‘The [School] Way’ - we’re all in this

together and we'll all give things a crack. I played on history because we've had a modular curriculum in the past and done interesting things. I said, "This is a school which gives a damn."

Peter acknowledges that this represents a departure from original Te Kotahitanga protocol.

There's a nice bit of tension there, isn't there, because early on you'd say, "This is a really great thing. Hey, get on board." You'd get your star teachers involved, thinking they would spread it, but they can only spread it so far without your help. Even then, I don't know if principals can do it on their own. They need the board.

Here, I probably held off for the year while I stacked the charter and a whole lot of other stuff around that. You can argue that a democratic principal should say, "Well, what do you think?" I remember once someone said, "Where's the control group?" and I remember answering, "Oh, the last 170 years. That's your control group."

### **Dealing with dissonance**

Peter is not naive enough to think that all staff are fully committed to Te Kotahitanga. His initial approach to the "three or four who are semi-reluctant" is to attempt to understand their perspective.

What I learnt from the Levin (2008) book is that I get worried when people talk about resistance. I like the notion of dissonance better than resistance. Resistance almost implies that they've got some power. It seems to me that if someone's not happy, I'd better talk to them and say, "Look, I hear you don't want to be involved. What's the story? Is there a way we can work around this?" rather than give resistance honour and status. That's why I think the charter and sense of direction are crucial. This is where we're going; these are the things we believe in.

When resistance becomes entrenched, Peter escalates his response.

Dissenters are called upon to explain their achievement data and promotion

to middle and senior leadership roles becomes conditional.

Oh, there may have been the odd someone who wasn't quite on board, but it's a bit like a mafia move: they're made an offer they can't refuse. And I think that's where moral purpose comes in. You're the principal. The board selected you.

### **Changes in the second year**

Having respected what he inherited, Peter began shaping school context, slowly at first. He reinstated and modified the house system abolished by a predecessor, a move that met with popular approval, and signalled that middle/senior school organisation would be up for debate. In 2010, changes "have certainly been coming thick and fast, and most of them have worked." These have not been all plain sailing and Peter recalls "early hiccups" involving the composition of the Te Kotahitanga team and an initial staff focus on student behaviour rather than teacher pedagogy. He remembers cautioning the school co-ordinator that this approach would stifle change: "They're not going to go anywhere with this. It's all about the kids having to change; it's not about them. Get them [focused] on learning outcomes."

Previous experience alerted Peter to the personality, safety, and sustainability dangers inherent in a sole lead facilitation role. He was the first principal to introduce a co-facilitation role and is intent on expanding the current team to "four, plus me." He realises that it is not enough for the principal to support Te Kotahitanga from a distance and is determined to walk alongside the team, both publicly and privately, in the school and beyond.

In Peter's view, there also needs to be greater alignment between Te Kotahitanga and the senior leadership team, and he wants the Te Kotahitanga co-ordinator to sit at the leadership table. This already happens in respect to staff appointments and Peter seizes the opportunity to employ teachers who are committed to the principles of Te Kotahitanga. In the information pack, he has "made it very blunt. It's unambiguous big time." The introductory letter articulates the school's commitment to the

“principles of social justice, bi-culturalism, the power of relational pedagogy and the belief that all students can be successful learners.” Also included is the Teachers’ Kaupapa which specifically states:

We de-privatise teaching practice, embrace bi-culturalism and have a shared kaupapa. As teachers we are all on the same waka. Our goals for our students are too important for time to be wasted on teachers who want to paddle in the wrong direction. ALL teachers participate in the Te Kotahitanga professional development programme.

Teachers are expected to be self-managing, connected lifelong learners and ‘The [School] Way’ applies as much to staff as it does students. The development of this school wide kaupapa illustrates the tension between consultation and direction.

I went looking for the Holy Grail [School Way]. It’s not there, so why don’t we collaboratively create that? One day the staff said to me, “Oh Peter, don’t consult anymore. You just tell us what the important things are,” so I said, “Okay.” I came in the next day and I wrote down the five things that I want all teachers and all kids to be able to do.

These include valuing each student as a precious taonga with special aptitudes and talents (1), personalising learning to cater for these (2), embracing New Zealand’s cultural diversity and the unique position of Māori culture (3), and acting with agency and accountability (4) to ensure every learner’s right to success (5). In Peter’s view, “identity matters, inclusivity does not mean assimilation, learning is done with students not to students, and relational pedagogy requires relational leadership.”

He is keen to align these core ideals with the charter, policies and procedures, and to ensure that values are lived on a daily basis.

At the moment we’re looking back at our charter. The five things I’ve identified are there but they’re not necessarily explicit, and we’re wondering whether to make our code of behaviour manaakitanga. We need to define that and be really explicit about the values in our charter. If those things are important to us, then not only should the kids be asked that, but also the staff. So, how could you demonstrate

as a staff member that you are caring of others? Where's your aroha? So that's probably where 'The [School] Way' is going to start biking now.

### **Exercising positional power: From horizontal to vertical**

Peter is selective in exercising positional power and the topic came up more than once during our conversations. As a deputy principal, he observed his colleague's struggle to combat the legacy of the "principal before [who] delegated so much power away that, in fact, the teachers ran the school. You can argue that that's not a bad thing necessarily, but I think the principal needs to have some positional power." In his current school, Peter is circumspect in distributing power.

I give people authority to do things. I don't like to be the person who does it all, but principals need to keep and be prepared to do some things. I don't throw away a position of power. I think it's something you've got up your sleeve if you have to.

The move to vertical forms represents perhaps the most significant exercise of Peter's positional power to date and this has fundamentally changed the role of the form teacher.

Our biggest change is that we have gone vertical, and there were people who were strongly against this, including my senior managers who wanted to keep the horizontals. I'm going back to the motto, to the whole thing about whānau. We need to have tuakana teina, the older ones helping the younger ones. I canvassed staff opinion and the survey came back more against than for, but that didn't worry me. I looked at the people who voted against it and probably flashly said to myself, well, they don't know what they don't know. They've only been here; how would they know? So, I just said, "I know this is the right thing to do." I gave warning that we were going to do this and would review it later. We had some resistance at years seven and eight; however the feedback I've had since, a year on track, is how much they enjoy the year 7-13 verticals. And so we're committed to that. In some

ways, you might say, “What’s that got to do with Te Kotahitanga?”

Well, it’s about relationships and knowing students. If you’re in year seven, you’re going to stay with the same whānau teacher and class all the way through. So, in fact, the question to people might be, “What are you doing to foster a relational pedagogy in your other practices?”

Academic monitoring and mentoring is now an important function of the whānau teacher who plays an integral role in formulating personal education plans (PEPs) with each student.

They are effectively the learning coach, for want of a better word. They have to have the conversations, one on one. The kid articulates the goal and teachers are expected to monitor this. If the kid’s three credits short, you’d better have the conversation.

This has caused teachers the “most angst” and Peter acknowledges that some will require greater support in their new role. Despite “a few glitches with some of the systems,” the shift to vertical forms has been largely successful.

On the whole, the idea of younger ones with elders has been really good. I already had 9-13 at [school F] and I also introduced it at [school E], so you can probably see a pattern for me, but I do believe - why do you have to have kids by age? We have little families together.

This prompts us to speculate about the range of form structures in Te Kotahitanga schools and to wonder whether vertical forms are the preferred option.

Hmm. The whole sustainability bit worries me. If you make it part of the school’s kaupapa, then you’ve got a chance. That’s what I’m striving for and think I’m getting at [current school]. It’s not what I had at [school F], if I reflect back. I might have had some of the rhetoric right but I don’t think it fitted into the way we do things around here.

### **Community support**

Strong academic results, internal survey data and a climbing roll have

dimmed actual and potential opposition to Peter's vertical form dictate: "I'd be really sweating on that if our roll was falling, or our results weren't good. I think you have to have a platform. You can be brave when the results are going your way." You can also be brave when you have community backing and Peter has worked hard to build this mandate. In addition to making himself known to members of the community, Peter has used his connections to benefit the local marae. This resulted in Project Aspiring, a collaborative venture whereby the marae gained a new driveway, students gained civil engineering mentoring and unit standard credits, and [Construction Company] gained a foothold in Northland.

So, big points. I'm in big time with the marae. Now we're negotiating for another driveway and we've got our kids helping them with their overall marae development plan. We've got trades here [at school] so, if they want any fences done or if they want a new deck, our students will build it for them.

Peter has also challenged other schools over iniquitous school bus routes, and "talked up" academic results in the media. While he is "not chasing roll growth," Peter thinks it's important to "stand tall" for students and community. He is humbled by their affirmation, recalling two occasions that constitute "almost the biggest events in my teaching career." The first, an end of year "Praise Giving", saw Peter make reference to the proverb, *Kaore te kumara e korero mo tona ake reka*. In translation, 'the kumara doesn't like to sing how sweet it is' urges humility and cautions against self-promotion.

"Well," I said, "This kumara's going to sing" and talked up our results. "This is the highest achieving school in [city] for Māori: Level 1, Level 2, Level 3; and for Pākehā it's pretty close to that as well. You need to know that." Well, people got up and tautoko'd us.

The second was a Komiti Māori evening attended by 250-300 people. "We expected 30-40 maybe. Holy Shit, it was packed to the gunnels. People were there because they wanted to be there. So we just felt affirmed, you know?"

The outcome has been that enrolment targets have been met and the



school has a parent teacher association for the first time. Support from influential Maori parents has seen the roll rise from 69% to 74-75% Maori.

### **Playing the change game**

Peter acknowledges that not everyone shares his propensity for change, or the same sense of urgency. “Some people might say we’ve got too many changes. I personally don’t think you can ever have too many, so I piss people off.” Nonetheless, the fact that he describes some initiatives as “games still to be played” suggests that Peter tempers the degree and pace of change to accommodate both the early adopters and less committed. Continuing the sports analogy, keeps his eye on the “long game. You’ve got to live what you believe, but you’ve got to actually work the room a bit.” While Peter would love to disestablish the current department structure, he concedes that this might be one step too far for most and is “starting to put a stopper on things.” The focus in 2011 will be on consolidating “cumulative stuff from last year.”

Ensuring that initiatives support the main change driver (Te Kotahitanga) also goes some way to reducing the potential for change overload: “I’ve got sort of a fad filter now – if it doesn’t fit, we won’t get involved. I’ve turned down quite a few.” Familiarity with much of the academic and empirical literature informs his decision making and Peter demands similarly high standards of those who champion new proposals. “I always think of the guy in that *Jerry Maguire* movie who says, ‘Show me the money’. Well, the staff know I say, ‘Show me the research. Show me the research.’” He finds effect sizes useful in managing people with new ideas. When one staff member advocated the introduction of streaming, Peter responded,

“You will not have streaming while I’m around. Do not do that by stealth, putting all the maths classes on at once. Because I will show you that the effect size is not going to work.” The research tells me it doesn’t make a difference. It makes teachers’ jobs easier but it doesn’t actually improve outcomes. So, I figure, if it doesn’t improve

outcomes, it's not happening. I tell parents, "If you're in the top class, go for it. If your kid's in the bottom class, for God's sake get them out."

### **Leadership thinking and practice**

Towards the end of our first conversation, I asked Peter whether Te Kotahitanga had impacted on his leadership thinking and practice in ways he didn't initially anticipate. He paused momentarily to ponder this.

It's interesting. Yes and no. There's a conflicting statement I make: you have to give people power and let them go with it, but you also have to be there for them, you know? You need to learn more than I learnt at [previous school]. You have to make quality time to talk with them, rather than just say, "I've got your back." And a lot of it's about stuff you take for granted as a leader. They're potential leaders and vulnerable. I had to stand with them and I had to stand with them in quite public spaces.

Te Kotahitanga has prompted a reconsideration of leadership and provided a context for structural change. "It's not only conversations that change. I call it a Trojan horse because you can get in there and do all sorts of other stuff. It's a real neat case study for managing change."

### **Another year on ...**

When we next met, Peter had returned from sabbatical refreshed, "fizzy and focussed on getting things done." Sabbatical provided a context for personal and professional renewal and an opportunity to engage in intellectual debate at an international level. When Peter applied for sabbatical, he highlighted leadership for social justice as his main study focus. "That's what I wanted to do. I couldn't see much evidence of that discussion happening in New Zealand, so I was looking overseas for that." To his chagrin, the Ministry documented his main purpose as participating "in some professional development performance alongside overseas colleagues" (MOE Educational Leaders website). "I took sort of offence at that. I'm not into paranoia, but have I been censored? I went over there because they're

not allowing me to have that debate here. It's just not part of the discourse.”

Whilst on sabbatical, Peter looked for “some quite provocative stuff that would force me to challenge some of my own assumptions.” He attended three conferences and targeted key speakers whose work on race, equity, testing and public education inspired him: Pedro Noguera (2008), Diane Ravitch (2010), and Daniel Pink (2005, 2009). Peter revelled in his chance encounter with Alan Blankstein (2004, 2010) and was impressed by actor Matt Damon’s speech advocating public education: “He talks it up well. You don’t get that in New Zealand.”

In New York, Peter visited a KIPP (Knowledge is Power Programme) charter school in Newark.

Newark would be decile 1, I would say, and the school I went to was 99% black and 1% Hispanic. It was an interesting staff; they all wanted to make a difference, were all driven, but a lot of stuff was around order and compliance. The kids spent the first week practising lining up. Really, that was what I saw. It was good to see it, but I didn’t see it as a game-breaker. I didn’t see great teaching. I didn’t see a lot of teaching to be honest, but I saw a lot of stuff to the book and to the test.

Since arriving home, Peter has written an article arguing that charter schools are a diversion on the New Zealand educational landscape. Originally published in the local newspaper, the article has in large part been reprinted in the Post Primary Teachers’ Association (PPTA) magazine. He also made a submission to principal pay round negotiations advocating that salaries should be decile based and variances determined by school size, not vice versa. Peter believes that the traditional career trajectory from principal of a small lower decile school to principal of a larger higher decile school brings with it attendant problems.

And that actually determines principal behaviour because the first question you get is, “How is the roll going? The first XV?” That’s what matters to them. I have real issues with heroic leaders who come in for three or four years, ‘rip shit and bust’, do a whole lot of stuff, then

leave. There's nothing left behind and they cause some schools considerable damage (probably an interesting study, there). That's the danger any time that you move...

I'd like to think that what I'm trying to do is a bit of a trail blazing. I do think there's a disconnect. This country, while it's beige, is also into weasel words like the 'long tail'. 'Long tail', okay, so what do you do about that? We know that effective leaders can turn a school around, let's see how that's recognised. We have a U scale up to 10, based on school size, and there's a pretty minimal top-up for decile 1-2 and 3-4. Turning around low decile schools is not actually offered as a career path. Mind you, you don't want this to be a soft option for principals going to their dotage. I don't think low decile is a soft option, however, and it worries me that some low decile principals won't stay. They'll move because they feel really done in. There's no doubt that low decile's harder work, but a hell of a lot more satisfying.

### **External review and its reception**

With Peter's ten week sabbatical pending, a contingency plan was developed around who would lead the school in his absence and the relatively new BOT took the opportunity to review the leadership structure within the school. Peter commented that the board held

quite a corporate view; very focussed on outcomes and very focused on the process. The board chair likes to keep it pretty tight and has a model of governance that proved a little problematic at first. The previous board had moved on and the new one probably needed to reflect a bit more, before seizing the chance to do things differently. They wanted to do some reviews and I said that would be healthy for us in our leadership team because we were revisiting the idea of what leadership looks like in the school. So we got an outside person to do a senior leadership team review.

The review identified a "lack of clarity around roles" and proposed a leadership model which would protect Peter's time and remove the "Year 7-

8 glass ceiling.” It recommended that historical bureaucratic jobs, including the timetable, be divested, and that pastoral, curriculum and personnel (recruitment plus professional development) portfolios be reallocated amongst members of the senior team. Membership of the senior leadership team would become conditional upon taking on whole school responsibilities.

While Peter would have preferred a broader team approach, he wasn't adverse to the new model and thought, “Yeah, I can live with that.” The release of review findings at the end of a busy school year, together with the presence of the external reviewer and School Trustees Association (STA) industrial advocate, meant that Peter's deputy and assistant principals initially felt otherwise. Exclusion from the review process and the manner in which review findings were communicated generated an unintended adversarial air and they didn't entirely buy Peter's reassurance that “Your jobs are safe. It's just a re-jig. There are no units going or anything like that.” Peter was consequently forced into damage control mode, in a situation not of his making.

We had quite a tense time when I came back because the review results came out not long after. I didn't actually agree with the review but the board commissioned it. The board bumbled it a bit, I thought, used a sledgehammer where it wasn't needed. They [SLT] felt wounded.

In addition to communicating to the board the hurt that exclusion from the review process had engendered, Peter placated the senior team and encouraged them to make the best of the situation. The aftermath was that things “got very righteous for a while.” People were still “reasonably grumpy” and “a bit snide.” At the end of the year, Peter called a meeting to clarify new roles and ways of being as a senior team, and address operational priorities. When the team returned from holidays rejuvenated, they seemed resigned to, if not fully accepting of change. Peter offered the person most affected by restructuring the first choice of portfolio and has subsequently been impressed by their leadership in this area.

## **Appraising individual and team performance**

One of the unintentional consequences of the new leadership model is that SLT members have tended to “become a little bit rigid about their silos” and Peter is working on breaking this down.

I’d already decided that we’d introduce a team appraisal, in addition to our individual ones. We’re going to review how we operate as a team. There’s a danger that [DP in charge of discipline] gets under siege (“Oh, student in the crap? That’s yours”), while the others are in their offices. I’m saying, “Look, we shouldn’t have to ask each other, we just know. Can I give you a hand? You look really busy.” We need to blur things, be the team...

They said, “Oh, we want to get out, but we’ve got things to do, and people pop in all the time.” They worry now about being visible, and I’m saying, “You define it. Don’t let other people define visibility. Visibility should be around the core activities, about learning in classrooms, and you’re not expected to be riding the boundary with a clipboard. You should be in classrooms. You’ve got your phone and you can be available.” So, that’s where we’re at, at the moment.

Connected to the concept of a team appraisal is a fundamental questioning of the school appraisal system and the relevance of Teachers Council professional standards as the basis for this.

They’re just benchmarks. And, in fact, I’m saying that our charter is our guiding document. We’ve got manaakitanga. We’ve got our five values [mana tangata, tumanako, pono, aroha, ako], so I’m asking staff, “Why isn’t our appraisal system about how we can demonstrate that we hold those values?” The other things [professional standards] you can tick off, you can find evidence of those...

Over time, I’ve learned that the charter is our script. We’ve really shaped that, and we’re wary of things that take us away from the charter, like the Ministry and Teachers Council. So, we’re having another look at appraisal, and trying to make that part of professional development. We’re just trying to stay true to our word, and making

sure that everyone's on board.

Interested in how far this extends, I asked Peter whether charter values inform part of the annual reports written by Leaders of Learning (LOL).

Yes, that's a work in progress, we did them better last year. We don't want them to be self-justification exercises. We're trying to ask the right questions, to get interesting answers. At one of my previous schools, people just covered their backsides or asked for more resources. So, this time, we're trying to tie it to our charter.

### **Rethinking curriculum**

The charter has also provided the impetus for "major shifts" in curriculum organisation and thinking. Curriculum departments have been replaced by faculties, led by LOL. Meetings have been streamlined: one on "compliance and NZQA stuff," the other on "driving the future of the school" and a subsidiary group, the Change Leadership Team (CLT), is exploring images of future learning and teaching.

I went for the first part and let them [CLT] go. It's really good to see them exercising power and having a say. They've come up with this three year utopia and I'm pretty impressed, actually. I said, "This is right out there. This is great!" but now they're having second thoughts, and a bit scared they might frighten the horses. That's where the principal needs to step up and lead them to lead. I'm going to have another talk with them.

### **Student leadership**

When we first met, Peter reflected that student voice was "the one thing missing for me at the moment" and he indicated that the school was "looking at setting up a Te Kotahitanga student committee" that would "talk about learning and what it might look like, instead of mufti days and things like that." Consistent with this year's emphasis on a "less positional, school wide view of leadership," plans for a student learning council are well advanced.

They [students] have to apply for it. We're telling people, "This is about leadership. Your kid could be a leader from Year 7 on." They will be responsible for telling us what works for them as learners, what makes a good teacher, those sorts of things. The narratives that drove Te Kotahitanga are lovely, but I need to hear our own voices. We need to know our own voices.

Peter understands that student conceptions of leadership tend to be traditional and hierarchical. He is endeavouring to broaden their understanding of leadership and to see this manifest in practice.

I had some discussions last year, drawn out of exasperation by me, and possibly by them. I'd taken some money out of the budget and given it to student leaders. I said, "Look, here's the money. You guys organise yourselves. Any time there's damage in the toilets, it'll come out of that. You can have beautification. Spend it however you like." I've learnt now that you have to be more specific with kids, or maybe with that group. Of course, my being away didn't help, but I'd only given them hints and, in the end, I had to do some restructuring. We have to have some clear structures for students because, in a way, their view of leadership is tainted by how they've learnt about leaders and power. Sadly, I think schools actually reinforce a pretty helpless view of leaders, a co-dependent view of the principal [and hierarchy]. And students wanted that. They were saying, "We've got privileges for seniors" and I said, "Why is that? Why do you have your own toilet?" So, they were duffers, and I probably was too. I should have said to them, "This is what you've got to do and these are the outputs you've got to show me." We're working through that now with the prefects. In fact, we're going to get rid of the term 'prefects'. I've done it in my last school. The term's obviously Latin and certainly of not much relevance to this school. So they're tuakana. We say, "Tuakana teina. That's your job. You've got to work with the teina."

We're still on a journey there. I've learnt that it takes a while to deconstruct people's notions of power, and it then takes a while to



construct it with them. In a way, you're a walking enigma, really, because you're doing all the power things, wearing a suit. "Why are you wearing a suit?" I said, "Oh, well, you're trying to get respect. People dress up for visitors." But I think Māori have a great way in with tuakana teina. The kids are pretty good at looking after each other, especially the eldest and the youngest. So, yeah, it's a longer journey than I thought it would be but, when I reflect back on the roles that head students have had, I don't know if we as educators have a really good understanding of power. I don't know if teachers ever construct what power is. I think we work in quite a weird system. Anyway, we'll get there.

### **Achievement dip: The role of the whānau teacher**

After three to four years of impressive results, Peter doesn't think last year's NCEA Level 1 results "are that flash" and they will need to do a "forensic." He ventures four possible reasons for the dip in results, two external and two internal: the removal of Unit Standards (which he perceives as a "high decile attack"), unanticipated roll growth, the absence of key people, and the resultant shift in academic counselling oversight to whānau teachers. Of the four, Peter is convinced that the latter shoulders most responsibility.

Prior to that, [colleague on leave] knew every Level 1 and 2 kid. In a school of this size, she could, and she'd see kids and tell them, "You'd better get that in!" When responsibility for this went to whānau teachers, there was inconsistency, and there would be, when you think about it. A small book in New Zealand education would be 'Great secondary school whānau teachers I have known'. They're not that common. It's a low priority. I once overheard a teacher say, "I don't want to have a relationship with the students." He's leaving and good riddance to him. He's probably our last one of that [ilk]. So, I think that's the reason and we'll address that this year. You need your joy germs in the middle of the school.

Peter is consequently determined to "rark up" the role of the whānau

teacher and to align student management and attendance systems in support of this.

We're being really stubborn on that. Every teacher here has to be a whānau teacher. You have maybe 15-20 kids, no more, and you usually have brothers and sisters in the same group. Whānau teachers are expected to ring home on a regular basis, not just when students are in the crap.

### **Sustaining Te Kotahitanga**

As much as he hates the terminology and the hierarchy it implies, broadening the 'senior' leadership team to include the Te Kotahitanga coordinator is also a work in progress.

She's very good on policy and on strategic planning. I need to have her at the table. She was at the table before and she fell afoul of the two APs. She always felt they were asserting their power, but those times are gone now, I think. It's always interesting; power is the issue.

Peter has been more successful in strengthening the commitment of the existing senior team to Te Kotahitanga, two of whom are now undergoing Te Kotahitanga training.

Other changes are in the pipeline. Peter is strategising to sustain Te Kotahitanga initiatives once the funding runs out, there are changes to the staff meeting format, and the timetable is undergoing major review. Peter is currently seeding ideas, many of which derive from his recent sabbatical.

I'm being radical and posing these to staff. I'm sort of torn. In the last two principalships, I attacked systems and structures first, in order to get what I wanted. And I've always been articulate about what I wanted, but I think I've been less measured. [Here], I've gone and said, "Well this is what we need to do. We need to get these results" da, de, da. "We'll go there." I'm not waiting for those systems to change because they just take too long. And now what I've got, I think, semi-cunningly, is widespread criticism of the existing systems and structure, which I have no ownership of. The people who are going to

change them will be the Leaders of Learning, and they will have my endorsement. As I said, we have an Aston Martin running on an A30. We're actually trying to deliver an Aston Martin curriculum on an Austin A30...

I like leaving staff with an idea and saying, "Well, think about that." Timetable is critical and that's why we're beginning early. I said, "You know what I'd like to do for the Year 7-10 timetable? I think we will timetable groups of teachers together. You group of teachers there, that's the national curriculum, put that together with the kids and come back to us to show that you've covered all the areas. How about we timetable the school getting the teachers in the right places, first? Then we'll look at the subjects later." Well, I had mixed reaction on that. Most of them were pretty good: "Oh that would be really interesting."

### **Personal/professional toll**

Leading change is both exhilarating and enervating, physically and intellectually. Responding to the current context comes at a cost. There are short games to be played before the long game can be won.

I'm still questioning what it does to me and I'm not talking on an entirely personal level. It's a semi-personal, professional continuum. I'm pretty well now, but I've had to do a deal. I don't get out and about as much as I'd like to. I'm good at it, you know, and I'm a bit pissed off with myself. I'm manoeuvring, talking to people that I need to, to get things done, but it's taking me away from the kids. So that's definitely an agenda item for me, from next term onwards, because I want to role model that to the rest of my team. So that's the one thing that sticks, and I don't know if other principals are experiencing that. There's an irony there: as I'm really fighting for these kids, they're seeing less of me. I get on well with them and parents say, "You're so approachable." That's fine, but I need to build them into my daily routine. Hopefully, when you get back to me, you'll see. That's a

missing piece for me. Most of the manoeuvring's done...

There's a fine line between working hard so you actually feel good and working hard so you don't feel good. I'm probably a person who's going to struggle to not do much. I've used this Neil Young line before, but it's better to burn out than to rust. I'm feeling the rust is not quite there at the moment and I just think we're not that far from getting somewhere; two or three years, and then I want to leave some sustainability.

### **Tomorrow's Schools: The political context**

Despite strong personal politics and a deep commitment to social justice, Peter initially welcomed the Tomorrow's Schools reforms that reduced Ministry bureaucracy and gave principals greater autonomy to innovate. He was oblivious to the growing inequity that market competition between schools created.

I don't think I noticed it in my first school, to be honest, because it was semi-rural. I did notice the disparity between Māori and Pākehā, very much so in that school, but I didn't see it as Tomorrow's Schools. The two aren't in time, but I'm a big fan of NCEA. They're not the same but, taken together, you have the freedom to come up with something world class, so I saw Tomorrow's Schools as a bright new thing.

The gloss faded when Peter moved back to [school F] and was confronted by the realities of a competitive educational environment.

In an urban setting, I saw that poverty was closer to the school. It was more in your face. You drove past it. I told Lockwood Smith [Minister of Education], "You drive that back road. You look. There are kids living in bloody caravans." You have to look hard, but they're there. You can't escape that.

In Peter's view, deciles and decile-related targeted funding mask poverty and the hard conversations that need to be had.

It's that pasteurised view of education. We give money to low decile

schools and ignore the issue around poverty. We talk about boys/girls. That's crap. It's not even up there, versus class, on the literature I've seen. It seems to me that it's alright to talk about why boys should do better, but it's not alright to talk about why poor kids deserve better. Market competition between schools has narrowed the focus of leadership to the individual school. Peter believes leadership is

contextual in the age that we're brought up in. It's pretty selfish times, has been for the last 20 years, I think. What I miss in NZ is the lack of a clarion call for something decent. Instead, schools are competing against each other. In fact, if you want to get ahead, there are some easy cards to play, rather than be worried about kids not achieving; they're just collateral damage, really. High decile principals wouldn't know a 'long tail' if it fell over them. You know that it's not even a reality for those principals because the 'long tail' can't get into their schools.

He is appalled by the lack of ethics that sees good students "being raided by supposedly better schools" in other areas. In [location], he perceived a double edged sword: "I saw that people were still looking down on kids from West Auckland and yet people didn't rate their local schools, they went elsewhere."

Peter is equally critical of the neoliberal emphasis on managerialism and performativity, much of which he dismisses as "Taylorism in drag. Never were there so many suits bought in the name of education. That's posturing." He contends that a raft of external accountability measures have rendered freedoms illusory and his response to colleagues who maintain they have the "freedom to run our own schools" is "you haven't got the freedom. Look at your charters; you have to fiddle around with words there." He thinks the Education Review Office (ERO) has a lot to answer for.

I'm not an ERO fan. I can play the game as well as anyone else. I have no problems in doing that, but I don't believe there's research that shows that makes a difference. I would rather have an inspectorate or superintendent model, than ERO. I also don't like being manipulated.

Take self-review, for example. It's pretty bloody ironic that ERO are telling me how to self-review. There's no self in this review. Of course we've got to self-review but it just seems to me that it's, "You do your self-review and then we'll tell you how effective your self-review is, and we'll give you five years, if you're really good," which I think's a joke.

While Peter enjoys ERO's interrogatory evidence focus and is happy to justify decisions made, he finds the nature of the evidence ERO collects problematic.

The evidence is a worry to me. I think there's a lot of gardening going on in education. So, there's this top layer that we garden around: literacy and numeracy. We measure the things that are easy to measure. Literacy and numeracy are really important foundational skills but God forbid if that was all we did at school. What about the charter, the national curriculum, the competencies? Schools aren't judged on those.

Acknowledging that charter values and curriculum competencies are harder to measure, whilst statistical and other test information is easy to compute, Peter remarked,

Maybe that's the human condition. Maybe we're not made for measuring.... And who really wants to know? It's the chattering classes. I don't think people need a lot of that information. If you want to find out about the myths and legends in education, go to the TradeMe message board. It's a *defacto* where people are making their decisions. People are saying things like "I want to go to a school in a high decile," and asking "What decile's [school]?" Some people are saying, "It's not about decile," but it's that sort of social class conversation.

Peter laments the absence of real dialogue around social issues:

I don't see the passion and arguments in education that there should be, so there are lots of elephants in the room: "What do you mean by a top school?" People don't challenge because Tomorrow's Schools means, that if you do, there's a danger that you will lose popularity

and your market will fall. So Tomorrow's Schools has been a context that has actually worked against addressing national issues. I don't think the question 'What's worth fighting for?' has been posed in New Zealand. What are people fighting for? To maintain advantage over the neighbouring school, it seems.

### **The real issue**

He suggests that the real issue is around poor and rich, "and yet, principals don't have those conversations. In fact, almost all principals' meetings work against honest dialogue." He is critical of the self-congratulatory, patch protecting nature of much of the conversation at principal conferences.

We don't need to buy into that. We need to sit around tables and talk over interesting things that we're doing in our schools, rather than listening to someone from America talk to us about strategic planning. So, it's that discourse. Some principals either don't understand power, or there's not much metacognition going on... others are living a lie, really. Or they're living the New Zealand dream that you work your way up to a high decile school, or you stream and keep kids in their place.

Peter is keen to participate in counter-hegemonic dialogue.

I suppose what I've found is that you need solace, either from readings of people who are on the same track, or from meetings with [likeminded] people. Otherwise you'll get taken in, I think, and you'll be lonely.

Peter is an avid reader, a habit developed during childhood when, having read all the books in the children's section, he was "the first person in the Library allowed up to the Adult section."

People are amazed at what I read, and I read a lot, especially if it's provocative or makes me think. In fact, if you ask me for seminal leadership events, they're probably in two or three books that I've read. And they come back to haunt you a little later, to provide a context... Actually it's strange – I was walking on the beach the other

afternoon and *Social Justice and the City* by David Harvey, in the early seventies, came to mind. I remember reading that and it making me think. I love the title of the book, *I Won't Learn From You and Other Acts of Creative Maladjustment* by Herbert Kohl. When I was doing my MEd Admin, I really enjoyed the work of Michael Apple. That gave me a real handle on hegemony that I hadn't had before, so I still remember that. My latest reading's been around managing change. Michael Fullan's stuff is a sort of signpost for leadership, and the other author is Ben Levin. We've used *How to Turn Around 5,000 Schools* as a template here.

When I came back from my sabbatical, I was at the beach, the waves were crashing in, and I was bloody crook. Breathing took precedence, but I got these books off TradeMe. They show that Māori issues in New Zealand aren't new. I've even said to Māori staff, "Have a look at some of this stuff" because my view, generally, is that as you get older, you say it as it is. It's a good feeling. And I think we're being anaesthetised by some of the research in New Zealand, the best evidence syntheses and all that. They're good, but they're not page turners. I suppose I've chosen to be anaesthetised. I've read all the BES, but they're very technical and they take away injustice.

Peter expresses a preference for texts that challenge and critique the status quo: "I need to be indignant when I read books." A quick scan of his office exposes Paulo Freire's (1994) *Pedagogy of Hope*, Ausubel's (1965) *Māori Youth: A Psychoethnological Study of Cultural Deprivation*, and Ritchie's (1978) *Chance to be Equal*. Peter is conversant with the works of Fullan, Hargreaves, Levin, Postman and Weingartner (*Teaching as a Subversive Activity*), Ken Robinson, Hattie, Hulley and Dier (*Harbors of Hope*).

I'm surprised more principals don't read, in a way, but then you've got this whole urgent but unimportant and non-urgent and important stuff. I suppose if I was missing anything in educational leadership, its intellectual debate.

Intellectual debate involves a search for like-minded sparring partners:



So, I thought, let's set up this group to talk about the stuff that really matters. At the SPANZ conference, another principal whom I knew from past Te Kotahitanga days, probably a little bit of a fish out of water like me, sidled up to me at dinner. I said, "You know what? I've always thought we should form a special group of our own. Don't worry with conferences; waste of time. People talk about everything but what matters." We've gone through the principals in the country we think we'd like to invite. We're looking at leaders for social justice and reckon we can name 20, if that...

It's an 'un-conference', not a conference. No outside speakers. It will be about more radical views of how the New Zealand curriculum should be taken advantage of. Honest conversations about learning and teaching, inspirational maybe. I don't ever hear anything about the national curriculum. That's actually our nation's vision, I believe, and I think it's a really wonderful document, but I don't see it being talked about. It's more likely to be about sports poaching and other things. We want to talk about poverty, not from a deficit point of view, but how you address that, what works. You're not going to get that at those old boys' club set-ups, really. So, we were quite excited by that. No questions about rugby.

### **The dance of principalship**

Music also provides solace. Peter has a "massive" and "eclectic" song collection and enjoys mixing compilations for friends and colleagues. When [Te Kotahitanga co-ordinator] was appointed principal of another school, Peter presented her with a double CD.

It was quite good fun making it. It starts off with *Take a Chance on Me*. It all goes well, *Good Vibrations*, *Rock the Casbah*, that sort of stuff. Then there's bad times, with *Rats in my Kitchen* and *Don't Cry Sister*, and you bounce back out of that. I also had *True Colours* and *Soul* by Van Morrison. I said, "You've gotta have soul, you've gotta have soul for this job. That's what keeps you going." If I was doing it for someone

else, I'd finish with that Clash song, *Should I Stay or Should I Go?* And then there's *The Long Run* by the Eagles. I'm not entirely a fan but, after listening to it, I thought, there it is, there's principalship in one song.

### **Transforming context through mentoring**

Recognising that he can only transform the education system one school at a time, Peter sees mentoring not only as a professional responsibility but an accelerant for change: "I'm really enjoying being a mentor. You get pleasure out of people who have similar beliefs and passions and you've got to support them because they could take the road more travelled and not even recognise those issues." Mentoring others also prompts him to reflect on the manner in which his leadership thinking and practice has developed over time, and the extent to which his rhetoric aligns with lived reality.

I think I've customised a few changes in my approach. When you're mentoring people, you often say, "Well, this is what you need to do" and you're thinking, yeah, that's right. How does that reflect in my day? How much of that have I done?

Peter feels a strong sense of satisfaction when colleagues who share his social justice imperative are promoted to principalship, and he describes the context his Te Kotahitanga co-ordinator has recently taken on as

real tough. She wants to make a difference. I've seen similarities between her and [previous colleague]. [Previous colleague] could have gone to a hell of an easier school than that, but she said she wants to make a difference. So, okay, go for it. And it's very similar, it's decile one where [TK coordinator's] gone.

He remains hopeful that this represents a way forward, however long it might take: "Look, I never thought there'd be a black president in my lifetime, having sat in front of the TV in the early sixties and seen that other stuff, and now there's one there. So there's hope for change." Interestingly, Te Kotahitanga has provided leadership opportunities that constitute an alternative pathway for aspiring principals. Peter's TK coordinator held

neither of the two traditional senior leadership apprentice positions (AP, DP) and it was her leadership of Te Kotahitanga school wide change that secured her appointment as principal.

### **Full circle: Leadership legacy**

Coming full circle, we returned to the personal context as Peter considered his leadership and legacy. The fruition of an 18-year principal career looms on the horizon and the potential for Parkinson's to accelerate its advance provides cause for contemplation.

You learn a bit about mortality and vulnerability and how to clear the mind, I think. I'm not running out of time, but I want - here's my legacy, I suppose. I remember my father saying, "What are you doing this bloody work for? They're not going to name a building after you." I said, "Oh, I'm not interested in that anyway, or a statue, or any bloody thing." No, I don't want that. It's more than just the school, I have to say. I actually work for the public school system. That's my real employer, but I have a duty to work here. I think the legacy is [colleagues who have gone on to become principals]. They're the legacy. I don't want to see what happened at [school F] happen here. I need subversive people within the system. That's how I see sustainability...

I find it really hard to divorce the personal from the professional. If I had a big message about me, that's it. What you see is what you get. But I'm shaped a lot by who I am and we're quite political animals, actually. I think teaching should be a transformative activity. I'm not into status and maintaining, and yet sadly you end up, or could end up, propping up a system that needs to be bloody changed...

I'd like to think if you look back over your career - what would you look back on? What would people say that you've done? And maybe you would have people who would say you've made the system more humane, or you've ameliorated it, but you'd like to think that you did more than that.

There is no doubt that Peter's influence is being felt at the school level. Towards the end of our time together, a long-standing member of staff, who happened to be in his office, was drawn into the conversation. Peter was intrigued by her observation around the extent to which successive principals have "flavoured" the school.

I don't know if I know that, because I wasn't around for those other people. And it happens a little bit the other way, too, I have to say. The school tends to flavour you a bit. You just do your job and then you think you must be an influence. Yes, I think you flavour the school and the school flavours you.

For his part, Peter is feeling "healthier, ironically" and buoyed by the progress being made. "I'm pleased I'm still really caring about the job because I always thought I would. And I'll know when to go, you know?"

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*Post script:*

Peter retired at the end of 2013. At his farewell, a young ex-student paid tribute to Peter's strong cultural identity and moral compass:

Horekau he tumuaki I tua atu I a Pita, nei ra te rere o nga whakamiha ki a koe e te rangatira e Pita. Nga manaakitanga o te Atua ki runga ki a koe me to huarahi hou kei mua I a koe. Mauri ora e te rangatira.

There is no other principal better or beyond you, Peter. My acknowledgement flows out to you. May God bless you on the new pathway set before you. Life everlasting to you, chief.



## CHAPTER FIVE: OLIVIA

### Part I

Prior to meeting for the first time, Olivia forwarded me a narrative describing some of the pivotal early schooling experiences that shaped her leadership being. Born into one of two European families in a small rural community, Olivia attended the local primary school, total roll 70 students. She recalls tikanga infusing every aspect of community life and much of her initial schooling taking place at the local marae.

This was a community school ... well before its time in developing culturally located and successful students who knew their strengths, were competitive well beyond the tiny size, and had a belief that, with work and determination, anything was possible.

Looking back “through the lens of adulthood,” she appreciates that rich “cultural and spiritual understandings” more than compensated the financial impoverishment that marginal backblocks farming inflicted on her family and those around her. Enrolment at the district high school brought cultural identity, socio-economic status and academic ability into sharp relief when Olivia experienced the social and intellectual dislocation that was to shatter her youthful habitus.

At thirteen, I had never made the cognitive leap that I was somehow culturally different from my school mates and this was brought home shockingly as new class mates and teachers commented that I was the “poor little white kid hanging out with the Māoris.” Up to that point, I hadn’t even realised there was a difference.

With this first reality check rocking me to the foundations, I then went on to discover that I was not the achiever I thought I was either. I could not spell. This was something that had always been an issue, but was shadowed by other strengths. At secondary school, this convention suddenly mattered a great deal more. I was labelled by some teachers as lazy and dumb.... I struggled on, growing more and more aware of my failings rather than my strengths. Most vividly, I

remember my Year 11 English teacher regularly branding me as a failure, with red pen-filled essays and comments of ‘good ideas 80%’ crossed out and ‘appalling spelling 40%’ written in capital letters in its place. I got 51% for School Certificate English that year.

This planted my initial seed that I wanted to make a difference in education. I chose subjects where I developed the best relationships with teachers who could see past my writing issues and completed secondary school unremarkably, with some serious anxieties about my ability to write and a ‘B’ average, except for my love of art. With art I could be me, no red pen-filled essays, just what I could get on paper to share my vision of my world.

Fulfilling her parents’ aspiration that she be the first in her extended family to attend university, Olivia “had to work to pay for [her studies] but somehow that made it so much more important.” As “art school was just too expensive,” Olivia chose education and this proved fortuitous when one of her lecturers quickly diagnosed the cause of her “bad spelling.” Relieved to discover that “dyslexia was not linked to dumbness,” Olivia’s learning difficulty was finally addressed and study “suddenly got so easy.” She “found an educational voice ... learned to love learning again” and completed her degree with an ‘A’ grade average.

A deep yearning to fit in, coupled with the courage to fight oppression in its multiple guises, underpins Olivia’s determination to re-build, re-form and re-create truly inclusive schools. This is no simple theoretical or intellectual exercise; it is embodied in visceral knowledge born out of life on the social and academic periphery. Olivia has experienced first-hand the damaging impact of marginalisation and ‘failure’, and the restorative, uplifting sense of wholeness that comes from belonging and succeeding.

Dislocation from home, school and community had a profound impact on teenage Olivia and it took all her resilience to survive her secondary schooling: “I think it’s just that practicality of being a farm kid, that ‘never give up’ thing of being a country kid.” She has since wondered, however, how many other children “felt tormented by that world” but lacked the “pig

headedness” to do something about it.

While Olivia found a means of expression, sanctuary, and fulfilment in art, both at school and at university, being awarded an A++ for a university history assignment broke the shackles of perceived academic inadequacy: “I kind of thought I’d arrived. It was a kind of awakening. I wasn’t dumb. I wasn’t average. I could actually be above average. For the little country kid who didn’t fit anywhere, that was huge. I framed it!”

### **Early career**

Inspired by the progressive initial teacher education programme at Waikato, and convinced that all learners could succeed, Olivia considers herself extremely fortunate in her first teaching position to have worked with “an incredibly influential principal well ahead of his time.” Reflecting on what made him so, Olivia singles out

his humanity, his ability to see success in all kids, and his ability to find the best people he possibly could to stack in his team.

Underpinning that was his desire to see kids succeed, all kids, different kids. There was no singular success track and I didn’t understand all of that until I left and went on to other schools.

And it worked. The manaakitanga that sat around that school was phenomenal and it was a community based school. Things that we’re now researching through Te Kotahitanga were just naturally happening there and I realised that it was his leadership that did that. It was profound. He still had difficult staff. I look back now and I see that, too. He still had his challenges, but he was reforming at a time well before reform was accepted practice and probably marginalised politically in his profession because of it. It wasn’t legitimised in writing till much later on in his career.

Olivia spent “a bloody long time jumping around other schools desperately looking to find that again and realised that it actually wasn’t there.” While it might not have existed at a school wide level, she could at least change what happened in her classroom.



And that was where my educational leadership stuff really began. You kind of built it from the grass roots up. I became focused on the ability of all students to succeed as individuals and appreciate what it was to feel that rush of success. Much of this work was in an effort to recreate what I had seen in my first teaching position and part was to overcome the feelings I had about secondary school crushing the life out of students who did not fit the accepted norms.

During this period, Olivia discovered that art room conversations provided rich insight into student interests and aspirations: “Kids doing art talk all the time. You just had to listen. It was what we did with that information that became really valuable to kids, advocacy for kids, essentially.” Advocacy for students saw Olivia question the hidden curriculum in timetable structures, the constrained choices students were forced to make, and the allocation of Sixth Form certificate grades whereby top grades generated by Year 11 art students were allocated to other Year 12 subjects.

Some systems didn't work for kids at all, and yet we persisted with them. Timetables for example - one of the most horrendous blocks to kids actually achieving what they need to.... In those early years, the grid used to be pre-made! The kids' choices meant nothing.

Olivia railed against the “politicised nature of schools that run around adults” and wreak injustice on students. This advocacy not only required courage and steely determination, but also perspicacity around what could and could not be changed.

If I was an art teacher, I could change the kids that I had direct affect over in the classroom. If I was a dean, I could play with a year level. If I'm higher than that, then I'm able to change structures that affected more kids. Social injustice was a great motivator to get higher within the structures of education to make a real difference for students, particularly those who were, like me, from low decile roots.

I was a strong willed, outspoken little toe rag. And I think for my very right wing principal in at least one of those schools, I would have been the big fat thorn in his side. I don't think he would have

characterised what I was doing as loyal opposition. It was just opposition.

Olivia recalls her mentors advising her, “You know, if you don’t walk in their step, maybe you should walk somewhere else before you get massacred!” This sparked the realisation that “when the context doesn’t fit, no amount of fight is going to make that difference” and the decision to move on. Endeavouring to find contexts that fit is not always straightforward and ensuring that they remain compatible even less so.

I always like schools that have a strong cultural base. I just felt more comfortable there. I understand that that was what I’d grown up with. I was never going to end up in a decile ten Remuera school. I wasn’t going to fit. I understood that and I think those schools probably understood that too. So my selection of schools was around ‘pick what fits’...

Again, I was appointed by a very charismatic principal. There was a shift in there to a principal who was very right wing. Big change. And when a ship changes direction and you find your direction going one way, and the ship [going another], that’s really challenging stuff.

Postgraduate study enabled Olivia to navigate turbulent waters and to “legitimise” her thinking around educational leadership. As a “fresh faced kid” appointed to a DP position in her early 30s, Olivia found that a formal qualification “gave you some cred [ibility].” Furthermore, she was

trying to prove that there were new ways, different ways to think about what was happening educationally. Here was this whole room of people who actually thought like that! And finding a whole research base and study that was actually encouraging us to think like that. I learnt that you can reform a school by reforming the underpinning systems that sit there and then build the change up.

In the process, she “developed one of the best peer groups you can ever imagine.” Perceiving educational leadership as a singular activity, Olivia thinks it important to “have a group of people who are at least likeminded.” They kind of talked me through DPship and into principalship. A lot of us

have transitioned at similar stages through our careers and that's been really helpful."

The opportunity to chart new territory came when Olivia was appointed DP at [secondary school].

Basically, as I walked in, the school was crashing. The principal walked out. The other new DP and I were left going, "Oh, cool, we'll run the whole lot completely green." ... There wasn't a single functional system in the school. It was the most wonderful clean canvas you could ever have wanted. It was a forgiving system in that if you tried it and it didn't work, you tried something else. You weren't as constrained by traditional systems that are semi-successful. Let's just say reforming a school that's been twentieth century successful to a twenty first century model is a hell of a lot harder than reforming a crashed out, going to be closed school that doesn't see itself as successful at all, because anything you do is good.

The fledgling senior team's immediate priority was to "get kids in, get kids successful, and change the culture." Finding and celebrating "even the tiniest success" was critical to re-culturing the school over a seven year period, as was evidence-informed practice, and the physical presence of the senior leadership team in classrooms.

The cultural change was the biggest thing. By that, I don't mean the European/Māori divide. It wasn't even about that. It was about, we're from [location], we can't be successful, we're brown and down. They [staff, students and families] used to say this, "We're brown and down from [location]." Oh my God. You had a whole culturally oppressed community.

We started from the smallest possible thing and we just built up, until, in our final year, we had an 80% pass rate.... We refit student systems to manage data appropriately, to get data out there, to use it with staff to change practice. The school was small enough that you could get out and see all your staff teaching and shift pedagogy to actually engage kids.

Leading change on this scale took “a lot of time and a lot of things went wrong.” The environment was so challenging that only those deeply committed to change remained. Halfway through that process, the senior team became aware of Te Kotahitanga and thought:

Hold it, we’re doing a lot of this. This sounds really interesting. We were an 80% Māori school and we fought like buggery to get into Phase 4. We saw it as an incredible coup. Legitimise the work, you know? Find more ways to spread to the educators on the staff what was going on. The cool thing about that was that you didn’t have resistors for long. You either fitted in or you left because, if you didn’t fit, it was bloody hard work. It was a very tough school in the early days.

### **First principalship**

Having felt at home in a predominantly Māori school, Olivia’s choice of school for her first principalship was somewhat surprising. What attracted her to the position was the change agenda promoted by the appointing board.

They wanted the school to keep going [with Te Kotahitanga]. They wanted success for all, which is of course the platform I walked in on. They wanted a far more bicultural approach to education. I’m completely immersed in that. They wanted sustainability. They were also a Phase 4 school and it wasn’t embedding well. I soon understood why.

Looking back, Olivia acknowledges her naivety in not doing due diligence before taking on the role.

What you see on the surface isn’t always what you get. What I got was a racially divided community that actually, to put not too fine a word on it, was oppression based and [did not want change].... We like it this way and brown will be down. Funnily, a very similar wording that I’d heard in the early days in [previous location], but perpetuated by a middle class white culture. The most culturally and socio-

economically divided community I've ever seen. I should have worked that out really.

Once their change agent was appointed, all but one member of the board resigned, and Olivia was confronted with a "right wing conservative board sliding over the top."

It was a non-election. They were the only ones that stood. A good lesson in politics around boards, a bad lesson in what boards can be. When boards go bad, life gets very difficult for everybody. So here we were, change agents in a school in flux, in to do 'x' job with the board wanting you to do 'y' job. It's just the incompatibility of it.

She met similar resistance from staff who, "in change shock to the eyeballs", applauded the new board's decision to halt reform. Too late, Olivia realised the folly of following "a change agent with a hatchet" and a tide of conservatism that dictated the path ahead: "It wasn't consolidate, it was far worse than that. It was retrench. It was truly retrench." When I suggested this must have been a nightmare, Olivia laughed wryly:

Living it was a lot more challenging. I was so much more of a challenge to that community than I even realised. This culturally layered person who believed in the rights of Māori strongly and passionately, who had far more affinity with the Māori community there than with any of the rest of the community, launches in, with kids under one arm, leading the school. It was bad enough that I was a woman, that I had kids, and that I was leading; [even worse] that my husband was actually working in another position in the school and I was his boss! That was kind of like the last straw for this conservative community. I've never seen anything like it.

The nightmare was relatively short-lived in that, after a year, the board was dismissed and Olivia moved on to her second principalship. She vividly recalls an ERO reviewer vindicating her approach:

She [review officer] said, "I wondered whether you guys just hadn't forced change too fast. I wondered. I read what you'd done. I could see what you've tried to do, but I wondered if you just didn't push too

hard.” She said, “I take it all back.”

Picking up on the ERO reviewer’s comment, I asked Olivia whether there were times when she might have pushed change through too quickly.

Yes and no. Yes, when you see the fear in the eyes of your staff - literally. But, no, when one or two of those staff would turn up and say, “There’s three Māori boys down the back of the school. There must be going to be trouble.” So, as I said to ERO, and I still hold by, to have left that unchanged would have ... legitimised what was happening to those kids.

Olivia readily concedes that not all staff bought into a discriminatory discourse and credits a few “amazing practitioners” who commenced Te Kotahitanga work prior to her arrival and continued it after her departure.

All they needed was to get fired up and find some systems to help them make the change. They have some of the highest marks in [region] and their gaps are almost zero with Māori and non-Māori, but that’s the work of a couple of individuals; it’s not necessarily the belief system of the staff.

Trying her utmost to improve an untenable situation, Olivia used appointment processes to “change a school by changing who’s in front of your kids. I learnt that lesson from way back.” She also learnt that the appointment of the lead facilitator was critical. Her predecessor had appointed a teacher whose subject wasn’t popular and had “done herself out of a job.” Worse still, this teacher confided to Olivia that she was “afraid of Māori kids and [didn’t] know how to get on with Māori parents, either.” While Olivia recognises internal struggle over moral “courage and conviction” and “trying to make life liveable in a community,” she thinks the previous principal made a

soft option choice in using the project as a way of mopping up staffing, as opposed to using a project for its actual intent....That’s why I’m so pleased to see more emphasis in Phase 5 on strategic leadership, on distributing leadership to create sustainability, because you would never end up in a position where you’re putting somebody like that in

the role. That role is just **so** pivotal.

Reflecting on this first principalship, as she periodically does, Olivia concedes that she would do things very differently now. Contrary to the “Slow down” that I was anticipating, she says she would have had “a lot more courage of my convictions. I probably would have been even worse. Isn’t that terrible? I probably would have been out in six months.” Although she believes that the context she found herself in was irretrievable, Olivia credits this experience as a valuable learning journey. While some changes seemed embedded when she left, Olivia wonders about long term sustainability, and learnt “really valuable dos and don’ts - a wonderful platform for here, though, learning what I’ve learnt through two completely different implementations of Phase 4.”

## **Part II**

### **Back home**

Leading in oppressed and divided communities held Olivia in good stead when she walked into “one of the most traditional schools” in an “incredibly stratified ... predominantly Māori community, driven by predominantly European values.” Sensing the potential for *déjà vu*, I asked Olivia what the attraction was. She responded,

It was back in the Bay. It was home. I accepted that I wasn’t [region], that I was [home region]. In all honesty, it was a predominantly Māori school and it was an escape hatch from [previous school], too. I make no bones about that. Here, again, another liberal board had seen the good things about Te Kotahitanga going on, and wanted it. My predecessor had wanted it here. So, they wanted to see change. A very strong, culturally astute board here, as opposed to other boards that I’ve seen, and quite hands on in what they were wanting to do.

## **Campaigning for Te Kotahitanga**

While inclusion in Phase 5 of Te Kotahitanga was not guaranteed, the board expected Olivia to campaign hard towards this end, a goal she readily embraced: “My job here, in a way, was to fight like buggery to bring in Phase 5 Te Kotahitanga.” Despite “unashamedly begging” the Te Kotahitanga team to bring the project to the area, Olivia had “learnt enough politically” to know financial logistics would preclude them working with a single school in a new region. She thus collaborated with secondary principal colleagues to submit a joint application. “Greatly relieved” that the school was successful in this, Olivia was upset that three of the seven schools missed out:

Having the whole community in would have helped us hugely. We trade kids amongst ourselves. It was always gutting there was insufficient money for that. I understand, politically, why – doesn’t make it any easier. Hasn’t improved relations with other schools in the area either.

## **Reading context and cultivating the environment**

Te Kotahitanga represented a “flagship for change” that opened “the door to begin the systems reform that is actually changing the school.” Olivia’s initial reading of context suggested she could afford to move a little more slowly with regard to school wide change. “It was a chance to come in and sit on my hands for a couple of months and actually watch – a very different approach from the other school.”

To begin the repositioning process, Olivia needed to counter the perception that the school was doing well. On discovering that the school operating system lacked the capacity to identify achievement disparities, she sifted through the records manually and brought student success profiles to the staff’s attention.

Its stats reflect its European success and it didn’t take much to show the yawning gap. As I say, if you’re Māori here, you have a 50% chance of getting NCEA Level 1; if you’re European, you probably have more



like a 63% chance, or higher. There's a clear divide.

I'd sit at home for hours working it all out. Same patterns. Again, it was that data that shifted the most pivotal person in the management team who [believed] our kids were doing well. It's like, "Well, actually, no they're not, they're split." Flip the stat on its ear. Simple things like flip the stat on its ear. Here we are saying we're passing this number of kids; well that means we're failing this number. If we look at who we're failing, oh my goodness, look, they're all brown. It was just that simplicity of begin the talk.

Olivia also exposed "institutionalised social layering" in student attendance data.

That was me teaching my team that things are not always what they seem, and that if we layer back enough lenses on the data, there's some really horrific stories under there. We used to keep attendance data and send this lovely report to the Ministry about how good we were because we were at 80% attendance. It wasn't until we unpacked it that we started to see the trends and, hold it, this is really ugly. On a wet Friday, nobody from that half of town comes, but why would you walk 6km in the rain and risk being run over by at least three logging trucks on the way?

It transpired that school bus routes exclude students living in [suburb], the majority of whom can ill-afford public transportation. Deficit explanations for non-attendance abound and Olivia is grappling with entrenched views.

How can you get the board to work through that? How can we get our staff to see past that? And see it for what it is? It's not that the kid's lazy and can't be bothered coming or, as the Minister so readily said, because the parents are spending all the money on cigarettes and booze. The Minister saying, "Why haven't they got pushbikes?" Well, if they can't afford milk and bread and the bus token, how can they actually afford the bloody bikes? And would you send your kid through six roundabouts?

Early on, Olivia realised that historical overstaffing and a falling roll made a

curriculum and pastoral needs analysis (CAPNA) inevitable and this threatened staff security. “I wasn’t very popular. I was pretty much the devil incarnate at that point.” While Olivia has “grown an armadillo coat” to protect the person within, her reading of context, together with the practical wisdom gained in Phase 4 schools, led her to adopt a softer, more strategic approach to change: “The talk wasn’t as ‘in your face’ as it had been previously. It had to be much more subtle. It was almost like infiltrate and teach; you couldn’t slap between the eyes.’

By feeding the management team *Culture Speaks* (Bishop & Berryman, 2006) and “other simple research papers,” Olivia “began the repositioning story ahead of even getting the project.” While this process felt interminably slow - “almost drop the water on the stone stuff” - she quickly identified potential facilitators and set about “grow[ing] the people, grow[ing] the potential, awhi, awhi, awhi.” Convinced that selection of ideal candidates would be more likely with a consensus approach, there was “no shoulder tapping, no mates’ jobs; panel interview. Once everyone agreed why we were deciding who we were, no-one was going to argue anymore because they helped pick the person. Appointments were made with the end in mind.” Olivia continues,

So all this is being created as a subtext to knowing that we were going to, eventually, no matter how hard it took, convince Russell [Bishop] to put money in this direction. I’m bloody glad he did when he did, otherwise I would have looked like a right tosser! I think we’d have carried on with the philosophy anyway, though, because it is a philosophical stance, but it wasn’t going to work without the legitimisation or the money that the project was bringing in.

### **Participation in Te Kotahitanga**

While participation in Te Kotahitanga is ostensibly voluntary, Olivia worked with the board to “kind of make it compulsory in a cunning way.”

Mindful of the furore that erupted at her previous school, she “covered arse” by having the board document in their minutes the “clear expectation that

all staff will be involved in Te Kotahitanga. That's it, that's all it says. Will be. There's no might. There's no maybe. There's no when. There's will - which gives you a lot of room."

Staff vacancies are advertised with Te Kotahitanga objectives in mind and the TK facilitator regularly joins the appointment panel.

In the *Gazette*, the ads we run state we are proudly a Te Kotahitanga school. In every interview, there's a set of questions saying, "You appreciate that if you join us, you will be participating in Te Kotahitanga?" If, at that point, they say "No," it's obvious we're not going to appoint them. So it's just systemising how to bring change into the organisation.

This also applies to internal appointments, especially pivotal curriculum positions that require fidelity to Te Kotahitanga kaupapa. Involving the TK facilitator in these decisions not only helps ensure the right person is appointed but broadens the facilitator's understanding of school processes: "Why do we appoint people? Why do we not appoint people? Where do they fit? What are we asking them? What are they telling us?"

The appointment of 14 new staff has accelerated change and diluted resistance amongst the second cohort, many of whom are status quo diehards. They "now have these absolutely keen bunnies stacked in with them" and this has enabled Olivia to tip the balance toward change.

I think that's one thing I learnt about decile 1 education: expect change. Voice that expectation and provide no other out. There's no out, it's not even up for discussion. And that's just the way it is. It's almost like the cultural shift we've made is actually around the rhetoric and around the language: "Well, where are we going? This is what we believe."

The downside of halving the average age of staff in 18 months has been the vacuum created in middle leadership.

It's about getting the right people to apply, too. Our young people coming through are still a little bit young and the older people aren't wanting to step up, so we're literally devoid of middle leadership.

The need to grow middle leadership, particularly HOFs, followed the CAPNA and introduction of curriculum faculties towards the end of 2009. While these new roles have the potential to distribute leadership more broadly, Olivia has encountered some resistance from staff who argue that they are managers rather than leaders: “No, no. We’re managers. You tell us what to do and we’ll go and do it,’ which actually translated into you tell us what to do and we’ll argue with you about it and do nothing.”

She understands that traditional power structures have, in part, encouraged intransigence.

There was an expectation that the principal stood up and did everything. Very strange; not what you’d call a distributed model.

Power sat with a few people, that’s how they maintained power. You know the kind of model. We were all guilty of it as DPs at some stage or another, where we did it all for everybody and that’s how we maintained the status quo. Can you imagine trying to run a meeting with 23 HODs, where the loudest voice was sometimes the person who was actually the tiniest little department? Again, power base; power base was how loud you could squeak.

An expectation that she will “sit and listen” while others “get up and speak” does not mean that Olivia relinquishes positional power entirely: “I still hold the odd power of veto but not like that.”

### **Supporting the Te Kotahitanga team**

Managing vocal opponents has proven challenging for the Te Kotahitanga team and, because they are “very young in comparison to the rest of the staff,” there is also ageism to contend with: “We’ve hit all sorts of really interesting stuff around staff not really wanting those young people telling them how to suck eggs, and doing all sorts of devious sneaky things to get out of that.” Olivia is wise to this and knows how important emotional and strategic support is, in developing the

confidence of our team to actually stand up and be counted. That’s why there are couches in here. We spend a lot of time sitting in here

talking, lamenting what doesn't work, and picking the pieces back up.... Those conversations of how can we build together, how we can play team tag, who plays good cop/bad cop. All those ways of subtly creating shift; the stuff that DPs learn really quickly if they get sly and cunning.

I think it's been really hard on the team. They've realised that what used to be personal friendships could be gone in a second. There's been a lot of learning around - when you're in leadership, there's a level of aloofness that you maintain and there's a reason for that. It's not just learning about facilitating Te Kotahitanga, it's actually learning to be leaders. And I think one of the most fabulous things about this programme is that it's a crash course in school leadership and school leadership for reform - which is exciting stuff, but tiring, you know? And, every so often, if you're feeling fragile, it's **hard**, and there've been times where there's been lots of tears from the team: "I just don't know what to do next." "Okay, roll it back together, pick it up, back to the priorities. Why are we doing this?" and you can kind of pull it around.

### **Aligning systems: Formal leadership structures**

Building a cohesive senior team was an early priority and the fact that the DP applied for Olivia's principal's position made this a sensitive undertaking: "Good work, though. Having to re-form itself and review where its priorities were has probably been the making of this team." Restructuring has focused both on the roles undertaken and the composition of the senior team itself. Olivia perceived a strong imbalance in the existing team, with power concentrated in the hands of the principal, "one DP running three people's jobs; one DP running half a person's job, and nobody else." When her senior DP was awarded a national study award, Olivia seized the opportunity to differentiate leadership roles.

It forced others to step up while she was away. Boy, thank God for that. A) They realised she was doing three jobs and so did she - very

important. B) When she came back, I didn't give all the jobs back. She openly accepted that and said, "Well I don't want any of that, anyway. I want to do something else." She's come back talking about the same things I came in talking about. Again, it's legitimised the need for change. Prior to that, she was very much locked into "we're fine." If you'd been here for the last ten years, how would you know? You don't know what you don't know. It's a failing within our system.

Over the short term, Olivia has used fixed term contracts to broaden team membership and trial different configurations. This gives people a chance to grow and then move on to other things. It would have been very easy to put two APs in here, which is essentially what I'm trying to do, but, at the moment, if I appointed two APs, I'm stuck with what I've got, people who aren't actually moving that fast towards a discursive place, or have not got that experience.

During the interim period, there were five on the senior team: principal, deputy principal, professional development facilitator, curriculum coordinator, and qualifications manager. Olivia admits to being "a bit sly" in including her Te Kotahitanga co-ordinator.

That was a very strong statement to our staff, as well. The portfolio includes Te Kotahitanga, which is our primary process, but it also includes coordinating and sustaining professional development in the school. I'm growing [TK co-ordinator] into a school leader, because essentially that's what she is, and if we don't look at the implementation of Te Kotahitanga in that way, then it's not going to work. So, she's growing alongside a whole pile of other people, some of whom are getting dragged along, kicking and screaming. That's the reality of it.

At the end of 2010, Olivia and her DP did "a hell of a lot of work" co-constructing a webbed leadership structure that has, at its centre, student learning. In addition to the roles trialled during the DP's absence, the new diagram includes a daily operations coordinator and a student services coordinator, the latter "a political concession on my behalf that I wasn't

going to trash the entire leadership system in a minute.” Three positions are in the process of being advertised internally and Olivia is looking for people who can not only operate systems but change them. Each role contains operational and strategic dimensions, and new appointees will not necessarily be heads of faculty. Their first task will be to personalise their job description and align goals to GPILSEO.

Writing job descriptions and aligning these to GPILSEO presents a fundamentally new challenge.

In the past, this school has worked on a system where the principal writes all the job descriptions and tells everyone what they’re going to do. They go away and do it and write beautiful reports on it. It’s always been fantastically well reported, which I personally think is a load of crap because there’s no ownership in any of it. It’s paper for paper’s sake. It actually bears no relationship to what’s going on out there half the time and the stats were literally manipulated to suit whatever the argument was at the time. A bit cynical [of me], I appreciate that. Rather than dictate specific content, Olivia has asked people with new portfolio responsibilities to “wrap” agreed task headings through co-constructed GPILSEO goals “which are sitting around achievement, and raising Māori achievement particularly... asTTle goals, community engagement goals.”

### **Aligning systems: Tracking student achievement**

Olivia has also acted strategically in changing the student management system to one which is “much more student focused.” This has not only “changed the reality of the staff,” but also that of students.

If you want to engage students in the loop of learning, you need a system that’s going to provide them the information to keep everybody real. If you have a system like MUSAC, for example, getting that information to kids is nigh on impossible. KAMAR cracked that years ago. So it’s as simple as changing the system to one that focuses more on the kids, teaching the staff a new platform to work on, and

freeing up the data. I think one of the things I saw in 20thC education was who had the power? If the power wasn't with the kids, how could they ever own learning? If the power sat with teachers in squirreled mark books and kids could never set independent goals, they could never move forward.

Olivia suggests that empowering students as learners is an important key to sustainability and that once you “create success for kids, they're not going to let that go. Kids don't want to go backwards if they've seen that they can be good at what they're doing. No kid wants to feel bad at what they're doing.” Student success is the *raison d'être* for Olivia's unashamed and “very Machiavellian” approach to change.

I don't make bones about it. But it's also strategic. It's a chess game. I think that's the thing about the introduction of this project; it's a chess game. You've got to mercilessly use the scaffold to bring about change for kids, without losing sight that the change is about the kids. And if it doesn't stack up with kids achieving more, then it's out. And we're fairly ruthless, I think, about that now.

### **Aligning systems: Form class organisation**

Olivia's approach to form class organisation illustrates the tension between things that don't stack up for students and things that won't stack up with staff. She is currently contemplating a move from vertical to horizontal forms.

I'm actually playing around with [this] at the moment. This school sits in a vertical structure, the old family-based vertical structure. All the right intent in the world but absolutely the wrong execution. So you have 30 staff trying to manage five levels of kids, supposedly with the aim of building relationships, which actually means kids sitting around using their cell phones and texting each other. If you're in two of those verticals, fantastic. If you're in the other 28, you may as well not have bothered. I think, for us, the death knell of vertical was when the staff – cell phones are away during teaching time – said, “No. We



want them during verticals because the kids have to have something to do.”

While Olivia is alert to the potential for “verticals to fit really nicely with the Te Kotahitanga model,” she suspects patterns of form time interaction are so entrenched that no amount of tinkering with the current system will generate change.

There’s almost a need to crash it and rebuild it. In other words, dump it, go to something else and then come back to it when we’re in a more, how would we say, advanced state. The worry here is that unless you actually change a system in a big way, people revert to type, they go underground.

Convinced of the need for change, Olivia has yet to implement this, not through lack of resolve but a feeling that the “balance of change was tipping too far.” Timetable changes already had some staff “freaking out” and Olivia realised the counterproductive potential for them to “become automatically resistant to any change, even though it’s sensible.” This presents somewhat of a dilemma:

So we sit on the tipping point of knowing we need to get out of verticals. Horizontals would suit us so much more in actually being able to work with kids - learning relationships at the right level, getting people skilled in the right information to be sharing. And I can’t quite – we’re working out where we can go.

There is a bit of Olivia that thinks “we should have done it ... bit the bullet and changed, and just to hell with the staff,” but she recognises the importance of a change coalition and is loath to alienate supporters.

I’ve got certain pivotal staff saying, “Yeah, we’ll go with that” and my barometer at the moment is that when those staff stand up in front of their colleagues and say, “We want to shift,” that’s when we’re actually ready to go. At the moment, they’re still saying, “Oh, we’re right behind you if you get up and tell everybody we’re changing.”

When I suggest that Olivia seems more attuned to staff fear and more strategic in determining when to initiate change, she responds,

Yeah, and some if it's just a little bit of chicken, too. That's the elaborate chess game that we play and it's kind of like, is there enough bang for the buck in that shift to cause carnage, or is it worth it to actually let that shift occur naturally itself? And, as we decided, okay, we might just leave it in term one and then flip it for term two – [look for] other ways we can swing the story. I think the one thing about taking a school out of that 20<sup>th</sup> century model into the 21<sup>st</sup> century is there's a hell of a lot more sell and not tell. We've actually got to shift these people's thinking, otherwise change doesn't buy, doesn't sit, doesn't work. So, it's a fun one, and it's a huge dilemma for us at the moment.

### **Portability?**

This leads us to consider the role of experience in 'swinging the story' and the degree to which lessons learned in one context are transportable to another, something Olivia is less sure about.

I don't know. Is there such a thing as an experienced principal? I think every situation is different. In the leadership roles that I've played, they're chalk and cheese. One of the most frustrating things I heard in Wellington last week was the psychometrician saying, "Well, I'd rather average the data for Te Kotahitanga out across **all** schools." That kind of understanding that schools are homogenous; they're not. And I think that the implementation of Te Kotahitanga is contextual to where the school is at. I'm glad I took that time in the first few months, not that they [staff] would tell you I took time. I took time from me, if you know what I mean? I think they still thought that I was like a bull at a gate.

Olivia believes taking the time to understand systems peculiar to each school setting is essential for shift to occur and she credits the TK Phase 5 systems approach for attuning her to this.

None of the implementation would have worked if I was still running the leadership system that was here. It would have fallen flat on its

arse a year ago because the wrong people would be in the roles. It's almost like there's a whole set of parameters around structural systems growth that have to take place even before the project hits the deck, before you even start with staff, if you want to reform, if you want true reform. Otherwise you just get stick-on reform which gets easily peeled off the minute you disappear again. I think many schools have suffered that.

### **Spread and sustainability**

One year into Te Kotahitanga, Olivia believes that reform is still fragile, "way too fragile."

It's taken two years to develop to the point where we can actually slide leadership across the organisation. Until we do that, though, none of this is sustainable. I kind of look at it and think, yeah, if I got run over by a bus tomorrow, some of it would last because [DP's] on board, and some of it would last with the Te Kotahitanga team, but the rest of it – whoosh! [Sweeping away motion].

Board support is also essential and, to some extent, precarious, as prior experience shows. Olivia has consequently been proactive in shaping the relationship with her current board and helping them distinguish governance from management activities. In "rationalising what the board can do," Olivia considers herself fortunate that "big chunks" of the board that appointed her remain, and that they share her determination to build authentic home-school partnerships.

At a meeting to discuss the research foci for an independent evaluation of Te Kotahitanga, for example, her board chairperson advocated the importance of a whānau/parent perspective on how well the project is working. Countering the statistician's response that "parents have far too extreme views at each end of the spectrum and it's not statistically valid," Olivia retorted,

Maybe you should just start listening to some of those non-statistically valid opinions from these parents because if we don't listen, we're

actually failing to do any of it. If we haven't actually engaged the families in the change process, it's all for nothing.

Over the past year, the school has taken some "simple" steps to encourage dialogue between staff and parents, including a change of report evening venue from the "big cattle call hall ... where many people had sat exams and failed as parents" to the wharenuī, "a much more friendly welcoming space" where they were offered "the manaakitanga of welcome." Unsurprisingly, "the change in dynamics of who came was amazing.... People came, people talked more, they were more open in their conversation, they stayed longer, and staff felt better."

This is work in progress. The day after we meet, the board "are having their first ever strategic kind of thinking" and there is considerable policy review to be undertaken in order to ensure that systems "actually put kids at the heart of that relationship. There's still **huge** work to do here." The ultimate success of this work depends upon spreading reform in depth and this requires school wide commitment. Olivia does not believe for a moment that she is capable of doing this work alone.

I'm very much doing this with this group of people and I think, if there's any learning, that's the learning I've made. You can't make this level of reform on your own. You can believe passionately in it, you can jump up and down, field your soapbox, but unless there's a team of people that are with you, it's a pretty futile kind of exercise.

Olivia perceives the ability to "clear the room for the headspace for the next step" as an indication that she and her DP have achieved a degree of spread, however they are "looking far too busy for that at the moment and you know already that's not right.... We've got to get into being the organ grinder here, not leaping around like monkeys."

### **Personal impact**

Understandably, there are days when Olivia wonders "what the hell I'm doing!" She bemoans the absence of "real training" which can see principals "dumped in the deep end," in contexts that are "hell on earth," and is

particularly grateful for the Te Kotahitanga network. More important than the “bank of resources” is the sense of community that working with like-minded principal colleagues brings.

At least a Te Kotahitanga principal has a common link and a common thread with a series of schools. Okay, we know that we can't necessarily uplift things and drop them straight on top of other schools, but we sure as hell can learn from those experiences. Other principals don't have that unless they accidentally fall upon it. It's dangerous stuff. I look at Hamilton, for example, there's a city divided. I look at Auckland, there's a city competitive, shockingly competitive, so much so that no senior leadership team member in Auckland will ever share anything with anyone for fear that it takes away the edge.

Responding to the principal of Auckland Grammar School's assertion that dumping NCEA at Year 11, in direct defiance of Government policy and the law, “is in the best interest of all our boys” (Grunwell, 2011, para. 11), Olivia questions, “And when he says our boys, which ones did he actually mean?” She considers [location] fortunate in that “all schools are different, it's niche marketed. It allows us to actually web together and work together. We're not pinching each other's kids.”

It is staff who are more likely to be pinched and, ironically perhaps, Te Kotahitanga staff in particular. The prospect of her lead facilitator being seconded to lead the project at regional level is causing Olivia some angst, as she balances what is good for the school with what is good for the region and nation: “I'm like, “You touch her!” and “No!” You literally lose talent.... I don't mind that, but I want to hold on to it at least for two years so I can make a difference.”

### **One year on ...**

Reflecting on change one year on, Olivia perceives both accomplishment and fragility in the current context.

You know, change as a process is a really challenging one. We've had all sorts of change. And I think the machine is slowly turning on itself

and it's smoothing, it's gathering momentum. But I'm still really cognisant that change hurts people and very aware that you don't want to cause undue hurt and halt all that good work. You've got to sort of find that happy medium – what's pushing enough and what's not pushing enough?

New staff, they don't have to be chronologically young, but young at heart staff have a very clear understanding of the need, that time is of the essence, whereas for staff who have been in the institution or system for too long, in a sense, time is immaterial to them. So that's been some of the more subtle things that we've started to deal with about pace and the need to consider that this is our five years' worth of kids. We can't wait. We can't wait till later; it's got to be now.

While “it's almost like the death cries of the resistors are louder in the small few that are left,” impressive NCEA results have silenced even the loudest opponents.

We've got a fantastic set of results. We've basically hit 80% pass rates across the board for everybody. We're on the border of parity for Māori and non-Māori for Year 12 and Year 13. It's really exciting! Māori achievement is above national average for 12 and 13 and just below on Year 11, so we've still got some work to do there. We've just pulled eight scholarships, the most exciting of which is one of our young Māori women in year 11 who's got a te reo scholarship at year 13. Woohoo! We're very excited about that. Our Māori attendance figures are up hugely and, strangely enough, because of all these factors, the timetable worked and the resistors went, “Oh, the kids all fit.” It's interesting how the roll-on effect of success for Māori has changed the dynamic of the resistors, who have gone, “Oh, my whole class was successful”, “I've had 80% pass rates”, “I've done so well.” For some staff, who haven't had scholarships for years, that has been a really exciting push - “Well, heck, I'm not over the hill yet!” We've seen a renewed sense of vigour in some of our borderline resistors because

of this. It's almost like the progress of success, things all coming together, particularly around lifting Māori achievement, has changed the dynamic of resistance.

The school has experienced unprecedented roll growth at Year 9 (38% greater than the Ministry forecast), “massive infill at Year 10, 11, 12 and 13,” and improved retention rates. Not only are young Māori not leaving, they are currently attending at the same level as non-Māori.

### **Engaging whānau**

“Success, simple academic success” and a concerted effort to work harmoniously together have been instrumental in improving community engagement. Parents from all walks of the community have accompanied their daughters to subject selection conferences and community perception that the school is there to help has grown. From Olivia's perspective,

That's been our whole motto for this last 12 months. We're here to help; we're not here to judge. If the wheels are falling off, we'll work with you. We'll make time. We don't stand on protocol. If you urgently want to see us, you can see us. We'll find a way. And we've put parents a lot more to the forefront, spent time talking with parents, listening to parents.... That's a big shift for a lot of our staff – “Have you rung and talked with your parents, not at your parents?”

In addition to parents coming in, and kaiawhina visiting homes, three marae have offered to host teacher only days, and the school is holding an increasing number of meetings out in the community. A current priority is the second transport trial whereby free buses will be provided for the 700-800 [suburb] students who are “paying ten bucks a week to come to school.” The first trial showed “funnily enough, that when the buses are paid for, kids come to school, in large numbers. Not really rocket science,” and the second trial is timed to “thrash home the point” before the local council renews the contract: “Our community have really got in behind us on that and really worked with us.”

## **The leadership team**

While it remains conceptually intact, circumstances have conspired against the leadership structure introduced in 2011 and there is little opportunity to twiddle thumbs. Olivia is about to take parental leave, injury has caused one DP to take long term medical leave, and the Te Kotahitanga coordinator has just been

poached and pinched, which is great. It's actually the right thing for her, and it's also wonderful for us to have that feedback in, so I'm not regretting that at all, but it is now only half a person when we used to have a whole one. We've dedicated the half that she's here entirely to Te Kotahitanga, so her advanced leadership work is now being picked up by the rest of the team, and that's been a challenge.

A focus on the "human interface" of restorative practice, the pre-emptive work in "ensuring behaviour for learning, achievement for learning, attendance for learning," and "data-driven proactive work with families" means that the team is "running a bit light." Olivia has recently received board permission to "formalise two further AP/DP positions" and

the staff, too, have accepted that there need to be more hands on the ground. If we're pushing so hard to make curriculum improvement, it really takes our middle leaders predominantly out of the operational stuff, so there needs to be that strong operational team.

Senior leaders are about to repeat the GPILSEO goal setting exercise, an undertaking that "had about a 50/50 success rate" in its first iteration.

Half the team – fantastic work done, far more advanced than we thought we were going to get to, and I think our results basically show that that work in action really worked. The other half of the team started with a lot of nodding dog syndrome – yeah, we understand, yeah, we understand. "Well, what the hell does this mean?" by about mid-year.

The challenges inherent in demonstrating discursive leadership practice have divided leaders from managers, with the latter struggling to demonstrate how they visualise goals, engage staff and lead change.



Olivia comments that getting managers to be explicit about what they want from staff and timely in communicating this - “Stuff going into people’s pigeonholes two to three days prior to a meeting, so that it can be read. No more shock syndrome” - was “hard yakka.” While desired performance is starting to occur more naturally, there are still some who depend on others to do their work and this has created tension.

I see two of my team just working like dogs, sharing, doing all those things. You can see the resentment starting to build of the others that aren’t. But at least they’re starting to talk about that, too. I think that’s been really important in terms of creating a much healthier environment around change. Change shouldn’t be left to just a few people. It’s everybody’s business.

While they might not always be on the same wavelength (“sometimes we’re not even in the same ocean!”), the senior team are becoming more adept at collectively depersonalising and strategising potentially fraught situations.

The problem is the problem, not the person. We do a lot of team talk .... Are we sure that we understand the problem? Is this our problem? And we’ve found ourselves, every so often, in the “Oh, man, this is us! We’ve not done this right,” and I think that’s helped a lot. You actually try and work out a strategy, work out what’s the win we want? Okay, what are we prepared to accept if we’re not going to get the win/win and what are we not going to accept? And I think that’s helped a huge amount around creating change where people come out feeling that their mana is intact, and that’s been really important to us.

### **Middle leadership**

For the first time in many years, heads of faculty have also been required to write formal end of year reports and Olivia suggests that this is “probably one of the most tell-tale things that we did.” Reports included a fairly typical stocktake of “attendance, achievement, differentiation, monitoring, [and] using data to drive positive change for kids in live time.” They also departed from traditional practice in requiring HOFs to report on how

discursive each faculty had become with regard to Te Kotahitanga progress.

This commentary revealed a strong

correlation between the rating of discursive practice versus the rhetoric of positive engagement with kids. In the non-discursive or the less discursive faculties, there's very clear rhetoric, still, around the kids who didn't pass were unmotivated, they didn't engage. Very obvious deficit talk reappearing, even after an edit, and we've sent them back and had them all re-edited, twice in some cases. But it was interesting what level a HOF would go to, to either deficit theorise or not deficit theorise.

Faculty reports have enabled the leadership team to identify pockets of resistance and "tag where we need to work." This has confirmed the suspicion that some of the "core resistors are actually our middle leaders. There's a wave of positivity rising up below and there's a wave above them, but there's still that kind of bracketed off in the middle." They have consequently strengthened their resolve to interrogate individual HOF positions and "challenge it when you see it, call it." Olivia knows "there are lots of PC words" that can be used to frame what are, in essence, difficult conversations with staff. Key to these are questioning and

critique as a form of constant improvement, as opposed to disagreement - those more reasoned approaches to "No, that's wrong" that used to be the kind of rhetoric here. We've talked a lot, as a team, about how we can deal with that positively without knocking the socks off the person, but calmly and rationally creating that repositioning effect.

### **Movement to horizontal forms**

The movement to horizontal forms has similarly been a "study in change."

Confronted with "huge" staff resistance when this was first mooted, the senior team "held off. We got more data. We got more student voice."

When the majority of students expressed a clear preference for change, they decided to proceed. Donning "armadillo coats," the senior team informed

that staff that they would concede on some things but not this. To their astonishment, the staff quietly acquiesced.

To this day, none of my team nor I can truly understand [why] everyone went, “Fine. Moving on.” The whole lot of us sat there in stunned silence. “What, is no-one going to argue about this?” “No. No, you guys have made a decision now. We’re fine.” The whole team, I remember it very clearly, came in here pale, white, going, “Nobody yelled, nobody screamed, nobody said anything. They just went ‘okay.’ Is something going to happen?” For the next week, we were all on tenterhooks that something terrible was going to happen. And it never did. There’s a lesson. Yes, consultation is very tough. Yes, people will say all sorts of emotive things but, in the end, they just went, “Fine.” As I say, I still don’t quite get that. It was almost like the battle was the battle. It wasn’t actually what the battle was about.

While some staff may have battled for battle’s sake, the senior team passionately believed in the reason for battle. Furthermore, comprehensive data collection supported the move to horizontal forms and they steadfastly reminded colleagues: “There’s the evidence, this is what you’ve all said.” In Olivia’s view, reiterating this message and having all cards on the table means “the emotion just goes out of it and maybe that was why it got to the point where everyone rolled over.”

Accompanying the shift to horizontal forms are formal review points built in at the end of each term and decisions yet to be made around group tutors seeing each Year 9 cohort through to Year 13. Coincidentally, the new form structure has seen resistors concentrated in one year level, containing negativity and making it easier to work with the staff concerned. This also streamlines the work of deans who were previously “out of synch with the vertical structure.”

An additional benefit is expanded leadership opportunities, whereby deans are working with up to eight staff at each year level. Olivia perceives this as “growing leadership at another whole level, hopefully leaders who think more broadly about their role.” The senior team have invested

considerable time talking with deans about their role: “Their role is not to do it all for [form teachers]. Their role is to help them to do it right. That’s changed a lot. I notice that my deans are a lot less stressed.”

### **Focus on junior curriculum**

The curriculum focus is now on preparing students in Years 9-10 for senior study and the school has, with one exception, moved from streamed to mixed ability classes. Having to differentiate across four curriculum levels within each class has “created some real challenges” for teachers who used to “pitch at Level 4 and hope it stuck!” The impetus for professional learning in this regard has come from “some quite shocking” end of year results.

Our Year 9s weren’t, on average, achieving the sub-level lifts in asTTle literacy that they should have been. We had 46% of our kids lift three or more asTTle sub-levels at numeracy level, but that was down to 20% for reading level. And if you think about how many kids were at a very low curriculum level to start with, it doesn’t really engender a lot of hope for getting to where you need to get to, without huge amounts of remedial work at Year 11.

Data interrogation has exposed flaws in “anecdotal story telling” and forced teachers to confront discrepancies in their interpretation of results: “Well, you say your English programmes are working really positively, but the evidence doesn’t quite line up with that, and why do you think that is?” The maths and English departments have recently combined to organise asTTle professional development, a “self-generated, self-motivated” initiative that suggests growing ownership of their practice.

The gifted and talented junior class, comprising 18 students over curriculum level five, wasn’t entirely our intention, we’ve compromised a little with our community on this. It’s also created some really interesting challenges about differentiating at the other end because a lot of staff hadn’t really cottoned on to the fact that we have got exceptional kids who aren’t necessarily being challenged. The exciting thing about this group is that it’s not monocultural, it’s

multicultural and a number of strong young Māori women sit in that class too. It's been exciting watching that shift and watching our staff come to grips with planning what they're doing and why.

### **Student voice**

A lot of work has been done “feeding student voice back into the machine at every level.” HOFs are required to include student opinion in their faculty appraisal, with “varying degrees of success.” Olivia acknowledges that “there are always going to be tensions” when staff don't like what students say, but believes that “reflecting on why they're saying it” is the greater priority.

Students now run the “entire assembly system at senior and junior level” and staff are noticing that they do a much better job of engaging their peers. Furthermore, this has shifted the power balance, whereby students are “calling on the staff to come and do presentations” rather than the other way around, and taking responsibility for school climate: “Seniors have grown quite frustrated with the rumpy Year 9s who don't fit the culture – ‘Where did they all come from? Do they not know how we work here?’ – and they've shown them, they've sorted it out.”

The process for selecting student leaders has also become more rigorous: “It's gone from ‘you're a good kid, we like you’, to ‘you're going to jump through 50 hoops. If you're still standing at the end of this, you're the right person.’” While the appointment process has been time consuming, a panel focus on leadership skills has secured an

amazing multinational group of kids who represent **all** our kids, not just this little narrow band.... Prefects are not just wearing the badge, but actually doing it for the right reasons. They're more socially conscious, more socially engaged, more community engaged.

### **Co-constructing the Charter**

Olivia's relationship with the board remains positive and there has been “huge change” in the nature of their involvement. After a lengthy school and community consultation process, they have co-constructed the charter and,

using Te Kotahitanga’s scaling up reform model, been “very specific about what are goals are.” There is strong ownership of the resulting document and it is devoid of formulaic phrases: “We refused to do that and the staff didn’t want that either. Nobody wanted that. They actually wanted to write something that meant something. Not quite in the Ministry’s framework, but anyway.” While Olivia anticipated the Ministry’s response, the board took umbrage at the degree of external interference in their governance role and fully supported Olivia’s fight to get the charter approved. She repeatedly asked the Ministry whether it was “getting the tick” and had no qualms in adopting a broken record approach: “You’re not always popular, but I kind of think it was worth the fight because we did it properly. And we did it exactly according to their checklist.... Does formatting really matter if you tick all the boxes?”

### **Spreading reform**

Towards the end of our conversation, I shared my observation that a number of words peppering the first transcript suggest a strong transformative agenda - words like rebuild, recreate, sustain and embed. Olivia nodded,

Transformation? Yes, slowly....I think we’re starting to get to that point. It’s been three and a half years and you can see it. My job at the moment is very much around moving me out and moving others in. For me, [parental leave’s] an enforced step-back. Nobody is indispensable and that’s been a really big focus this year. How do we build so that it will carry on, that it takes on a life of its own in that transformation? And we’re starting to get to that stage.

She has been heartened to see members of the senior team take on the “mantle of leadership.” This involves:

refining and interweaving all the strategies together, getting excited about what they’re seeing and starting to challenge those that aren’t – “How come you think that? Where does that come from?” And I see that as the first seeds of real sustainability because, for every success

that they see for kids, they're charged up to create more. When they're getting excited about who's being interviewed and they're reading the CVs first, I kind of feel, this is great, this is not my baby anymore. It's their baby; it's growing into a much broader level of ownership.

### **Telling the story**

Telling her leadership story reaffirms for Olivia "why we're doing what we're doing," and she has encouraged her senior team to similarly "peel back the layers." Sharing their stories has increased trust, helped "avoid the conflict of misunderstanding," and reinforced the importance of context. It has also revealed a number of common threads in their evolving leadership understanding. Alert to the danger that stories become sanitised, Olivia reflects:

I wouldn't have learned what I learnt if I hadn't gone through the schools I did, as punishing as it sometimes was. If I hadn't bumped into various influential people in my time, I wouldn't necessarily be where I am now, and those contexts are all critically important, as are the stories that continued on from them.

If someone were to read the story of my first principalship, would they say that that was a little clean to view? I'm really careful of re-storying. There's shit that happens that we learn from. And you don't want to not say, "Actually, yeah, it was a bad time, horrible."

Sanitising experience rarely becomes an issue in the hubbub of the school day, however, because there is little opportunity to articulate stories, let alone record them. "There's no time. We're running around doing stuff."

Olivia rarely stops to appreciate change in its entirety.

As I say, it's kind of interesting to sit down and talk to outsiders about what we do. We sit and talk to each other all the time, but we don't often have that chance to actually sit and think, "Well, okay, what have we done?" Because you're just rolling on, you don't necessarily go back and revisit in any particular form.

At some point, Olivia would like to return to university study in order to

“do a whole lot more educationally” but “where the hell you fit that in” remains problematic: “I’m kind of living it at the moment, working out some stuff, rather than going out and writing about it ... with the commas in the right places which, strangely enough, I never managed to achieve.

### **The torrid tale of 2013**

“Living it” took on new meaning the following year when the terminal illness of a beloved family member necessitated periods of extended leave. As Olivia’s life “transitioned in another trajectory,” the BOT and leadership team continued their united pursuit of pedagogical and cultural change. Indicators across the board were positive and the shared leadership model functioning so well that, when Olivia stepped out, senior team colleagues concurred, “We don’t need anyone else in. We’re a united team. We’ll just carry on.” In retrospect, this proved a fateful decision:

When you take 20 weeks out of a pressure cooker environment, you create something that I don’t think any of us saw coming, definitely not my board or my leadership team. We created this mass power vacuum. Therein lies one of the biggest mistakes we made. And okay, I can almost forgive myself. I probably wasn’t in the head space to insist, but my board chair and I together made that critical mistake of not insisting that they bought in support. Now, that didn’t mean bringing in another principal. They just needed to have bought in another set of eyes, ears, hands, into that leadership team.

Whether the presence of an additional person would have avoided what transpired is moot, however, the overburdened senior team may have detected and responded to malcontent earlier than they did. Olivia comments that “they were so busy doing that they weren’t running shotgun on this and [calling] people to the table. They were actually running the school, multi-people down, and without big chunks of information.”

In her absence, a small group of “very toxic staff ... palpably disenchanted with having to be observed and improve practice” agitated with union representatives to stall reform. At no stage were staff concerns



brought to the BOT or acting principal, nor any formal complaints laid in-house. Tension escalated to the point that branch union meetings were held in committee, with non-attending members denied access to minutes and more moderate members ousted, the local field officer was frequently on site but non-conversant with the school leadership team, and a vote of no confidence in the principal and board received by the Ministry at the beginning of July was not communicated to the board until mid-August. Furthermore, there was no indication as to how widespread dissent was: “[We] couldn’t get any information from this group of nebulous staff as to how big the group was, who the group was, who had issues, who didn’t, whose issues they even were.”

This situation was compounded by a downturn in the local economy which forced the retrenchment of 3.5 teaching positions. Olivia consequently found herself walking “out of a funeral straight back into CAPNA” and describes her return to work as “hell on earth.” The following week, anonymous members of the PPTA branch began filing “really outlandish claims” around bullying, credit harvesting, financial mismanagement, and the board being “sock puppets to the principal.” Shortly thereafter, the Education Review Office signalled its intention to conduct a school review. From Olivia’s perspective, the review process was fraught from the outset, with conflicts of interest and personal biases colouring members of the review team, solid achievement evidence questioned and detractors, including ex-staff members, allowed clandestine and disproportionate voice.

At the same time that the school received a letter from the Minister of Education congratulating them on being in the top 10 for raising student achievement, a damning ERO report recommending statutory intervention arrived. This set in train a series of external investigations and a legal battle to defend the school’s integrity. Auditors found no evidence of financial dishonesty, and a New Zealand Qualifications Authority forensic review concluded that achievement results were legitimate and the school following modern assessment practice.

Using the Official Information Act to access documents from the Ministry and ERO, Olivia comments that she, the board and senior team literally fought the trench over the most bizarre smoke and mirrors politics that you could ever imagine. Cleared of NZQA fraud, cleared of financial fraud, cleared of operational fraud. You name it, it's been cleared. There's actually nothing left to clear apart from the unsubstantiated, supposed accusations that we're really horrible and mean to staff, of which there is zero evidence on the table.

### **Impact**

The impact of dissension on students and community, staff relationships, and Olivia's professional wellbeing ranges from minimal to substantial. Students remain largely oblivious to friction and a community survey of 300 randomly selected parents undertaken during the same period (return rate 87%) indicated a "75%+ support rating across every question ... parents are thrilled with where we're going. On the key question, do you support the direction the board is taking for the school, 80% rating."

When I asked how conflict has impacted staff relationships, Olivia observes that, on the surface, "you could walk into my staff room and not know any of this is going on." The group of disaffected staff persist and, while their size and composition have yet to be disclosed, Olivia suspects there are five core drivers: "It's still secret squirrel. We assume we know who we're dealing with. We don't." The senior team resolved from the outset that they would not sink to the level of their attackers: "We will take it that every person we deal with is not one of these people, even if they are, and we will treat people with respect." Tempting though public statements and a newspaper exposé might occasionally sound, Olivia knows this would be detrimental for the school and is "really proud" that the board and senior team refused to "get in the trench."

Describing herself now as "a lot more battle scarred," Olivia nonetheless holds firm to a strong moral compass. While she concurred with one of the ERO reviewer's comments that they didn't "change the

hearts and minds” of pivotal individual staff, Olivia responded, “No, but we changed the way our children’s futures go. What’s more important?” Somewhat stoically, she believes that “the learning is still the most important thing.” Events have confirmed for her the importance of galvanising middle leader commitment to reform, supporting the TK team to challenge senior teachers in one particular faculty who consistently rate themselves 5 (the highest) on the teacher effectiveness scale, although observation evidence suggests this is far from the case, and shielding vulnerable new teachers from the negativity of disenchanted colleagues.

In the words of the board chairperson, the school is staying its course and “You’ll either get on or you’ll get off.” Olivia agrees that there is no need for the ship to change direction: “The community doesn’t want that and, after all, the board are elected members from a community. The chair was elected with the highest number of votes ever recorded in this school.”

As principal, the impending ERO visit and subsequent legal battles saw Olivia delay an already planned departure from the school. Now, professional as well as personal circumstances have cemented a decision to jump ship.

My exit needs to happen relatively soon to let this place settle and get on. I don’t think [toxicity is] going to stop if I’m around still. I’m very cognisant of that. And I need to get out and have a life to be quite honest, because this isn’t life.

Before she leaves, Olivia is committed to the “dirty work” to be done so that her successor “starts with a slightly cleaner slate and we just don’t create history again.”

### **Dog day in the decile one sun**

She has every confidence that “an utterly robust leadership team” and “quality governance structure” working in unison will continue the reform agenda she was appointed to set in place. From her perspective, a deserved dog day in the decile one sun comes not from venting frustration and hurt at change saboteurs, but growing a school culture in which power sharing

amongst all members of the school community is authentic, student achievement both universal and holistic, people treated fairly and professionally, and the school staffed by a “team that will literally walk on burning coals to support kids.” On balance, Olivia is “satisfied that we did what we did.” She believes the board will appoint judiciously to ensure the school “won’t ever go back to 50% of all Māori failing before the end of Year 11” and foresees multiple pathways ahead:

I don’t feel any sense of need for it to be done the way I did it. In fact, the best thing will be that it will be done the way the next person and their team do it. And I feel quite at peace with that, to be quite honest.

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## CHAPTER SIX: KEITA

### Part I

#### **He aha te mea nui o te ao?**

Before recounting her career as an educator and reflecting on the critical events that have brought her to her first principalship, Keita looked to the image of an elegant Ngāpuhi woman in a photo frame behind her desk, the woman who raised and continues to inspire her. Her beloved kuia instilled in her young mokopuna strong communal values, clear moral purpose that included equity of educational outcome, and high aspirations for success. Secure in her grandmother's care, Keita discovered that rich Māori heritage counted for little in the predominantly Pākehā mainstream and that restricted life chances precluded material and spiritual wellbeing for many in her community.

Through that experience, being whāngai to her, I had a sense of her not being ashamed of being Māori, but feeling that she shouldn't talk Māori around me. In order for me to be successful, I had to be not Māori, I suppose, or hold on to Te Ao Pākehā. That left me with a sense of sadness, but also a question, because to me she was the most amazing strong leader, a capable person, and I was very proud of her. So I've always had that in the back of my head, wondering why all these people were so capable and yet hadn't necessarily had successful lives. And there's many stories within my whānau about that.

Highly conscientised and determined to make a difference in the lives of rangatahi Māori, Keita initially "wasn't too sure about the 'how' and what process would be most effective." She trained as a social worker and, following a period working at Māori Women's Refuge, joined the staff of Te Whānau o Waipareira as a community youth worker. Events during the first day were to define her future because, as she arrived, the social work tutor resigned and Keita was asked to take on the role.

So I thought, okay, absolutely! Went in, had no idea about how to

teach or what to do, but at least I had a social work background. It was really challenging but it wasn't long before I thought, wow, this is a really effective forum. I saw the potential to work with rangatahi in a more positive way, whereas in the past, at Refuge or different children's homes, it was very reactive - ambulance at the bottom of the cliff emergency situations.

Excited by the transformative potential of education, Keita went on to tutor Youth Training and Training Opportunities (TOPS) courses to 16-18 year olds at another institution. Introduced in 1993, TOPS courses provided poorly qualified school leavers with basic vocational skills in an effort to foster work readiness and enhance employability. In the process, Keita recognised in her students talents which had been frustrated and largely hidden in school settings.

I really connected with these young people and thought, wow, they're so capable. What's happening in mainstream education that all of these children are not being successful in it? I just didn't understand what was happening and then I was thinking, "Right, that's it! I'm going to start up my own school." I had all these wonderful ideas, so then I went to Epsom Teachers' College.

At Teachers' College, Keita enrolled in the huarahi Māori medium programme, completing te reo Māori and health education papers. Practicum experience in immersion and mainstream settings confirmed teaching as her true vocation: "That was it for me really. I thought, great, this is me; education."

### **Teaching in the mainstream**

Keita spent the first five years of her teaching career in a large, culturally diverse west Auckland secondary school. During this time, she established and consolidated the discursive classroom teaching style that sat well with her beliefs about learners and learning.

It's about being authentic. The way I was teaching (it's still not the norm) was more in line with cooperative learning. I think it was

through building those relationships with really disengaged students in alternative education that I developed my teaching style. It wasn't stand at the front traditional teaching practice and it was initially looked down upon by teachers within the department, including the HOD. But another beginning teacher was saying, "You know, I can see they're engaging. You keep it up!" and that gave me that little bit of encouragement.

Recognising Keita's passionate commitment to vulnerable Māori students and her ability to engage them in mainstream education, the principal provided her with early leadership opportunities, including facilitation of Te Hiringa I Te Mahara and participation in the Te Kauhua pilot project. The former "involved professional learning around relationships, leadership and applying Te Tiriti o Waitangi within an educational context" and the latter provided schools an opportunity, "in partnership with their Māori community, to explore professional development approaches that enabled teachers to improve outcomes for Māori students and work more effectively with Māori whānau" (Tuuta, Bradnam, Hynds, & Higgins, 2004, p. vii). Significantly, both interventions had action research components which reinforced for Keita the importance of evidence based practice. This intensified when, the following year, she became Head of Health and co-facilitator of Te Kotahitanga.

When I moved into Te Kauhua and Te Kotahitanga, it felt really affirming. I had a lot to learn but it just fit naturally with my beliefs around teaching practice. In the first year of Te Kotahitanga, [facilitator] worked with the same cohort teachers who had volunteered to participate in Te Kauhua. There were about eight of us (of a staff of approximately 150) and it was wonderful. I think what we valued most was having that data, the feedback and feedforward on our practice, that evidence-based approach. It was really good. I came in on the second year to be her co-facilitator. Then, during the next round, the first teachers became the tuakana and another group came through, so it slowly built outwards.



Keita's ability to lead professional learning was also noted by an ERO reviewer who encouraged her to become a deputy principal. At that point, she hadn't seriously considered applying for senior leadership positions, "but then, of course, the seed was planted [laughter] and all of a sudden a job popped up at [school]." Having been sown, it was important to Keita that leadership seeds germinated in contexts where rangatahi Māori would most benefit. She successfully applied for the DP position in a Northland area school, a context demographically and culturally dissimilar to her first school.

It was a different context - primary through to secondary - and smaller. There were about 600 students initially. One of the big differences was that, at [previous school], we had a range of ethnicities. Māori were about 10% of that, and we had a number of Pasifika nations, and European students. I think Samoan students were actually the biggest population. So there was a real mix, representative of Auckland. In the far north, it was more like a treaty school in that, when I first started, we had 50% Māori/50% Pākehā. Through that period of time, we ended up being about 85% Māori in primary and about 70% overall, so there was cultural change.

The leadership team included a relatively new principal from overseas who was acclimatising to the New Zealand context, an experienced AP, and Keita. Initially unsure of her role and how best to utilise her strengths, Keita found herself in an uncomfortable and unfamiliar reactive mode.

It was a big step and a challenge in terms of building my own leadership capacity. I came in and thought, "What am I supposed to do?! What is best practice? How do I use my time effectively to improve student achievement outcomes?" It was all very open and I was sort of observing what people were doing. Most of the time, I was just responding to whatever happened, student problems mainly.

After a short period of stasis, she seized the initiative and sought external advice.

I rang Team Solutions and one of their leadership management

facilitators came in. I said, “Right, what are the key things and what do I need to be doing?” I had some ideas, so we developed some action plans and I did some reading around that. Then I renegotiated my job description according to my strengths. My job description was very much a traditional DP role, in terms of student discipline. It was a waste of resource, really, and the principal realised that, so I was then deployed, as he used to say, more in professional learning.

This was a timely deployment in that the recent ERO review had concluded that concerns around student achievement warranted a supplementary visit within twelve months, rather than the usual three year cycle. In addition, “the principal became unwell and was not in for the majority of that time, and so it created a sense of urgency.” Keita thus assumed responsibility for addressing ERO's concerns. She considered herself fortunate to have participated in Te Kotahitanga, as this provided the platform for improving the quality of teaching within the school.

Even around that time, there was research around Te Kotahitanga. We knew that teaching was the biggest influence on student achievement and that we needed to be agentic and not externalise the problems. We needed to improve our practices.

The staff really came together. We had a couple of teacher only days and had a look at a range of research: Hill and Hawk's, Russell Bishop's research around effective professional learning. We didn't have the BES then, but there were quite a number of readings available and, out of these, we identified what good practice is. To bring about change in the classroom, we decided to implement a peer coaching model, on the basis that everyone would be actively involved and it would be more sustainable. We started with a small team of volunteer coaches which grew, over five years, to include about half the staff. It was transformative; it really did make a big difference to our teaching practice. We were able to show evidence to ERO and they collected the same data, so it was really successful.

While the impetus for a peer coaching model lay in Keita's experience of Te

Kotahitanga, a number of factors precluded them importing the shadow coaching model.

We applied. We would have loved Te Kotahitanga. We kept applying, but at that time we were out of the zone, so really it was a Plan B. It wasn't as robust as Te Kotahitanga. That would have been a much better programme, but we couldn't just go and copy that either. We didn't have the funding, or the staffing, but we made it work and it was successful.

Developing a community of practice was central to improving teacher performance and student outcomes.

The key was that it was collaborative. The staff and the SMT team worked really strongly together. It was during school time. It was evidence informed, so we knew what we were doing was valid and the research showed that it would make a difference. We also had an RTLB [Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour] working with us too, which was helpful, but it wasn't externally imposed. That had a positive spin-off. Because every staff member was there and part of the decision making, we had 100% buy in, which was great. And we didn't have that at [previous school]. So, everybody was moving in the same direction, plus there was the sense of urgency of the ERO supplementary review. There was no out for staff saying, "What we're doing is fine." Well, show me the evidence.

Prior to the ERO supplementary review, the incumbent principal left and the DP from another area school in the region was appointed to the position.

He was wonderful, a very good principal. As he arrived, ERO came in and did the review and then we got the three year cycle, so it was quite good for him to see everything that was happening. The seed was planted again, but I was very resistant then. He was actually saying, "You should be a principal. You should have gone for this job." I said, "No way! I'm not ready." The board had encouraged me to apply but I didn't feel ready. I wanted more time to develop my leadership as DP.

During Keita's tenure as DP, a bilingual unit was established and Māori student achievement equalled that of non-Māori. While parity in educational achievement was cause for celebration, it also generated some adverse minority reaction from Pākehā quarters.

Once Māori success was at or above non-Māori success, and the profile of Māori success became greater, there were allegations that we must be giving credits away. We had some white flight but nothing too significant. Students didn't have a lot of choice, like we do here, so competition between schools wasn't really an issue. The falling roll was more about demographics.

### **From deputy to principal**

Demographics also meant that Keita had to expand her professional networks to keep abreast of current educational research and refine her practice. Participation in the National Aspiring Principals' programme was pivotal in stimulating leadership confidence and desire. Not only did this experience develop personal inquiry and analysis tools, it also introduced Keita to significant mentors and ambitious colleagues: "I think every person there felt they wanted a job right away." By now, Keita felt similarly and began applying for principalships of schools where she believed she could make the most difference: high Māori roll, low decile, struggling. Shortlisted for the first position she applied for, Keita was then confronted with a rather idiosyncratic BOT.

### **"Thank you for coming"**

Keita recalls the appointment process being a comprehensive one. "There were interviews with the community, students, the whānau group of the kura which also had local Māori primary principals in it, the staff, and then there was the board presentation at the end." At the board dinner, the night before the presentation, Keita sensed the first signs of disquiet over her youthful appearance, something she finds amusing in retrospect. "When I went in, the body language was like, 'Oh, we didn't realise she was so

young!' I found out afterwards they thought I was in my twenties. I should have said, 'Actually I'm nearly 40.'

She realised she wasn't the favoured candidate when, moments before the final presentation, the board chairperson welcomed her with the words, "Well, thank you for coming. We will inform the successful applicant tonight and we'll ring you tomorrow." Knowing the chances of winning the board over were slim, Keita proceeded with her focus on making a difference through raising Māori student academic achievement.

I thought, "Okay, I've got to work really hard here to get you, to prove I'm not this little girl." I had analysed all the achievement data and had strong evidence to support what was needed in terms of change improvement. Māori achievement was a real issue. There was one Māori person on the panel and the rest were non-Māori, very conservative. I kept trying to hook them in through evidence, but I could see the body language go down when I was saying, "We do need to address Māori achievement. Success for Māori is success for all, then you will actually bring up your whole." I think they saw that as something that would compete with and detract from non-Māori; that if we do that for Māori then that's actually going to take away from the rest of the school.

Anticipating that the board would engage with material in her presentation, or probe other elements of her application, Keita was concerned when their focus shifted to aspects bordering on discrimination. "The qualifying questions were really interesting. They were, 'Do you like to party?' Do you like to party?! I said, 'I like to celebrate success with the staff' and kept turning it around."

Although the resulting phone call came as no surprise - "I knew, obviously" - Keita found the appointment process a valuable one. Feedback confirmed her perception that stakeholders other than the board were impressed and this spurred her on to apply for two subsequent principalships. The fact that she did so simultaneously reflected similarity of context rather than a scattergun response to initial rejection. All three

schools held similar appeal in that they had a high Māori roll and “real issues in terms of Māori achievement.” In each case, the decision to apply was carefully considered and thoroughly researched. Keita read ERO reports, spoke to those with knowledge of the school community, searched the web, and analysed NZQA achievement results.

I did a lot of research for both interviews, from Google to ERO reports, to word of mouth. For both schools, I looked on the NZQA website from 2004 right through, looked for patterns and trends and, in terms of my strengths, I knew. [The other school’s] a very similar context to here, similar issues. This one interviewed first and I was offered this one first, took it. Really happy to be here. It feels like I’m meant to be here.

## **Part II**

### **First principalship**

Keita acknowledges that her choice of a struggling decile one school is rather unusual:

Yeah. Everyone was kind of like, “Oh, [school]?” But for me, it’s a privilege. We have about 75% Māori, just under 20% Pasifika, and a small number of European students. And it’s at a real crisis situation. I knew there were issues and, eyes wide open, that’s why I wanted to come here. I believed these students were so capable. Why aren’t they achieving, you know? It’s quite heart breaking. There were ongoing issues, which hadn’t been addressed for well over five years, in all the big areas. ERO had concerns around all the areas of leadership, the variable teaching and learning, engagement, achievement. There was a real dip in achievement results last year. So this was when ERO came in and said, “We haven’t seen change. We’ve seen the same issues raised in the previous report and they’re all big ones.”

While it noted deliberate and focused responses to improving achievement

in some departments, and a developing capacity for self-review, the 2010 ERO report identified a number of areas that had not been adequately addressed. Only 62% of students were attending daily, and almost a third of the annual school roll was transient. There were a significant number of students with high literacy needs and most were achieving well below peers nationally. In addition to poor student presence, engagement and achievement, ERO noted variable teaching quality and teacher development; disjointed curriculum design; fragmented self-review processes; and inadequate strategic planning and management structures. The report concluded that the new BOT, new principal and senior leadership team faced significant challenges in developing and sustaining quality governance, management and leadership.

Concerns were of such magnitude that the school was one of the first to undergo an ERO Arotake Paetawhiti review, a longitudinal ongoing evaluation process that replaces the supplementary review.

It's different in the sense that with a supplementary review you'd be given 12 months in which to address the recommendations and areas for review. If, at the end of it, you hadn't, then it's likely you'd have a statutory manager or a commissioner. This is similar, except that they work with you throughout the whole process. It's lots of little mini-reviews, I suppose. Less hands-on and, at any point, they can advise the Ministry and put in a statutory manager, or whatever they choose, if they think it's not going to be successful. While their role is still accountability, they work more closely with the Ministry. They can offer advice and bring in support people, so it's a different process.

### **Te Kotahitanga**

The impetus for the school applying to join Phase 5 of Te Kotahitanga came from the regional Student Engagement Initiative (SEI) coordinator who was working with them to introduce restorative practices and reduce suspension rates, early exemptions, and truancy. When Keita arrived in August, the school had already embarked upon the programme. While the decision to

do so on a whole school basis may have been justifiable given the urgency of reform, and the fact that the relatively small teaching staff constituted one cohort, it was not universally well received. Keita surmises that staff probably reflected “the usual range, from the small group of dissenters to the high innovators and a whole lot of people in between.” Her preference would have been to use hui processes to “read and engage in the research, look at our data, reinforce that we need to make a difference in terms of our outcomes for Māori learners, and co-construct a way forward.” She is confident that such an approach would have secured greater ownership and built stronger consensus for involvement in Te Kotahitanga.

### **Where to start?**

In the interim between being appointed and taking up her first principalship, Keita deliberated how best to tackle reform on multiple levels. Her preferred approach was to make haste slowly, to listen, observe, and build relationships before instigating substantial change.

Making big structural change doesn't have a big impact on student outcomes, anyway. There's not a big effect size there, and what it does do is make staff feel very nervous and uncomfortable and unsure. So, while I had that in mind, I wanted to come in and observe.

I had a couple of months between being appointed and taking up the position. I'd obviously been thinking about it for a long time, in terms of reading and being on the aspiring principals' programme, and sought a lot of advice as well. One of the things I admired about the new principal at [previous school] was that, for the first term, he just watched what was happening and built relationships, but actually didn't change a thing. I thought that was really good because it built trust. People felt safe. We felt valued for what we were doing.

I came in here and that was my full intention. My whole focus was to build relational trust and I had a number of strategies in place to do that. I spent every interval and lunch out there with students. Every day, for an hour, I was in class. I tried to get into every



classroom, talking with the students, talking with the teachers. I did a whole SWOT [Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats] analysis, got feedback from teachers, students, community members. Attended every sports game every weekend, Saturday and Sunday, every community event possible. And lots of listening. Interviewed every staff member from the cleaner to the DP, every single person, face to face, as well as reading their SWOT analysis. It was another opportunity for me to find out what they did and for them to express their hopes and concerns, and make suggestions.

Keita sensed a low trust environment amongst students and staff.

Conversations with teachers confirmed her suspicions of division between school leadership and staff.

I had people coming in and saying, “Oh, do you want a spy?” I was saying, “No. Open, honest, transparent. I’m not into divide and rule, or playing games, or picking. No. I value everyone. Thank you, but no.” The one on one feedback made me realise my internal instincts were right around that. I think from my previous context, as well, I understood the negative effects of divide and rule leadership and how important it is to be open, honest, and transparent.

Within the first few weeks, Keita collected substantial baseline data that showed students were seriously at risk of non-achieving.

Student achievement data from August through to December, and especially August, September and October, showed we were on track for the worst results ever. I’ll give you an example; all students for Level 1 had 0-20 credits. I thought, if I don’t jump in and make a few changes, I know what’s going to happen. Some major interventions were needed.

This posed her with an early leadership dilemma. Aware that interventions would potentially jeopardise fledgling relational trust with staff, Keita also knew that inaction would severely compromise student life chances. Dire circumstances required an urgent response, and moral imperative overrode her preferred leadership approach with staff. Pausing to weigh up “the

negative effects,” Keita rang her previous principal and asked him what he would do in the circumstances. He responded, “Oh look, I didn’t jump in because you were doing well as a senior management team. Your practice was good. ERO said that, I could see that, and I didn’t need to but, if it was this context, absolutely.”

Reassured that her instincts were correct, Keita confronted the issue head-on.

Initially, what we did was look at the systems that were in place. Then I got teachers to do a course reflection. They had to list the standards that had already been assessed, what they were yet to assess, students at risk, what strategies they were going to put in place, and I collected all that data and analysed it. I also contacted NZQA to find out what we could do to improve, and I knew that we needed to make some changes around our processes.

While undertaking the review, Keita unearthed systemic problems with subject pathways, senior course advice and placement. Her analysis of subject enrolments revealed that many students were simply not studying enough credits to achieve NCEA: “Because of the structure that we’d set up they couldn’t succeed. We had low expectations.” Given that the teaching year was drawing to a close, little could be done about subject enrolments and addressing system issues became a secondary priority. Of far greater concern was the fate of at-risk students, many of whom felt disengaged and disempowered, and all of whom Keita met with individually. She then forged an “action plan of what teachers needed to do in each class with them, and negotiated with teachers.”

Negotiation with teachers involved collective and individual conversations. A staff meeting was held during which current and projected achievement data was analysed and strategies to address the issue identified.

Staff really wanted the chance until study leave to turn that around and that was really hard. I did step back, but I had all sorts of plans in place if it didn’t happen and it didn’t. By study leave it was looking

very poorly, so then we had to really do some major interventions.

### **Walking the talk**

I've never done anything like this before, but I actually picked students up. I drove the school van, went around and visited families, and said, "Look this is where your child is. I know they can succeed. I have every belief in them. I need your help. Can I take them into school?" We'd done all the phone calling but it hadn't happened.

Keita's fortitude and forthrightness in facing the achievement issue head-on stirred whānau, students and staff into action.

I went out for the first couple of weeks, and then more staff came on board. I didn't force anyone to do it, but more did and we had two vans a day right through the study leave period. Families were being supportive because I was going over and telling them, face to face, that I believed in their children. That was a positive thing. I think the spin-off was that once students were succeeding, there was a ripple effect with more and more kids coming in the van, and then it got to the stage that children would bring themselves in. We had kids coming into the board room, after they were on study leave, and working the whole day with very little supervision. They were very motivated.

In addition to collecting students, Keita taught revision classes within her specialist field. Unlike the majority of her principal colleagues, she has continued to teach one class throughout the year. As a consequence, her teaching practice remains grounded in the classroom and provides important modelling.

I ran short workshops around different standards in health education and then more and more teachers did the same. The HOD English had been on study leave and came back to really horrific literacy results, so he was running workshops and reassessment opportunities.

Despite the whole school approach to Te Kotahitanga, and Keita's example, not all teachers felt ethically or morally compelled to assist. Some echoed the defeatist "I can't do this" response of students and, to Keita's

consternation, actively thwarted remedial initiatives.

It was fairly interesting. We had some who were very resistant and actually trying to sabotage; teachers that wouldn't release the work, refused to. We had to go in and have those hard conversations. There are enough barriers in place already for these kids. We don't need to create them.

### **Initial success**

At the beginning of the following school year, Keita's analysis of national examination results showed that interventions had succeeded beyond expectations, with 70.8% of the year 11 cohort achieving NCEA Level 1. Elated by this accomplishment and eager to celebrate student achievement with the school community, Keita was optimistic that success would inspire students and staff alike to strive even harder. She readily conceded that emergency responses to crisis situations were necessary in the short term but unlikely to change practice over the long term.

It wasn't about transformative practice, leadership and teaching and learning. It's not sustainable, it's not good practice, it's not how I [prefer to lead]. Down the track that won't be happening because we'll have effective teaching and learning, students will be engaged, they'll be attending, and they'll be achieving. But I thought that was a really important strategy for the students, and for the staff to see that we can do this. They are capable. A lot of that was just about having high expectations, believing success was the only option, and supporting students to do that. It was hard work but it was really effective. Look what we achieved in that small time.

While Keita is a first time principal, she is neither unrealistic nor overwhelmed by seemingly herculean tasks. Encountering similar leadership challenges as a DP has held her in good stead, and a context of adversity and struggle is one that she thrives in. This is just as well because there is no shortage of struggle ahead. In addition to student achievement, external authorities have concerns around national assessment and

moderation, and school finances. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority is imposing a process similar to the Arotake Paetawhiti (“I guess what will be at stake there will be accreditation, things like that”) and a meeting with the Ministry over ongoing financial issues is imminent. In all three respects, Keita anticipated the need for a series of action plans to address ongoing concerns and, together with the BOT, has drafted these in advance. In addition to assuaging external concerns, these also constitute a roadmap for internal reform.

We’re going to have an action plan in place before they come. That’s our strategy, too. I met with the board yesterday and we did up nine different action plans. We’ve chosen three because you have to have three goals. The three that we think will make the biggest difference are: one, improving teaching and learning; and two, building leadership capacity and sustainability. The third one is more strategic on our part and that is improving student achievement. It’s an outcome, but it’s also a recommended area for review and development, so I think we can manage it from that end. It’s strategic in the sense that we have a lot of evidence to show that we have done that!

### **The story continues ...**

When we next met, Keita was able to report that external authorities were satisfied with the progress made in improved accountabilities.

All the MNA action items were addressed and there have been a couple of positive shifts there, including improved external moderation processes. I think finances were an issue too, when we last spoke, but there’s been a surplus, and we’ve got another draft surplus for this year. We’ve just had an ERO review two weeks ago and that was positive, so that’s great! That will be confirmed in 4-6 weeks. It sort of feels now that we’ve got quality systems in place and we’ve negotiated where we’re heading in terms of the direction of the school, and building on ‘The [School] Way’ for teaching and learning. Our

next step is really about sustaining everything now, deepening our practice and getting better.

### **Deepening practice**

Keita's approach to deepening practice is a collaborative one that mirrors her classroom practice, and she firmly believes that "what motivates a student motivates teachers." Staff have collectively "unpacked" the *Teacher Professional Learning and Development: Best Evidence Synthesis* (V. M. J. Robinson et al., 2009), identified priority areas for investigation, and made a commitment to cross-curricular professional learning.

We've got some shared agreements. We negotiated, reviewed a range of readings and the previous ERO report. We all came up with an action research model and action plan for each professional learning group (PLG). Staff then opted for a range of PLGs. It happens that they are all aligned with four different groups: one on co-operative learning, one on differentiated learning, one on literacy, and the fourth on the New Zealand curriculum. Within the groups, they've carried out the action plans. There's a real focus on shifting teacher practice, so it wasn't just about learning. They had to go from theory to practice, so they created obs [observation] tools and then led staff meetings, to share that professional learning.

This has led to a change of meeting focus. Whereas previously meetings were primarily administrative in nature, "all staff meetings across each area are now focused on professional learning and pedagogy." Daily briefings have been reduced to two per week, administration and information dissemination is largely achieved via email, and PLG meetings are currently held 8-9am Friday mornings. The senior leadership team have been fully involved in leading professional learning and Keita has seized the opportunity to focus on this aspect of their leadership, "modelling and coaching" in between PLG meetings.

## **'The [School] Way'**

One of the positive outcomes of professional learning explorations has been the emergence of “shared guidelines to add to the Te Kotahitanga effective teacher profile” and the development of ‘The [School] Way’.

That’s new. That’s been co-constructed. So, while we have Te Kotahitanga, we’re also looking at how we teach and learn at this school. We’ve a shared agreement from teachers and our next step is with students, in terms of how we learn and how we are at [school].

From the teachers’ perspective, this includes pedagogical approaches to curriculum and lesson design, cooperative learning, literacy and differentiation that emerged from their PLG findings, and a commitment to implementing these in every lesson. What distinguishes ‘The [School] Way’ from the learning mnemonics of other schools, however, is a commitment to peer coaching, whereby “we’re more able to observe and staff are paired up according to need.” Keita sees this as key to deepening practice.

Where the change has happened has been in the shadow coaching and the feedback and feedforward that we receive throughout all levels.

We know from a range of research that its peer coaching in class that makes the difference. It’s not just about picking up a reading and implementing it.

## **Academic mentoring**

Academic mentoring and the ongoing monitoring of senior student progress have avoided the need for emergency end of year responses. While teachers continue to offer additional revision classes according to need, Keita has not had to collect students from their homes. Time previously invested in senior form classes is now allocated to mentoring throughout the year.

We got rid of form classes because students weren’t attending them. It was not productive time, so we’ve replaced this with academic mentoring. We book in an hour every fortnight, with one teacher to five senior students. There’s academic counselling, an action planning

component, and NCEA monitoring and checking. It's been a really effective way to support [students] and we're now looking at developing something similar in the junior school.

### **Temporary absence**

At the end of term three, following the birth of her daughter, Keita took a month's parental leave. Had the circumstances been different, she probably would have taken longer but "we had a big job to do, with ERO coming in as well. The pregnancy was a surprise, a wonderful surprise, hence the shorter leave." In her absence, one of the DPs took on the acting principal role and people just carried on. Things were set up by then. A year ago, we expanded the SLT to four, to distribute leadership and build capacity across. There was no extra staffing, so it might be four people but it's the same size pie. It was all very structured in terms of the areas that we were leading, and I guess that's a succession planning thing. It's reassuring that, if anyone goes, the processes are in place now. They carry on. They're not reliant on one person.

### **Engaging with the media: Baptism by fire**

At the end of the year, a planned fight between three students hit national headlines and exposed Keita to the vicissitudes of media coverage. When she learned of the incident that took place on the school field, while staff and students were attending Junior Prizegiving, Keita took immediate action. For reasons to which she was not privy, a number of initial meetings with whānau did not proceed and it was not until after the school closed for the year that another meeting was scheduled. When Keita arrived for this, whānau were absent and television reporters and cameras present. Selective reporting of the ensuing interview omitted Keita's deep concern for the victim and her emphatic anti-violence stance, focusing instead on her observation that bullying is a national issue.

That was about the fourth thing, or so, and everything else, including the bit at the beginning about concerns for the young person and their



family, was cut out. The question I was asked was something like, “So, bullying’s really bad at [school]” and I said, “Well, it’s a national issue.” I went into detail about how there’s no place for it here, but all of that was cut out. It sounded like I was just trying to transfer blame over, in terms of the way it was reported.

This was far from the case. The school took immediate action, investigated the incident, suspended the perpetrators and, within the constraints of the Privacy Act, informed the school community. I shared with Keita my observation that many viewers, particularly those knowledgeable about school systems and processes, would critique the sensationalist reporting of the incident and, that having talked with her for some 12 months now, I found the inference that she would respond in the manner alleged incomprehensible.

Yeah. It was devastating. It wasn’t just the spin on it. We got really good advice from the School Trustees’ Association. As soon as they could see the way that we were being portrayed, the stance went to ‘No comment’, but the media coverage kept carrying on and on and on. Then we issued a full statement and that wasn’t printed, so we posted it out. Knowing that the media is so out of our control makes it really challenging. I think that, at times, a factually balanced story can get in the way of a good story - you know, headlines and things!

### **Lessons learned**

There have been a number of lessons learned and the welfare of the students concerned remains uppermost in Keita’s mind.

The whole situation was heart breaking for the victim, for the victim’s family, for the students, for the school, for the community. The wrong-doers were suspended and excluded by the board before it all hit the media. Yes, a devastating situation, but the good thing is that all three students are okay. Hopefully, it will change their lives for the positive in terms of staying on the right path. The victim’s family wants to re-enrol their children and the other person in the

community, who was printed quite a bit, wants to re-enrol their son as well. We're trying to facilitate some restorative meetings with them. Engaging with the media is a topic that received little, if any attention, in Keita's leadership preparation and she describes her first brush with negative press as a challenging learning experience.

What have I learnt from it? I've learnt that I would go live, say that I'll talk to *Campbell Live* (if it was TV3), something like that, because at least then it can't be cut and paste and put all out of context. They could still edit, I guess, but maybe not so harshly. And, now I know the perception of the local papers, I will continue to 'No comment' and when we want to say something, pay for a page and print it.

Misrepresentation irks her. While part of Keita rallies against the injustice perpetrated in the press, she is astute enough to know that responding to misinformation can be a delicate exercise. Recent reporting of stand downs, suspensions and expulsions in local schools serves as further illustration:

On the front page of [newspaper], a couple of weeks ago, an article stated that we had 18 suspensions and a ridiculous number of exclusions, but it was really three or four. There's a whole lot of really strange data out there. We've contacted the Ministry to see where that information came from. Apparently, the paper got it through the Official Information Act, so something's gone amok, and we'll follow up in that sense. It's really difficult because there's a range of things that you can do, but will that be more harming to the school, or not? Is it better to speak up or just let it go and keep trying to promote the successful things? And there are hugely positive things. We know we are making a difference in terms of our data.

Keita's sights remain fixed on things within her control. Following the assault on school grounds, she initiated a rigorous review of school processes, one internal and two undertaken by external agencies. Keita is subsequently satisfied that staff did everything possible to both prevent and respond appropriately to the incident in question.

I guess I always look to things as learning situations. What can we

learn from this situation? Certainly, we went through a full review, and ERO looked at that as well, so it was a good process in that sense. We can be assured that the procedures and policies we have in place are effective, and that it is a safe school, and we will continue to do everything to ensure that. We actively try and prevent incidents. And, for us, we know that a key part of that is finding out everything that's happened in the weekend, hearing those rumours, and sitting the parties down to resolve things [in a restorative justice hui]. And we have to be really vigilant at the end of year, and when there's something different happening in the day.

### **If we can re-culture a school, we can re-culture a community**

The fact that this incident could just as easily have occurred outside school hours, and off school grounds, is irrelevant.

We're still actively involved, whether it's after school or at other events. We take an active role in sending a message that violence isn't okay, and there's always a way around it. And certainly, we know that there's a real opportunity for us. If we can transform the culture of the school then that, in turn, can go out and transform the community. It's exciting. We're seeing some real shifts in culture now. There's been a huge reduction in serious incidents. That was a one-off extremely serious incident, let me just clarify that, but generally stand downs for assault will include anything from a push or a kick. It's more low-level, but we've drawn the line to say, "Hands off, it's never okay," so we're preventing it. 99.9% of the students are awesome, really positive strong leaders. When there is an issue, we deal with it, and then go through a restorative process to resolve the issue, and try and repair harm.

When that serious incident occurred, it was an emergent review process. We've learnt we can respond to basically whatever challenges arise, because that was a huge one and potentially it could have affected the school. We sustained the roll, which is great, and I think

that could have been an issue if we hadn't progressed as a school and hadn't forged those relationships. So that was a positive outcome. The focus this year is on deepening practice and addressing student engagement in sustainable ways.

Through our strategic and general review processes, we're constantly reflecting on how we're doing in every aspect, and then responding and adapting what we've got for improvement. It's an ongoing process. But, certainly, those unplanned things become part of it and we review those as well. This year, we're embedding and sustaining practice, developing teacher practice and deepening that. We've added a fourth strategic goal. The first three remain the same: improving the quality of teaching and learning, building leadership capacity, improving student achievement. The new goal is improving student engagement, which includes attendance and how engaged students are at school.

### **Student voice**

Keita sees student voice as a critical, central determinant of a safe, supportive and stimulating learning environment. To ascertain what students think, she instigated a student connectedness and wellbeing audit, and intends administering *Me and My School*, a New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) student engagement survey designed for Year 7-10 students. In addition, daily connection and regular student meetings have been important in assuring students "that they've got a voice now and that it's responded to." As a consequence, students are beginning to develop a stronger sense of community and taking greater responsibility for their social environment. The student executive has taken the initiative in placing themselves on a duty roster and organising sports and cultural activities during intervals and lunchtimes. Some have also led initial restorative conversations with students, although "not the more formal ones."

### **Inherent optimism**

Beneath her buoyant youthful exterior lie a strong heart and bones of steel. Not everything has gone to plan, but huge progress has been made. Keita remains humble, hopeful, and steadfastly determined. As this conversation drew to a close, she pre-empted my question about her passion for “wanting to make a difference, yeah. And we’re getting there, you know? We’re certainly getting some culture shift now, so it’s exciting.”

### **Embedding culture shift**

When we next met, external funding of Te Kotahitanga was nearing an end. In addition to continued focus on deepening and sustaining pedagogical practice, Keita and the senior team were grappling with the structural reform necessary to institutionalise change. Initiatives to strengthen student engagement and home-school partnerships include three-way whānau conferencing, streamlined academic pathway guidance, purposeful mentoring of and leadership opportunities for junior students, Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L), restorative justice hui processes, and working with local iwi to “develop cultural competencies in our teaching practice that are informed by mana whenua.”

Leadership development priorities have shifted from senior team learning about GPILSEO (see pp. 43-45) to building capacity among middle leaders. As with the former, the latter will be co-constructed with those involved. Keita perceives GPILSEO as a “really good self-review tool for the school, in terms of sustainability” and believes the leadership components add “so much more to Phase 1, 2 and 3.”

### **Physical environment**

Following the *Me and My School* survey which identified “a couple of areas” that “small numbers felt were less safe in the school,” Keita responded with increased supervision, structured activities, external music, and conveniently situated student feedback boxes that year leaders clear and respond to weekly. The school is in negotiation with the Ministry over a

property upgrade that will not only see the remediation of leaky buildings and earthquake braced classrooms, but the construction of an early childhood centre and teen parent unit. Keita sees this as:

A great opportunity to rebuild the school.... It's about creating an environment where our rangatahi can be who they are within the school and feel valued and affirmed. And see who they are everywhere – physically and within the curriculum.

### **Regional and community voice**

Fostering a sense of belonging extends beyond school gates into the wider region. Students have accompanied Keita to local council meetings focused on ensuring that school leavers “are in further training or employment.” At a strategic planning meeting attended by CEOs, successful businesses and council members, students critiqued available print resources: “I wouldn't read this ... online is the way to go.” They presented a compelling case for “student representation at the governance level and ... voice in each aspect of the planning.” Students were so passionate, positive and articulate that the majority of stakeholders present “were really taken aback and listened. I think their perception of [suburb] changed as a result.”

Keita is “really encouraged and optimistic” that these young people will “transform the community.” In the interim, there's still a “sense of urgency” driving conversations with whānau around how the school can support them to support their future leaders. Enrolment conversations have shifted from a more clinical gathering and dispensing of information to the co-construction of genuine partnership. As Keita comments, the focus is on “how we can work together more ... and put support in place before they start school.” Dialogue and power sharing are key to this:

What support do they think their child might need? What are the issues? What can we do to ensure that they're going to be successful? And then we come back with, “Well, this is what we can do. What else? How would you like to be involved? What else would you like to see happen?” ... It's about asking different questions and creating

different processes within that enrolment space.

### **Equity of outcomes**

When it comes down to it, Keita is determined to ensure that espoused theories of action translate into the “agentic positioning” and practice necessary to secure “equity of outcomes.” She finds it somewhat “ironic” that at a time when “the rest of the world is thinking Te Kotahitanga is a great, innovative programme and the way [they] need to be heading,” the New Zealand Ministry of Education is signalling the scaling down rather than scaling up of Te Kotahitanga.

In the meantime, her focus is on sustaining gains made. The biggest success lies in seeing:

Confident, capable young people who are actively participating and having high expectations of themselves and their future. And we’re having to raise them. As professionals, we’re having to provide for that to happen, in terms of what we’re providing within the school, and the quality of educational leadership. It’s a great challenge to have.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: JIM

### Part I

Jim's statement that "secondary schools are much more difficult to change than primary schools" is a provocative one and he makes no apologies for this. Nor does he think people will be particularly surprised by his forthrightness. "People might get upset by anything I've got to say but they won't be surprised." What makes Jim atypical is not his candour but the fact that he has been a principal of both primary and secondary schools. This experience makes him more qualified than many to compare the two. So, what makes secondary schools more difficult to change? Jim's response hinges around the nature of teaching and the size of the institution:

I think primary teachers and primary trained teachers are generally a lot more flexible, for a number of reasons. Firstly, there's not the pressure of public exams. Secondly, whereas some secondary teachers are teaching subjects not students, primary teachers teach across the curriculum. They teach the whole child not just one subject. Thirdly, secondary schools tend to be much bigger and the diversity of personalities much greater. If you have pedantic people, they are quite hard to move.

Jim suspects that subject specialisation increases the potential for pedantry and finds it ironic that the division of labour within secondary schools should generate diseconomies of scale when it comes to implementing change.

Secondary schools are different in terms of dynamics and development. I keep thinking about this and I don't know why it is. You have more people with particular expertise and if you're able to pull all that together.... You do everything as a primary school principal but, in a secondary school, I don't have to worry about day relief, somebody else does that. I don't have to worry about all the NCEA results and entering the data, somebody else does that. And when you think you've got all these people with all this expert



knowledge, why is it so bloody hard to change it? Why does it take so long? And I still haven't worked that out, to be honest, but that's where it's different. And that's where it can be really frustrating. There are days when I go home thinking, "We just need to go faster," you know?

Having outlined key differences between the two contexts, Jim paradoxically contends that:

They're different, but they're not.... I think, in terms of principalship, they are very closely aligned in terms of accountability, your role and your responsibilities in terms of working with your community, with your board, with your staff. So the day to day administrative job of the principal is pretty much the same in both schools. You still have to report to the board.

### **Jim's teaching career and early principalships**

When Jim commenced his teaching career in the 1970s, beginning teachers were bonded for three years and placement in the first two schools was determined by regional education boards. At the end of this probationary period, Jim applied for four jobs in three different regions. His selection of schools was pragmatic, simply what was available, and he felt no particular affinity with any of these regions. Within a day of each other, Jim received a telegram from the General Managers of two separate education boards, "Recommended assistant teacher X school. Do you accept?" Had he not conformed to the common expectation that responses be conveyed by return telegram, Jim would have accepted an intermediate rather than primary school position, established roots in an entirely different community and taken a different career path.

### **Early apprenticeship**

The sequence of telegrams proved fortuitous in that Jim's knowledge of school operations increased exponentially at his third school. When students received weekly religious instruction, Jim and other novice

teachers spent time with the principal.

He took talked to us about how you run a school, how schools are administered, what his job was, and all the different forms. I've still got the exercise book. Every time we'd go in, he'd take us through this series of tasks - this is what happens when you're getting a relief teacher or when you're appointing teachers, etc. It was all typed up and we used to stick it into this book.... In lots of ways it prepared me for what was to come, but I may not have recognised it at the time. I was probably just too young and inexperienced.

The first typewritten page in Jim's exercise book outlines the principal's rationale in guiding his Year 1-4 teachers in matters concerning school administration:

Many things just appear to happen. Requests are made for what reason. Demands on punctuality of returns are expected. School appears to function without any unnecessary hustle and bustle. People can find things not only now but in years to come. Records are kept and a school's history is quietly recorded. In actual fact all teachers play a part in "school administration."

The contents page (see Figure 5, next page) reveals priorities in the period prior to 1989 when the Education Board was responsible for school accounting and staff appointments.

As principal, you had a bit of input around property, but most decisions were made out of the school. I think the most work you did was writing the daily school diary, which we don't even get time to do these days, and which would be good for historical purposes. Those were the days when principals had time to read *The Dominion* and do the crossword. Yeah, that's a fact. They weren't overextended in terms of their workload.

Because "senior management meetings were mostly administrative," discussion around leadership was limited. While the principal was responsible for writing schemes of work, much of the professional learning was delivered off-site at local Education Department offices, and at

residential Lopdell House courses.

There wasn't a great deal of pedagogical leadership. And there certainly wasn't any distributed leadership. It was more: "this is the way it's going to be guys. You take control of this; you take control of that." ... He was a military man so, when I first arrived, the agenda for the teacher only day was 0800 hours, 0805, 0810, all that sort of thing.

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Figure 5: School administration topics, 1972

Jim's principal took both a professional and paternal interest in his future. As a young single man, Jim was welcomed into the principal's family fold and fondly recalls spending most weekends together at the beach.

He was a neat guy. He and I got on really well, so I did three years there. He often said to me after that, "You know, I always thought you had a bit of potential, boy." So he did push, not only then, but even

after I left. I can remember him coming to see me when I arrived here [current school]. He used to live around the corner and we had a long talk about those days and what's happened over time. He was the sort of guy that you could always go and talk to. I guess, in lots of ways, he was probably a mentor for me.

This mentoring paid dividends when Jim took up the position of deputy principal at his next school and three successive principalships thereafter. Prior tutelage made new operational responsibilities relatively straightforward and Jim was welcomed "into the inner sanctum of the principals' group." Immersion in seven primary school contexts exposed him to the complexities of diverse human and physical architectures and he honed his leadership responses accordingly. As a teaching principal in small schools, Jim's leadership style was very much hands on. He taught subjects and class configurations perceived to be the least desirable, sought input into the writing of schemes of work for subjects he was less familiar with, and encouraged an inquiry learning approach amongst colleagues and students.

In larger primary schools, roll generated management units meant that Jim was able to work with a senior management team for the first time and to distribute oversight of the junior, middle and senior school. This coincided with a national shift towards open plan teaching in newer primary schools and a resulting deprivatisation of teaching practice that some found threatening.

What made it interesting was the inability or the difficulty in changing people's traditional thinking to a more flexible pedagogical approach. There were quite a number of elderly teachers who weren't particularly good at working co-operatively. They liked to be locked in their room.

Having assessed the climate in all three sections of the school, Jim focused his efforts on the "middle unit of staunch, old, traditional teachers who were really difficult and some just weren't that competent." While shifting entrenched attitudes and patterns of behaviour was not easy, nor entirely

successful, the potential detriment to students precluded doing nothing. Through a process of persuasion and natural attrition, Jim “eventually managed to move most of them out and get some new blood in there” but, by the time he left, the middle school culture had “only just started to change.” This experience highlighted the time needed to initiate and embed change, and Jim acknowledges that his next promotion “probably came about two years too early” for him to see changes through to lasting fruition: “I hadn’t quite finished there.”

At his next and largest school, Jim’s initial reading of context saw him adopt a more invitational approach.

In a big primary school, you have factions of staff that think very differently and work very differently, so the first step is to talk to them and listen to what they’re saying, to try and get a feel for how they’re thinking and what they believe is important. Trying to get where their priorities are, you know. Like I said to you earlier, if you’re here to eat your lunch, go home; if you’re here just for the money, see a psychiatrist; if you’re here for the kids, come on in.

Jim is of the view that teachers who are capable and committed to student learning should be trusted to act as the professionals they are.

You leave them alone to get on with it and you start to work on the others. One of the ways to do that is to work through your senior management team, so you become a bit more distributive and you allow them to identify what they believe the challenges are. What are the things that are of concern to us in the school? What are the things that are the barriers?

When I asked Jim whether his distributed approach was pragmatic or philosophical in intent, he suggested it was a response to the context in which he found himself.

You walk in and you think what’s going on here? Who are the people you need to work with and work on? Who’s got your back and who hasn’t? I think it’s a matter of getting to know them. I don’t think it’s a deliberate, “Right, this is how I’m going to approach each job.” It’s

been similar, because I guess you have a style, but it's slightly different in each environment, in each place. The other thing is, of course, that you're learning a whole lot more as you go. You don't start with something and say, "This is my philosophy for life." I've changed as much as they have throughout the years, so the more I learn, the more I change.

### **Immersed in context**

Jim has lived in this community for 40 years, teaching and leading at six different schools. Fully immersed and comfortable in the broader setting, he has not really deliberated why this is. The context has, in a sense, been taken for granted.

There are a lot of Māori kids in this region. More than 50% of the population is Māori. More than 50% of the school population is Māori. Most of the schools I've worked in have been what would have been decile 1 or 2 or 3. They haven't been high decile schools, apart from [school] and [school]. It's just been the way it's happened. I've never thought, "Oh no, I couldn't teach in that school because there's too many Māori kids." It never occurred to me, probably to my and their detriment, that it was any different - for a start.

When I asked Jim why this was to his and his students' detriment, he replied, "Well, probably because I didn't do the learning. I should have learnt Māori right from the start and, in hindsight, I'd love to have."

### **Priority on students**

Throughout his career, students and student learning have been front and foremost in Jim's mind. Consistent with this ethos, Jim routinely prioritised the needs of students over all others, including school inspectors. Power and position were duly relegated. He recalled one occasion when the inspector arrived in his class unannounced, expecting to discuss school matters with him:

I was running a system where the kids contracted to do certain things

within a certain timeframe, at their leisure. So if they wanted to do maths now, they could. I had half hour teaching spots and the rest of the time involved interviews with students. They had to register their name on the blackboard and I'd work my way through the list. The inspector came over and said, "I need to talk to you." I said, "Well, put your name on the board." What I was trying to say to him was that what I'm doing with these kids is really more important. I can talk to you anytime. Anyway, he finally put his name on the board but it got the better of him in the end. He came up and said, "Excuse me; I really need to talk to you." I said, "Well, if you don't mind, I'll ask the kids if it's okay for you to jump the queue," so I did and the kids said, "Yes sir, that's fine, no problem." So he knew right from the start. It was about, don't bring your Auckland attitude and demeanour down here and push everybody around. We're doing just as well as anybody else but this is how we work. The kids are the priority.

### **Advocacy: Community and national**

During his primary career, Jim became increasingly involved in NZEI, the primary teachers' union, and undertook a variety of roles at local and regional level. This experience deepened his knowledge of policy and system issues, expanded professional networks, enhanced self-belief and honed inter-personal skills.

I'm a union person from the point of view that I really think we need to protect the good people we've got, but I never walk down the street with a banner. I don't believe in going on strike. I believe that if you can't sit around the table and sort it out, you're history. You might as well give it up, because it needs to be sorted around the table as a professional. If you push people into a corner, how do you build relationships with people who have all got the same goals?

As chairperson of the NZEI district council, Jim embraced the proposal that there be a Māori joint chair. His community ties and willingness to share power meant that this process was smooth rather than fractious.

We were the first in New Zealand to have a joint chair of the district council: one Māori, one non-Māori. It was fine. I knew a lot of the Māori community and I was comfortable having somebody Māori sitting alongside me having an equal share of what was going on. We always worked out, co-constructed I guess it is now, what it was that we were going to do and how we were going to run meetings. I think X is one of those places where people recognise people who work for their community.

### **Regional schooling improvement project**

After nine years in his third principalship, Jim began thinking “it’s time, probably good for the school to have a change and somebody else to take it to its next place, wherever that might be.” He was attracted to a regional schooling improvement project designed to improve student achievement, and Māori student achievement in particular. This project was a collaborative venture between two runanga, 40 schools, the local council and Ministry of Education, and one of the main objectives was to encourage and build a holistic view of education within the community.

In order to do that in the school sector, we needed to ensure that pre-school and post-school pathways were in fact in line. We needed to establish those connections and foster a community value of education. What was it that we needed to do to enable these kids to come to school prepared? It wasn’t that difficult in its philosophy, but it was quite hard in practice. One of the things you had to do in order to make significant change was build relationships and that takes time.

We established a range of work groups and advisory committees to look at particular things. There was literacy, numeracy, professional learning for teachers, special education, early childhood. We started to build relationships with every early childhood organisation, every school, every tertiary organisation, every community agency, and we had an enormous wealth of support. And it really takes a long time to



get all of these people on board.

Two years into the project, just as things were starting to come together, Ministry re-structuring saw a change of priorities and a shift to what Jim perceived as more narrow performative measures. “Such things as lift the reading age of year five boys in the next six months. Here’s \$100,000 dollars, now go and do it” was not what this project was about, as far as Jim could see. Nor could the runanga and school partners who

wanted it to continue the way it was. They’d crank it up, probably, speed it up a bit. I became quite frustrated because I was beginning to see that this was just throwing money at a project in disconnected ways and that when it finished it would not be sustainable. I didn’t want to be part of something like that, so I started to look and think what else could I do?

## **Part II**

### **Crossing the divide: From primary to secondary**

Just as Jim was looking for other opportunities to contribute to education, a colleague alerted him to a principal vacancy at a local secondary school and encouraged him to apply. His initial response was, “Oh, come on, mate. That’s not me at all” but when Jim “started to get a bit of pressure from others” he began to wonder,

Is it that different? Maybe it isn’t. Maybe being a principal isn’t that different. I’ve done it for 19 years, I can probably do it. How different can it be? Well it’s very different, believe me, but on the other hand it’s not. So, anyway, I applied for the position.

The prospect of leading a community school with a strong ethic of care excited him and he believes this culture was developed and embedded by the school’s foundation principal some five decades before. He credits this principal with the ability to focus the rationale for the school.

It’s about care of kids and the highest quality education. It’s about

caring for our people and that culture of care continues to be strong. When I got the package and read it, I started to understand the culture of the school and what was behind it. And when I got here and I couldn't see it, I was a bit worried. Well, when I say I couldn't see it, I couldn't see it at first.

In the early days, Jim felt little warmth from his new colleagues and the rhetoric of care seemed hollow. The circumstances surrounding his appointment meant that Jim's transition from primary to secondary principalship met with some resistance from staff. There had been strong support for an incumbent DP and many were sceptical about the ability of a primary principal to lead a secondary school.

It polarized the staff because there were some who wanted the DP. So half were in his camp and half weren't. They weren't in my camp because they really didn't know me. I only knew a couple of people. It was not easy to walk in here day one, let me tell you, and I got a snub from some.

I had to really work hard to build those relationships, to have them understand me and what I was about, so that they would open up and relax. I basically spent that first year just nodding at the right time and letting them get on with it, and learning that. And then I gradually started to make more and more impact but, along the way, there were some big barriers and hurdles to overcome.

Unfortunately, many of the barriers posed by the attitudes and behaviours of a few individuals proved harder to shift than the inanimate elements in the learning environment. Jim generally favours a collaborative and conciliatory approach in which the exercise of positional power is a last rather than first resort. He is convinced that while this approach is often more time consuming, it is more likely to secure buy-in from staff.

Sometimes it's tempting to say, "Look, I'm the boss, you'll do it" but, in fact, as soon as you go down that track, you immediately disadvantage a whole lot of kids because somebody in the team will go, "Nah, I'm going to do it my way." I can make hard decisions when they need to

be made, and I do, but I try to have people understand what it is that we're doing and why.

Hard decisions were necessary when it came to resolving two particularly sensitive and historical employment issues. In both instances, prior experience as a union advocate cushioned Jim from relational and procedural stress because, in addition to honing his advocacy, mediation and negotiation skills, Jim had witnessed many highly charged situations and learnt the importance of acting calmly, respectfully and resolutely. He recognises the potential for one person to exert huge influence over the demeanour of students and colleagues, and doesn't shy away from making tough decisions for the collective good: "Well, you can't because it affects kids and, if it does that, then you have to do what you have to do." Jim is mindful of the need to balance multiple perspectives and there are times when being perceived as the "worst bastard on earth" is a small price to pay for restoring peace. Reflecting on one case, Jim commented that the departure of a senior manager meant:

A huge lid came off the place and people could breathe. It cost the school a lot of money, but the price of that person continuing as opposed to the price of them leaving was too high. There's no question that we're in a much better space now than we ever were. And it takes time to recover from stuff like that, you know?

Having talked with those directly concerned, Jim staked his claim with the staff as a whole and sought their commitment to moving forward. He declared:

Two things: one is that I didn't make the appointment, the board did, and, secondly, I'm here. I'm not worried about history. I don't want to have any debates. I'm worried about us working together and moving this place forward. So, if you can work with that, I can. You make your decision but, at the end of the day, we're here for one thing only and that's those kids out there, so just let's get on with it.

### **Getting on with it: The first year**

Jim describes the first year as “bloody terrifying.” To him, the school context appeared to be “compartmentalised, siloed, competitive and, in some ways, confrontational.” The polarised nature of staff relationships led some to attempt to gain influence with the new principal by “opening up to me about others in the school.”

The first thing I did was meet with the DPs. We had dinner and a few beers together and talked. During January, I interviewed all the HODs and talked to them about their expectations of me, their view of the place, all that sort of thing. That was interesting because there was a bit of power play going on, that’s for sure.

His initial conversations and assessment of school context left Jim thinking, “Geez, there’s some work to be done here: physically, socially, pedagogically, the whole deal.” While building relationships would take some time, there were immediate steps Jim could take to improve the learning environment for students and teachers.

I thought the place looked a bit grotty and lots of people said they didn’t have much in the way of equipment, which they didn’t. So I went to the board and said, “Look, I’d really like some money to buy teachers the equipment they need to focus on learning. Then we can decide what we’re going to do with the property and so on.” I got a few hundred thousand dollars out of them.

This represented a substantial sum and financial reserves built up at expense of previous student cohorts was something Jim felt a bit “awkward about, to be honest. Yeah, there was a lot of money in the bank that had not been spent.” He sees his legacy as “more about making sure that you’ve got the tools to do the job and the facilities to do the job and the people to make the difference” than the accumulation of substantial funds for future cohorts. Jim distributed the money amongst departments and “they got on with the job” of purchasing essential equipment. He then reviewed the 10 Year Property Plan and convinced the board to shelve “a contract about to be let for two science labs” that would have consumed approximately 25%

of the funds available.

\$860,000 for two science labs: 50 something rooms, how am I going to do this? It's not going to work, so I convinced the board to can it while we stepped back and had another look. The first job was to look at the general classrooms. There were 30 classrooms that really needed to be revamped, so we spent \$500,000 and we did those. We put new carpet down, vortex on the walls, new curtains, chair rails around the walls so the paint wasn't all chipped off, whiteboards. Some of them had the old roll-around chalkboards, you know? It was crap.

Jim realised that science staff in particular would be disappointed by the delay in constructing new laboratories. He mitigated this to some extent by articulating the rationale for his decision making and involving staff in the building design process.

I explained to staff what I was trying to do, that we were trying to look after the kids first and that's what's important in this place. It's the kids, believe it or not. It's not about you.... The people who responded were pretty good about it really, but some of them were going, "Oh God, I've waited six years for new science labs and now you're going to make me wait more." And they did wait, but look what they got. They got exactly what they wanted. They got six of them and they're happy as sand boys now.

While the priority was on learning spaces, something that teachers also benefitted from, Jim paid some attention to the non-teaching spaces that staff inhabited.

There was a bit of staff stuff; I painted the staff room and did up the work room, and that sort of thing. They're still going on to me about the toilets, but it's a toilet for Christ's sake. You don't spend a lot of time in there, or you shouldn't.

### **Professional inquiry**

Physical refurbishment constituted a superficial but immediate indicator of new learning priorities. Of greater importance was the re-design of

professional learning and the shift to a more intentional discursive pedagogy. In an attempt to utilise resident expertise and minimise power hierarchies, special interest and cross curricular professional learning groups were established whereby group members took it in turn to host each meeting. Discussion topics were typically generated by the professional learning committee and everyone was expected to participate in the professional reading and dialogue that followed. Jim was placed in a group “with the HOD Japanese, the calculus teacher, a music teacher, a PE teacher, and a social science assistant HOD.” He found the small group structure an empowering one in that it gave voice to each individual and avoided departmental group-think. “It’s inter-departmental, so there’s no ‘This is what we think.’ It’s what I think. Everybody has a say.”

While Jim realised that the inquiry orientation of professional learning groups would align well with Te Kotahitanga, this was not the catalyst for their introduction and the creation of a receptive environment was, to some extent, serendipitous.

There was some planning but some of it was accidental. It was more, ‘We should be doing this. Oh, yeah, that would fit with’, not ‘What do we need to do to fit with?’ It was about talking and throwing ideas around.

### **Desperately seeking Te Kotahitanga**

Staff involvement in ongoing professional learning did not readily translate to improved educational outcomes for students and reform initiatives were struggling to gain traction. It seemed that “however hard we worked, however caring we were, however good our relationships were, Māori kids weren’t coming up with better qualifications. Something else needed to be done.”

Jim first became aware of Te Kotahitanga in 2005 when a support staff member undergoing initial teacher education alerted him to Russell Bishop’s work. At a principal’s conference in Wellington later that year, Jim approached Russell and asked, “How do we get into this?” At that point,

involvement was restricted to schools in the Waikato region and Jim's initial application was rejected on these grounds. Determined to advance this agenda, Jim launched a multi-faceted three year campaign directed at the research team, staff, local schools, Ministry personnel, and the Minister of Education.

I just kept on and on, harping on and on at them at every opportunity. Then, in 2008, Te Kotahitanga material formed part of our professional reading around improving Māori student achievement. Six of us went to the Te Kotahitanga *Voices* conference, at the University of Waikato. It was a great opportunity. I talked to Russell again. I met a couple of people in the Ministry, who I knew from NZEI days, and pushed our cause. The National government had just come in and Anne Tolley [Minister of Education] was there. We had the heads up that she was going to announce the extension to Te Kotahitanga, so we lobbied. Anybody who would listen got it between the eyes from all six of us for a couple of days, including the Minister, and so we just went for it at every opportunity. Then the extension was announced and we thought, "Yeah, we're in! We're going to be in. We're going to fight."

When we came back, we got together and talked about the learning that had gone on for the six of us. Then, at the beginning of 2009, three of us presented a start of year Teacher Only day learning group session on Te Kotahitanga. Every staff member had an introduction to what it's about, what the research says, what the narratives were saying, what deficit theorising is, how Te Kotahitanga works in a school, the five year commitment to it, etcetera, etcetera.... There was a lot of talk about Te Kotahitanga. I kept saying to staff, "If we get it, it's going to start in 2010. We need to be thinking about whether you're going to be in the first cohort or the second." I was on and on and on about it, all the time.

While the school met the criteria for inclusion in Phase 5, Jim realised that the involvement of other schools in the area would offset travel costs for the

research team and strengthen their case. More importantly, a regional application would benefit the entire community and provide a unique opportunity to research the impact of Te Kotahitanga on a regional scale.

We've got only nine secondary schools. Some of them are quite small and, under the criteria, wouldn't be able to get in. And they're all whānau, you know? They're transient and move from one place to another, regularly, so it's important that we're consistent with them.

This is about our people and our community.

Jim and a staff member used their professional and personal networks to lobby parents and local principals. Once a "few parents started to talk about Te Kotahitanga, it gathered a bit of momentum," and when the time came to make the application, Jim invited the research team to visit.

They went to a meeting at the wananga at night and the next day met with boards and principals in town. They went away from here not only with the promise of lots of seafood at the launch, but with the promise that we would work as a community. As chair of the local Secondary Principals' Association, I collected individual applications, collated a regional one which everyone approved, and sent them all off.

Tenacity eventually paid dividends but success was bittersweet.

We waited and waited and waited and waited, and finally they came back and said, "No, just the four schools that met the original criteria." We were gutted. It really upset those who didn't get in. They were beside themselves. I rang them, as a matter of respect, to say, "Look I'm really sorry. You've got our support, anything you want us to help you with." It was pretty disappointing to be honest. But then, you know, we had to get over it. We had to get on with it because, at the end of the day, I'm responsible for this school, not for every other school.

### **Launching Te Kotahitanga**

Getting on with it didn't mean forgetting community ties and the public



launch of Te Kotahitanga provided another opportunity to give the Ministry “a bit of a serve” over the non-inclusion of partner schools.

The majority of Māori students are in schools in this region, so it isn't rocket science. You think it's hard to change a secondary school? It's a million times harder to change the Ministry's view on anything. But that doesn't stop us trying, you understand. We keep trying because it's in the best interests of our kids, and who best knows their kids? Well, we do. And I'm not just saying me but I am the voice of the school. There is a whole lot that sits behind that and I'm the obvious person to voice the concerns people have. So, it's not just me talking; sometimes people think it might be, but it's not.

### **The first cohorts**

In line with the research kaupapa and Jim's intuitive approach to change, participation in Te Kotahitanga was voluntary.

The approach we took was that if you make it compulsory and there are still some people who are doubtful, they'll potentially sabotage it, or they won't give it what it really needs and deserves. So we'll take those on board who are really keen.

The school had “no trouble getting thirty” and the second cohort comprising “pretty much the rest” have commenced training. Jim is confident that “we'll get them all, except one.” When I asked him what he was going to do with the one, Jim responded,

Nothing. Just quietly mention from time to time, “So, how are things going with achievement for your Māori students? What specific things have you got in place?” And eventually he'll either leave or go, “Oh, I might come along to the next one.” There'll always be something going on because there'll always be new staff. So, yeah, I'm relaxed about it.

### **We not I, us not me**

Of far greater significance to Jim is the overwhelming shift in staff culture.

When you start to see the enormous change in general relationships and the way that conversations take place between staff – if that’s all we’ve achieved in the first year, that’s enough for me, to be honest, because it’s a totally different place.... Did you notice the sign in the table tennis room that says, ‘It’s all about us’? ‘All about us’ means us as a school community. It’s not about me, it’s about us. They’ve pretty much got there now. It just takes a while.

### **Streamlining strategic goals**

Experience suggested that in order to consolidate and sustain early progress, Jim needed to concentrate energy and resources on Te Kotahitanga, rather than divest these across multiple unrelated initiatives. Enabling staff to engage fully in the school’s strategic priorities required alertness to change overload and, where necessary, the determination to protect people from external accountability demands. The strategic plan was simplified and the annual goals reduced from “something like twelve goals to two.”

The two goals were to implement the new revised curriculum and improve Māori student achievement. That was it. We don’t want to know anything else; everything else will fall in around that. That’s our charter, our strategic plan, our targets for the year and, in fact, for the next five years at least. And the next question is how do we make that sustainable? Well, we make it sustainable by making it part of the way we live now, so there’s a whole lot of other traditional stuff that might go out the door. And that might mean that we’re not complying with the Ministry’s requirements and their annual targets and all that. Well, tough shit. If it improves students’ achievement, particularly Māori student achievement, and it improves teachers’ teaching, I don’t really care. What can they do?

Implicit in this is a judicious prioritising of change initiatives that complement Te Kotahitanga. While Jim firmly believes that Te Kotahitanga constitutes the way forward, he does not see it as the sole panacea for

endemic problems.

It can't work alone. You have to take into account a whole lot of other things that make up the world. You have to bring in every other part of students' lives because this is about [school]. Improving Māori student achievement is not just about relationships, it's not just about allowing students to work in groups and interact in different ways, it's not just about the way you change your teaching. It's part of a bigger picture. It's certainly the catalyst to drive a whole lot of things but it's not a silver bullet. If we did nothing else but follow that, we still might not have the best achievement that we could. I suppose I say that because I don't want us to think here's another initiative, throw everything else away and do this, because it's not like that.

### **Staff recruitment and succession**

Avoiding "initiative-itis" means internalising reform to the point where it becomes part of the fabric of the school, reliance on external developers is no longer necessary, and changes in personnel have minimal impact.

At some stage, we have to make it ours. It has to be ours. I can only influence sustainability while I'm here but if I've built a strong enough culture in terms of 'the way' and the belief in that, I would hope that the next person will continue that. And the way things are shaping up, I might have some sway over the next person.... Last year, I was working with my DP as part of the National Aspiring Principals' Programme and I think the best training he got out of me was during my sabbatical when he was leading the school.

Mentoring staff is one way of building continuity, appointing people who are predisposed towards Te Kotahitanga another. Every advertisement for support and teaching staff states that applicants must embrace the philosophy of Te Kotahitanga.

That's just the way it is. This is a Te Kotahitanga school. If you're here already, we'll encourage you to do it but, when you come in, you know that you have to make that commitment. You don't necessarily have to

know it all, but you have to be willing to participate. So that's the question we ask in interviews. It's also written into the advertisement. Interestingly, in recent times, most people have done some homework on it. If they haven't, you think, "What planet are you on, sunshine?" and appoint someone else.

### **Creating leadership synergies**

Participation in Te Kotahitanga has precipitated a fundamental reconceptualising of senior managers as leaders of learning, reinforced distributive approaches to leadership and generated some thinking around the future composition and function of the senior leadership team.

If there are a group of people who have my blessing to manage the professional learning, then I trust them to manage this in a way that's appropriate for everybody in the school. I haven't ever had to say, "No, actually, I don't think you should do that." Give somebody a job and tell them how to do it? No. Give somebody a job because they've got the expertise and let them get on with it. I've got too much to do to worry about stuff like that anyway. When you delegate in a primary school, it's easy to stand and watch. Here [secondary], you just ain't got time. You just get on with it and this is why you delegate in the first instance, but you delegate to people who have expertise. My DP is outstanding with stuff like this. He's definitely a leader of learning who has distributed the major development of professional learning across the school to two other people who are responsible to him. They work together, they plan together and they implement together but, because he's the DP, he's got other roles to perform, so he's gradually moving away and getting other people involved in that.

Distributing leadership means navigating a number of tensions. Jim is loath to take the best teachers out of the classroom, frustrated by staff demands for appropriate recompense, and constrained by historical management unit allocations.

You're caught between a rock and a hard place because you're really

reluctant to take your best teachers out of class, and you've got to try and make sure that you don't disadvantage the kids again. It's a fine balance. Management units are fraught. There's a lot of tradition. I would really love to be able to say, "Right, can them all. Put them all in the pot and then lets negotiate what we do with them and why." We don't have any spares. Somebody left and the roll went down and we needed to lose two units so, there it is, we're back to square one. It's an absolutely stupid system. I understand the philosophy behind it, the flexibility, the reward, but, at the end of the day, it's like everything else, there ain't enough of them to do what you need to do with them.

Within these constraints, Jim is determined that the lead facilitation role is an appropriately acknowledged, well resourced, and permanent component of the staffing profile.

I've talked to senior management about the position that the lead facilitator currently holds. Long term, I see a position for a leader of Māori achievement. I hate to label it, but somebody in the school will have specific responsibility for ensuring that pedagogy, professional learning and Māori achievement is maintained at a high level. Now, who and what that looks like, and how they manage it, is another issue. It won't necessarily be called a Te Kotahitanga facilitator at the end of five years. It'll be something else, but it'll have a similar role in making sure that everybody who comes into this place is well versed in the practices that we take on as a school.

### **Impact of Te Kotahitanga**

Of all the initiatives he has experienced throughout his career, Te Kotahitanga has had the most profound impact on Jim's leadership thinking and practice. It has reignited his passion for change leadership.

Over forty something years, I believe the most important component of what I was doing was the kids. That's what I joined to do, you know, to make a difference to them. That's what I've always been passionate about. And I've been in and out of so many initiatives that people have

tried over the years, and they've worked for a bit but haven't been sustainable. And I've always been a very strong believer that in New Zealand education we've been fickle. We've decided that here's a new initiative, we've dropped the bundle there, we've jumped in here, and then we think, okay, that's gone stale, that doesn't work, what do I do now? I've always been a believer in viewing these things as a toolbox component, as the new spanner or the new screwdriver. And you use that toolbox in a range of situations, with a range of students. But it's never really made the difference. There's not been something that has challenged my thinking about what I'm doing as much as Te Kotahitanga has. All of a sudden I saw the light. It was like an epiphany. Why the hell didn't I think of that? I probably had all the strategies but I never put them together.

I keep describing it as 'The Way.' What it's done is pull all those really important pedagogical theories and ideas and practices together and said that, first of all, your thinking has to change about why you're doing this, and who you are and how you relate; and when you've got your thinking straight, then you need to get your toolbox out and manage your toolbox in a way that is in line with your thinking, to make the necessary changes to make these kids benefit. And, by doing that, everybody benefits. That's a bit simplistic but, for me, that's what changed.

I think, as far as leadership is concerned, people saw a passion in me that they hadn't seen before. You'd have to ask them, but I felt I was believing deep down more than I had. You know, you believe in some things but you have doubts in the back of your mind, so whether you give it a hundred, I don't know. I feel I can with this one because I think it will make a difference.

Jim was heartened and somewhat surprised by the impact of his conviction on others.

I was surprised at how easy it was for people to say yes. The lead facilitator keeps saying that having me as a strong advocate has made

her life a lot easier and I'm pleased that my enthusiasm rubbed off on so many. Maybe I was just getting old and cynical but I was hoping they wouldn't think this is just another one of those bloody things that they've got to do. That's why I keep talking about 'The Way' because it's not something that you do to somebody. It is 'The Way'.

### **Reflecting on practice**

Having articulated the impact of Te Kotahitanga on his leadership thinking and practice, Jim admits that reflecting in and on practice is not a regular habit of mind and that he rarely stops to consider the extent to which he makes his leadership learning visible for colleagues and staff.

I haven't really thought about it. It's not necessarily been deliberate. Sometimes it has and sometimes it hasn't. I think, as you get older and more experienced, it becomes a bit more deliberate in terms of how you approach things. As opposed to, "I need to do this, I'll do it", you sometimes think, "I need to do this, I'll just step back and have a look and see if that's what I should be doing" and you just learn that strategy as you get older. I don't think I've ever spent a great deal of time deeply analysing what I do, because I've always been too bloody busy. I just get on and do it. I think deeply about what we need to do as a school and what would be the best approach, but I don't think deeply about how I approach things. I don't have a great deal of self-analysis skill, I suppose, but I don't even have time to do it, or I don't do it. I don't know why.

### **One year on ... between a rock and a hard place**

A lot has happened since we last met. Jim has resigned as principal and we are sitting on the veranda at his home, looking out over the sea. Jim's conviction that "if you can't sit around the table and sort it out, then you're history. You might as well give it up" has taken on new meaning and, as agonizing as this has been, Jim has done just that. As he recounted the events of the previous six months, Jim appeared to be at peace with this

decision, but it was clear emotions were still raw.

The year began positively with a hui whakarewa for the second cohort on the school marae. Jim's persistence with the sole resister, someone who had declared at the outset that they didn't believe "in this shit" and didn't want to be part of it, finally paid off.

I tried one last time during the week before the hui whakarewa. I said, "Look, how about coming along? I'd love to see you there. No pressure. I understand where you're coming from but, at the end of the day, we're going ahead and doing this. If you want to come, it would be really good to see you." Walked away. He turned up and, on the second night at dinner, he said to me, "I don't know why I resisted so long. This makes good sense." So he'd obviously got it and had decided to buy in. So, yeah, we got them!

Shortly after the school year began, and during a short period of time, multiple bereavements took their toll on Jim's leadership and health. The loss of his newborn first grandchild and three close colleagues left him feeling bereft.

I got quite down and I just couldn't get to the point where I needed to be. I couldn't sleep. I went to the doctor and I had really high blood pressure and really high cholesterol, so I went onto pills straight away, and that took a down side, you know? ... I guess I was [pause] distracted by this to some degree. And so other stuff went on. And I'm not sure how others viewed it, but my role was to try and hold the team together, to basically meet commitments and let others get on and make sure that the day to day stuff was done. That's how I saw it. In hindsight, maybe it wasn't the best way to do it.

At this point, Jim became increasingly aware of division within the senior team over school priorities and the fact that relationships were "becoming more strained." Whereas Jim argued that the focus should be on progressing school goals, his DPs appeared side-tracked by short term measures designed to address poor academic results from the previous year. These included removing Year 11 Māori students from class in order to rapidly



accumulate credits, a strategy that Jim could see some logic in but didn't entirely approve of. "I thought, yeah, to a degree, but you need to be careful that absence from mainstream class doesn't disadvantage students further."

The senior team had paired with senior deans to strategise and implement a raft of academic supports for students and this was where Jim started to get quite worried. Whenever I had a meeting with the Year 13 Dean to discuss a particular issue, he was sick or he wasn't there and when I did catch up with him, he'd dealt with that. I felt he was avoiding me. The work was being done in another way without my input. And I think that might just be my interpretation. I think it was very difficult to engage in that work given the principal's role dynamic, from the point of view that you can't always commit to a class or a time.

When Jim's health failed to improve, he accepted that he "needed some time out" and, after speaking with the board chair and senior team, took extended leave on medical grounds. Recovery took longer than expected and his doctor cautioned him against a premature return to work: "No, you're not going back. You need to take more time to unwind from all of this and really think things through."

During his absence, the board and senior staff had, in anticipation of an upcoming Arotake Paetawhiti visit, formulated a plan to address student achievement concerns raised by ERO reviewers. When Jim obtained a copy of the plan, he "spoke with the chairman of the board and spent some hours working on how I would approach that and what I would do when I went back." At a subsequent meeting with the board chair and DPs, Jim indicated that he respected and would fully support their work, and identified aspects of the plan that he "would be wanting to participate in." He also sought the DPs commitment to rebuilding the senior team on his return, support that was not forthcoming.

This stunned Jim to the point that he said, "Okay, thanks" and got up and left.

To say at one meeting, "We want you to go home and get well and

come back" and then, when I was ready to come back, to say, "No we don't want you," what does that tell you? They felt they were going in different directions and I was thinking, "Do I want to fight this?" I could have said, "This is my job. You're not having it. This is what you will do" but that's not in my nature because that's not the best way to build relationships and make progress. They're talented people but they wanted to do it their way. I don't think they'll wreck the school because they've got it just as much at heart as I have, but I just think they're inexperienced to be honest and that's not the way to approach it. And I thought to myself, "I am not going to let the school suffer because of a rift between me and the DPs" because, if that battle's going on, that rubs off on the staff, it rubs off on the kids, it rubs off on everybody and who suffers? The kids.

After much soul searching, Jim advised the board chair of his intention to resign.

I'm giving up \$X salary so I didn't do it lightly but I didn't want to be back in the space I was in last August. It was just time to move on. The community understands that it's time for a change. That's all I've ever said. I'm not going to go out there and tell people I got shafted or things weren't happy. I just don't think it's necessary for the school to be put under that sort of pressure. I know why I left. There are people inside the organisation who know. At the end of the day, let's just move on.

## **Legacy**

Reflecting on his leadership over the preceding eight years, Jim would like to think that the school is

better poised to meet the needs of the young people who go there, that there is a staff who care about the quality of their teaching, and that there are facilities that are the best we could provide within the resources that we had. It's not about blaming poor facilities or poor teachers - or poor teaching, rather. It's about everything's in line so

you just need to get on with it now. I hope it's in a better place than it was when I went there.

In his view, the cultural shift has seen teachers exhibiting greater care for students and greater commitment to deepening their professional learning. Additionally, attention to the latter has enabled the high expectations that characterise the former. Jim's concluding comments blend realism with idealism, fatalism with free will:

It's really hard work. Teenagers can be challenging. Bureaucracy and compliance and stuff like that just drives you to drink but, at the end of the day, I think our kids are special because they don't hold grudges. They just like to be liked, like to be cared about and, if they fall off the rails, just keep putting them back on. As I've always said to staff, "These kids need to know that you won't give up." As a teacher, you won't give up on them. And they need to know that and we tell them that all the time. So, whatever excuse they come with, well that's tough. We're not going to give up, that's not an excuse for not doing anything, get on with it. And I think we got a long way towards that. There's no silver bullet, there's no magic bloody potion, you just have to work at it, and eventually you'll get 80% plus succeeding, you know? More than that you can't expect, I don't reckon.

Now that's my view. I think we've got a happier crew. I think we have weeded out some less effective people and got some more effective people in the team. I think we've allowed people to have a say in what it is that they think is important to them. So, I hope that there's been a shift. I think, honestly, it took me a lot longer to do it coming from primary into an environment that was 50% agin you, and trying to work your way through and learn surreptitiously, because no-one was really that interested in helping. And then, having got rid of all those sort of people, it took longer to actually get the show rolling, you know? And then it started to roll. Yeah, and it rolled me [wry laugh].

Secondary may have rolled Jim but it hasn't rolled him flat.

At the end of the day, I'm disappointed in the way that things have turned out but, having said that, I think it's created other opportunities and I think that's good. I'm not bitter. I'm still passionate about education and about kids and making a difference to this community in particular, so I'd really like to continue to do that in some way. I think I could do that best in the education sector, but I'm not working for the Ministry and I'm not working for ERO because I don't believe in the philosophy. I understand how necessary it is but I don't believe that that's the best way to do things.

Jim's story adds another dimension to the interplay between leadership and context. It is a story of progress and obstruction, of togetherness and isolation, of hope and despair, and, in this particular instance, of reading context and making the ultimate sacrifice as principal. His rationale for remaining a research participant lies not in catharsis, but in the sincere hope that sharing this experience might better inform a collective understanding of the challenges inherent in confronting and shaping unique contexts.

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*Post script:*

Jim continued in education, supporting teachers to inquire into their practice and conducting principal appraisals. He subsequently took on a national education advisory role and, until his passing in 2018, focused on developing the teaching practice necessary to re-engage traumatised children in their learning. Jim's resolve to offer the next generation of students "the best possible chance in their lives" never wavered: "When it comes to young people, until we teach them how to stand up for themselves, we have to be beside them ... and provide the right sort of leadership to those who work with them day after day."



## CHAPTER EIGHT: ROSS

### Part I

Sitting with Ross in the lounge at the Headmaster's residence, during a late Sunday afternoon in May, my sensibilities around intruding on rare quiet time in a headmaster's busy week, and the scant privacy that living on school premises affords, were heightened. Above and beyond the call of duty, in many respects, a Sunday conversation was, however, preferable from Ross's perspective: "It's easier. Because we would [otherwise] have had a conversation that would have been interrupted." Deliberation around the use of a participant pseudonym proved a short and early indication of moral stance, with Ross undeterred by the likelihood that readers might identify him: "Anything [students] do, we expect them to put their name to it, so it will be a double standard to do otherwise."

Research formalities completed, I began, in the usual way, by inviting Ross to share aspects of his career as an educator, teacher, and principal. Seeking to establish some parameters around this chronology - "Well, it depends how far back you want to go" - and being given free rein - "However far back you want to" - Ross outlined a family history in which the teaching profession features prominently. A great uncle was foundation principal of an Australian Teachers' College, his aunt and mother were both teachers, Ross married a teacher and so did his brother.

Raised in a small central North Island farming community, Ross attended the local primary school where he was a pupil in his mother's class, and, like many of his contemporaries, left home for his secondary schooling. Ross thrived in the single sex boarding school environment, eventually becoming head student of the hostel, and thus began a long association with boys' boarding schools that continues to this day. Rural horizons expanded considerably when he received an American Field Service (AFS) scholarship to conclude his secondary schooling in Palo Alto, California. It was:

A fantastic place to go, for a whole lot of reasons .... the hippies had

just left. Palo Alto High School was leading edge. It's where Hewlett and Packard started. It's where Silicon Valley is. It's right opposite Stanford University.

Living in "a leading edge community in a leading edge city, in a leading edge state" was to have a profound impact on the "rugby, racing and beer boy out of [rural farming community]" and included a brief introduction to teaching: "In actual fact, my first formal classroom, other than being a recipient, was when I [spent] Wednesday afternoons at an elementary school assisting with reading."

The route to teaching in a professional capacity was a little more circuitous: "I had a brief stint playing farmers with dad but that didn't go very well" and, following a period in banking "that was boring, that was so predictable," Ross subsequently decided to train as a primary school teacher. Three years later, having completed his Trained Teacher's Certificate, Ross was posted to a small King Country school. Less than impressed at the prospect of geographic, social and sporting isolation, he thought, "Mmm, bugger. Continue flatting and doing the rugby thing that I was doing, or go to [place]? That's not going to happen." This proved the catalyst for further study and Ross belatedly but successfully applied for a studentship to complete his education degree, thereafter teaching for one year in a primary school on the outskirts of the city.

As a self-assured young man in his early 20s, Ross approached the principal of his secondary alma mater and asked for a teaching position. Despite not training as a secondary teacher, Ross was confident his connection with the school afforded him "a bit of currency at least. So I leant on him, as one might." Asked by the rector what he could teach, Ross responded, "Well, anything. You give me a job, you try me" and, in the two years following, taught a range of subjects - "social studies (which was fine), physical education, geography, and then my maths was okay so I was doing junior maths, and I'd had time in the bank so I did economics."

At around this time, a long drive north in a Mini, coupled with lack of surety over whether the teaching profession was for him, prompted Ross to

abandon the secondary classroom and pursue chiropractic study in Melbourne. On discovering the need to boost his chemistry proficiency before formally enrolling in a chiropractic degree, Ross returned to teaching to fund night school study. Having met the necessary prerequisites and secured a place in the programme, his wife applied for a teaching position that would keep them financially afloat while he studied fulltime. Notification of this appointment outcome was so slow in coming that they decided:

“Oh well, plan B” and plan B was to travel, so we kept on travelling. And about two years later, we came back via Melbourne and the little old lady next door had collected our mail and in that mail was an acceptance for [school], so things might have been different if we’d hung around for another ten days.

Following their return to New Zealand, Ross re-joined the geography and social studies staff at his secondary alma mater, where he was to become Head of Hostel, Geography and Social Studies, raise a young family, and live on site.

Principalship was far from Ross’s mind, despite the rector recommending core professional development and sowing promotion seeds.

I hadn’t really thought about being a principal. And I remember [rector] said, “Oh, you need to do this and this, and then you can be” because [rector] was like that. He was a grammar person and I thought, no, I don’t want to do what you do. I can’t. I couldn’t do that stuff. I don’t know it.

Taking on the Head of Hostel position provided some insight into the responsibilities and potential rewards of managing an educational institution.

It was only really when I got to [hostel] and I had the budgets of that, and I had to look after staff. I used to walk back across through the grounds from the school to [hostel] and it’s big – it’s three storeyed in places, and the lights would all be on and it was like a big ship in the dock. And I thought, well, this is all mine. I’m in charge. All of this,



everything that happens there is what I've had [a hand in] and I took a great deal of satisfaction from that.

### **Senior leadership beckons**

Over a decade later, confident that he “knew enough about schools to be as competitive in that environment as anybody else”, and enthused by the prospect of working with a previous teaching colleague who was now rector at a South Island boys' school, Ross applied for his first senior leadership position: “I went down to be his DP... part of the attraction was to work with [name], for us to work together.” From the school's perspective, Ross believes his hostel experience was a determining factor:

One of the reasons I got the job was that they needed someone to sort the boarding out. The boarding was a disaster! They'd only enrolled three third formers in 1995, the year I got there, and it was going downhill.

The principal/deputy collaboration was short lived as three months after Ross and his family relocated south, the principal “went north to [school].” Ross applied for the rector's position but was unsuccessful. With only three months' experience as a deputy principal, he acknowledges that he “probably wasn't ready” to take on principalship and was, “in all honesty ... quite pleased I didn't get it.” Rather than scanning the field for new employment opportunities, Ross focused on responsibilities at hand and honed his craft as a deputy.

I never looked in the *Gazette*, never looked in the *Gazette* at all, because that would be unsettling. You want to give where you are the very best and the last thing you want to be doing is looking at other places.

Ross may not have been looking at other places, but schools elsewhere were looking for suitable applicants and, a year or so later, an invitation to apply for principal of his current school arrived in the post. Ross recalls returning to school following an inter-school rugby fixture in which his first XV failed to sustain a healthy half-time lead against a team captained by a notable

future All Black.

I got off the bus, disappointed we'd drawn, having been so far ahead. And it was ... probably about half past seven, eight o'clock at night. Go into your office as a DP. What sort of crap's happened in the day? Who's away tomorrow? Who's got the relief? All that sort of stuff, and there was a letter with [school] letterhead on it and I never even opened it. I just grabbed it and took it home ... and it was an invitation to apply for here.

Ross is unsure whether this invitation reflected a blanket approach involving all boys' schools deputies and principals, or a targeted campaign involving a select few. He remembers inter-school fixtures between his current and previous school but doesn't recall staff or board member connections that might explain specific targeting of applicants. That said, Ross has no doubt that "it was part of a boys' club of school leadership.... There was a little bit of who knows who."

In a small country like New Zealand, few degrees of separation exist between teachers in general and even fewer within the single sex boys' schools network. At the time of writing, there were 44 state and state integrated boys' schools, representing 12% of the total number of secondary schools (Education Counts, 2018). Professional networks are sufficiently small that the likelihood of short-listed applicants knowing each other is high and members of the appointing board were deeply embarrassed when applicant paths crossed on a school tour the day before the interview.

We were coming in the door here, just as you did, and as we came in the door with the Chairman of the Board, [short listed applicant] came out with the School Secretary. And these guys were just horrified that they met each other. But what horrified them more was the high fives and handshakes all round, and kisses and hugs from [Ross's wife], and "We'll see you later." ... it just so happened that the board were having their final meeting before the interviews on the Saturday at the [same hotel]. And we were there having tea together, and they all had to file past our table. And what they didn't understand is that the education

sector in New Zealand is very small and it's quite well connected. If you don't know, you do know, you know? There's inevitably [someone you will know].

### **The principal skill-set**

There is little doubt that reputation within the single sex schooling field played a key role in the recruitment process and, while most of the underpinning attributes and experience Ross outlined were equally applicable in a co-educational context, one was field specific:

You had to be well-performed and you had to have the skill set, which was more around the ability to administer than maybe to lead teaching and learning. There's no doubt in my mind. There was no doubt. You had to have some key skills. And one was you had to be a good classroom teacher. This is an overall view. You had to be good in the classroom. You had to probably have been an HOD, so you'd had that sort of role. Ideally, if you'd run a hostel, or had something to do with the hostel, because most boys' schools had hostels. Sport. Having coached the first XV was always a good tick. And you had to have pastoral stuff and I had been a dean for a long time. So, if you could tick those boxes, you sort of had a reasonable chance. And then, after that, it was probably ... how you clicked with people.

### **Personal and professional habitus**

Ross attended a boys' school as a hostel student, taught at two boys' schools subsequently and is now principal of a boys' school. When asked what it was about boys' schools that attracted him, Ross responded simply: "It's what I knew, I think." An immediate sense of fit with his current school remains strong.

It fitted ... we were quite comfortable with the hostel right next door. Didn't scare - it was just bread and butter. I loved it. I could go and talk - the first farmer, first guy I met, was [name]. When they were coming back for the beginning of term four, Sunday night, over in the

hostel, I thought, I'll go over there. I'm going to meet someone. You've got to start meeting and greeting at some stage. And it was [name]. And he was basically from [same rural farming community as Ross], having his cup of tea on the back of his ute.

During the course of conversation, they established a mutual connection with someone Ross had gone to school with, "a rough, rough cowboy diamond guy.... So that was easy."

Living on school premises is a 24/7 commitment involving loco parentis, site custodianship, and not infrequent call-outs. While the headmaster's house is generally off limits, it is important to Ross that boys know he is part of the hostel community and there to assist should emergencies arise outside of school hours: "If, in the nth degree, there's a problem, then you should knock on my door and I'll get up and I'll help you." On occasion, unauthorised visitors also disturb his sleep: "There's someone on the grounds doing wheelies. You hear it, so you can't lie there. This is our patch. We've had some doozies, I tell you." Ross is accustomed to what others might perceive as intrusions on his family life, having learned early on that "if the job you're doing in the hostel competes with your personal life, you're bugged. If the job you're doing in the hostel is your life, its fine."

Year 9 home economics "field trips" to his vegetable garden provide an opportunity for Ross to share his knowledge of gardening and talk about the house and its history. Opening his home in this way strengthens relationships with another group of students.

The kids have to know this is who you are, and that you're a real person. I still coach rugby and I coach rugby because I like coaching. I coach rugby because I like rugby, but I coach rugby because I like meeting another group of kids. And I coach cricket, so I meet another lot of kids, and I'll do something else.... In terms of that leadership with the kids, it's about knowing them and being able to understand them a bit, and a bit of give and take.

## **Heterogeneous school mix**

Having grown up on marginal land, Ross “quite like[s] an underdog scenario.” He believes that the hostel environment expands educational horizons for rural youngsters and helps support the hinterland.

Philosophically the [region] needs a good hostel because these kids haven’t got options. And to have a good hostel means ... it keeps on going being a good hostel because your economies of scale arise. If we don’t have one, then the farms up here can’t get people because they’ve got to move for their education and all that other stuff.... The captain of our rugby team, [name], Māori boy from [southern region] has been to Italy and Spain with [teacher], and he’s a little hostel boy. To me, that epitomises what a boarding school can do.

A wide catchment area also means greater heterogeneity in the student population. The school enrolls students from privileged and underprivileged urban and rural backgrounds, within the region and beyond.

We’ve got kids from professional backgrounds, business backgrounds, and in the surrounding area as well. Kids come in by buses. And then the hostel gives you the rural urban mix of kids and they come from [northern region] to [southern region] way down the coast.... And then, over here, at [low socio-economic suburb], there’s a housing estate. And it’s tough. It’s tough.

The local day boy school zone forms a geographical wedge that takes in most of this suburb. Pointing to a map on his office wall, Ross commented that when negotiating zone boundaries:

We could have drawn a line that went down [street name] and then just sort of went down over there, but we didn’t. We’ve got a commitment to the kids over there.... We accepted the role that we should have in those kids’ lives, and we’ll do our best for them.

To illustrate the strength of relationships built with students in this suburb, Ross relays an incident in which his son’s car was stolen:

So here’s a story. Car gets pinched on Thursday night, wrapped around a tree, absolutely smacked up, in the wrecker’s yard. And, on the

Friday morning, I can remember getting up in assembly and saying, “Look I live in this neighbourhood, like you guys, and someone knows something about [son’s] car being stolen.”

No one was forthcoming with information that day, however the following afternoon, on the return journey from a school rugby match a considerable distance away:

This kid leant over and said to the guy in the front seat, “Put on track 14.” And it was that song. Remember there was a remix *Stole My Car, Stole My Car*? Remember that? So this comes on and I’m driving, and I think, these guys know. Well, sure enough, on Monday morning, two guys, they’re gang prospects, came and knocked on the door and said, “Sir, we know who did that. It was [name]. He took it.” And so the police went around and they found [name] and [he’s] probably now locked up. But, on Saturday just gone, yesterday, I was back to [place] to play their first XV and [name], the younger brother, was in the team. And [younger brother] could go to university and we’ll get him to university.

### **Learning on the job**

Building relationships with staff as principal proved less straightforward than with boarding school parents and Ross commented on the relational and role distance between the two senior leadership positions:

What was probably more difficult was the high end – getting to know the staff at an even higher level. The distance between the DP who, you’re there and you’re part of what’s happening, as opposed to being above that and trying to steer the ship rather than make it go faster.

And that was quite difficult.

Although by this time a relatively experienced deputy, Ross acknowledged considerable naivety in taking on principal responsibilities. He remembers asking a previous principal, “How did you know how to do stuff?” and receiving the response, “Well, I didn’t.” His colleague recalled getting the job, relocating from a prestigious grammar school and living on his own in

temporary motel accommodation.

He'd go home every night and think, "What the hell?" He didn't know what to do to start with. So he just – the job became, well, whatever comes in the door I'll deal with and, if I keep on dealing with enough, I should have dealt with it all, and then I'll plan about some things. It was very reactionary and, yeah, hard to get your head around.

Ross's experience was not that dissimilar, with hostel viability and managerial tasks consuming his initial energies.

When I first got appointed, there was a whole lot of that stuff needed to be done. Because, if we didn't get that stuff right, the roll was going to go south.... The hostel buildings were just awful and we were looking at that. At one stage, there was a conversation about closing the hostel. That was never going to happen but ... [it] was, well, where do we go with this? And how do we get the money to do this? And how do we build that? And, so, you were just running.

A focus on roll maintenance and growth was essential to hostel survival in a competitive economic environment. At previous schools of employ, Ross recalls feeling "really pleased" when he poached student enrolments from competitors, and was equally determined that this fate should not befall his current school.

It was a very commercial model of putting the ripples out further. And so when we came here, we'd say, "Right. [School A] are not getting anyone from [current school region]" and even though I'm an old boy, it's not bloody happening! ... I can remember I used the ready reckoner of staffing to show the staff that if this was a school on its own [that did not draw from its hinterland and other regions], this is how many they would employ. So these guys are important.

### **"Cock your leg on something"**

Following appointment to a new position, Ross prefers to signal in small ways that things will be different and bide his time before making substantial changes. While biding time was not an option when it came to

hostel issues, change in the rest of the school was less pressing and early initiatives less monumental.

Somebody said, “You’ve got to cock your leg on something when you get there, otherwise you won’t be the leader, so make up your mind.” I think it’s good to do something small, that’s obvious, but not earth shattering. I think I changed the order of the staff meetings. I told the management team, “We’re going to do it in a different order.” ... So it was very simple, it was very easy, and it was at no cost to anybody. It was quite good advice, really, because at some stage you actually have to drive the bloody thing.

### **Leadership habitus**

Ross describes his leadership style as collaborative, informed, and “a bit blokey ... it’s manly but it’s not macho.” In his view, manliness aligns well with the school’s core values, requiring both decisiveness and an ability to listen. Whereas the former dominated his approach as an HOD (“It was more, this is how [we’re going to do things]”), as principal, “the door’s always been open” and staff are free to “come to me in my office.” Ross draws on driving, nautical, and military metaphors to describe transition from a novice to more expert leader, and development of leadership habitus. He recalls initial hesitance, concern for harmony, strategies to canvass the road ahead, and gradual embodiment of the headmaster’s role:

There’s a point - when you first start, you think everybody’s going to judge if we do this. Everybody has to be happy and if they’re not all happy, then maybe we shouldn’t do this thing. So what you learn is to research things and say, well, what are the battles you have to win? ... Is that going to lead to winning the war or not, and if it doesn’t, don’t even fight it and put your energy there. So a bit of planning, prior planning, testing out on either people or small groups and then saying, right, we’re going to go now with this.

Early on, it was important to identify influencers on the staff, people who variously acted as change barometers, wise counsel, vessels of institutional



knowledge, and independent thinkers: “In terms of learning and leading ... whatever the changes might be, small or large, there were some ‘go to’ people” who acted as “stepping stones or testing points.” Alerting Ross to sources of wisdom within the school, his predecessor advised:

“Look, if [name] speaks, listen to him.” And so I would go to [name] – he’s an Englishman, a very good maths teacher, and just the mould of a boys’ school. He could have taught anywhere well, but he patently fitted, and he was always good counsel.

... And then there was [name], who’s taught here for 38 years. An absolute legend and he was the ‘history of the school’ stuff. “Why does this happen?” Because there’s usually a reason most things happen in schools, and they’ve been chewed over before. “Why does this happen?” “How come this happens?” And he used to say, “Good boy” ... but that’s how he was. He was much the elder statesman than I was.

... And then the other one was [name] – and one of the reasons he’s doing Te Kotahitanga as a facilitator, is he’s completely independent. He’s in no corner, full stop. And, if you want a considered, independent mind, he will give it to you.

### **Qualifications for principalship**

“Knowing the void” he experienced personally, Ross sees some merit in formal professional qualifications. He is, however, alert to the “danger that [a principal qualification] then becomes an absolute.... So if you’ve got it, then that is an entitlement to a position, where that may not be the case.”

In addition to the ‘doing’, professional reading, personal research and perpetual reflection have all shaped his leadership ‘knowing’. An avid non-fiction reader, Ross likes to share “professional stuff” that includes current events and academic articles. One of the newsletters he subscribes to recently included a “really good four-pager” on year 8 algebra: “That doesn’t go out with Harvard letterhead unless it’s reasonably well researched and well written. And cracking algebra has been a maths problem for ages – they just can’t get it right.” It is not uncommon for him to “go over to morning

briefing with five articles” which he will then “flick” to various subject teachers.

Ross gained first-hand experience of Harvard in 2006 when, as part of a Woolf Fisher scholarship, he attended a two week school educational leadership course focusing on leadership and pedagogy. Along with principal colleagues from America, Australia, South Africa, and Canada, Ross recalls “quite intense” engagement with theory: “You had lots of readings and you had to do those readings. And then ... in every lecture, there were interns on two aisles with microphones, and you would be asked what your thoughts were.” Responses revealed differences in scale and terminology that meant comparing “chalk and cheese.”

The thing that annoyed me most ... was that the American principals would talk about “the building.” And even the Harvard lecturer talked about “in your building” and what that was, is reference to the school. The school is ‘the building’ and the workshops are on the bottom because they’re the noisiest, and the basketball court’s on the top, and there’s one gate in.... [Noted American author] Mary Monroe was one of the speakers and she was talking about ‘the building’. “Get out and get around the building” and these schools have got 4000 students, 3000 students in ‘the building’. We were all looking at it and one South African guy said, “Oh, our school’s 300 acres. We’ve got seven of those things.”

Ross attempted to suggest that schools are communities, human entities rather than inanimate buildings, but chose not to press the point because “it was a common terminology” and when students “go out of that school, they go into the hood and the hood’s the community.”

While at Harvard, one presentation on the importance of non-fiction writing “struck a chord” that continues to inform his pedagogical leadership.

There’s a very strong correlation between the ability of kids to write non-fiction and academic success. And it’s something like 0.8. It’s very powerful.... If you think about it, anything a kid writes in NCEA is non-

fiction. It doesn't matter what subject. Even in English, they write non-fiction because all the creative stuff's done in the internals.... And so the issue is having the language, having the vocabulary of their subject and being able to use that vocabulary to make observations and have discussion about. And, the other day, at the photocopier, a maths teacher's photocopying off a maths question and what is it? It's all English. So I bang on about it every year. People's eyes roll back, but it's absolutely bloody true and they know it's true and every time I find an example I say, "Well, here we are again. See, I told you!"

Telling staff and seeing this implemented in their practice are two different things. Ross formally observes teachers for registration purposes and is a regular classroom visitor. He sees this as an important responsibility and enjoys this aspect of his work.

That's where the leadership is. If I delegated that [to the DPs], how the hell would I know how good you are unless I've seen? And possibly, gee, you're not as flash as I thought. It'll be a good conversation we'll have. I go to a lot of classrooms.

Observation and assessment data lead him to conclude that non-fiction writing is not sufficiently prioritised:

I had a teacher who came and said, "How do you get the people to write?" I said, well, [name], have they been practising? When you start your class, your 'Do Now', is it a paragraph about what they learned yesterday, what they don't know and why they don't know it, and all that sort of thing? Have they been writing those things? "Ah, no." *Do they know what a topic sentence is? (Michele)*. Exactly. *Do they know what the evidence is? (Michele)*. Yeah, and are they practised at it?"

The Woolf Fisher scholarship also afforded Ross opportunities to investigate the adoption of ICT across the curriculum in 15 different schools, visit school hostels, and gain insight into other education systems. The importance of context was brought home on a number of occasions. While visiting a school on the West Coast, Ross sensed that the principal was preoccupied: "Polite as she was, her mind wasn't in the right space." He

subsequently learned that a ratepayer decision to establish another school in the district meant she was responsible for deploying staff to the new high school.

40% were going to go to the new school because it wouldn't have been full, and this school was going to have less people - 60%, something like that. Anyway, her issue was trying to figure out who was going to go and who was going to stay.

A few weeks later, when writing a report on his visit to the school, Ross realised he'd neglected to record the principal's name in his notes. A quick Google search led him to the school website where he noticed a letter to parents regarding a serious incident that "happened the day I was there.... A group of boys in the canteen said, 'Well, tomorrow on the Devil's Day, let's shoot six people.' And some people in the canteen had heard [them]." No wonder the principal was less than attentive!

Not only were principals subject to the vagaries of state politics, they were likely to be reassigned at short notice. One of the Harvard participants shared with Ross her consternation at being placed in a school she was both unfamiliar with and starting that very week. Commenting on the superintendent model, Ross remarked:

They push people around like pawns. Good principals get put into those places... Presumably they know your strengths and weaknesses, and they know your abilities to mobilise teachers in a certain way to get an outcome that they're missing, and all those sorts of things ... [but] what does that do to your head space about your relationship with the school and its community?

This led to discussion around the importance of context and the observation that while some principals are successful in multiple settings, others 'crash and burn'. Ross agrees that reading context and responding accordingly is key: "I think it would be very dangerous, it would be extremely dangerous to say this worked here so it's going to work there. These theories apply, if I take this pill and everybody swallows it..." While there are "undoubtedly some fundamentals" that work anywhere, successful

change comes down to “your relationship with people, to be able to bring those fundamentals to the fore and to activate all those things that might be missing.”

## **QBE**

In the end, Ross believes that “leadership for most is the QBE qualification. Qualified by Experience.” After a number of years in his current position, he feels very much at home in his leadership skin but is far from complacent: “I’ve lived here and I [still] haven’t got the ‘recipe’ right.” Seeking multiple perspectives, maintaining an open door, listening, and inquiring further assist Ross to innovate and fine tune leadership responses: “Sometimes I will take notes where someone will say, ‘Have you read that?’ Well, no. I haven’t read that. You’d better tell me a bit more about that.” For Ross, leadership is “based around relationships, and strong relationships. And trying to at least understand a viewpoint and giving a viewpoint credit and credibility, but saying, ‘Well, maybe that can fit but it mightn’t be like that.’”

When it comes to growing fine young men, social conscience and a commitment to community have, over the years, engendered a redemptive and perhaps more equitable disciplinary stance.

On Friday [DP] and I had an interview with a guy. The kid had been a bit of a jerk, or more than a bit of a jerk, quite a big jerk. [DP] had dealt with him and I had been away, so I was just catching up the pace and I was sitting there hearing our conversation with this guy and thinking, man, here we were, actually giving him a third crack, whereas years ago neither of us would have done that. He would have been high jumping. So, I guess there’s a sort of maturity that in the end arises - and I can remember seeing it in [principal colleague], too. [Name] changed quite - I wouldn’t say dramatically because he didn’t do dramatic change, but he did, you could say, mellow in the best possible way.

Years in the role mean that management functions have become second nature, more is known than unknown about the school community, tasks

have been distributed to capable staff, and Ross's energies have become more strongly focused on instructional matters.

I think that the further on you get, I think in some ways you get better at doing the things you need to do, because you take a bit of confidence out of how you've done things in the past, and so you can lead – a lot of it is maintaining some of those CEO administrative things, but if others can be doing that, then you can focus more on teaching and learning, which is why Te Kotahitanga came at about the right time.

## **Part II**

### **Applying for Te Kotahitanga**

Reflecting on the teaching, administration, hostel, pastoral and extra-curricular practices apprenticeshiping the principal's role, Ross now finds it curious that pedagogical leadership was not prioritised.

I don't think for a long time, a long time, there was a hell of a lot of real focus on principals leading learning. You were the CEO.... What you did is just got results.... For me, personally, it's only probably been in the last 6-8 years that I've ever thought, hang on, there's another job there.

Initial interest in Te Kotahitanga was sparked when Ross heard Russell Bishop present Phase 1 data at a secondary principals' conference in Christchurch. The accompanying student narratives had such a profound impact that Ross and a principal colleague attended breakout sessions led by teachers involved in the project: "And we came out of that and [principal colleague] said, 'I want to take them home!' and I felt the same. I thought the guy was fantastic."

During the intervening years, Ross looked at the Te Kotahitanga professional development videos but didn't apply immediately: "I thought, no, I don't think we're quite ready - which was probably me. I'm not quite

ready to have a crack at this, but I should be.” This suggests tension between moral commitment to reducing inequity on the one hand and professional and organisational readiness on the other. Inkings of teacher resistance surfaced when, at the point of signing, hearsay swayed the board’s decision.

While the board chair was keen, the rest weren’t convinced and one of our board members, who was a teacher but an elected member, said, “Oh, no, it works better in co-ed schools.” Now, I don’t know whether that’s the case or not because we were the first lot of all boys’ schools they’d had. I don’t know whether somewhere in the chemistry of Te Kotahitanga its better in co-ed schools than it is in [single sex].... So, on that basis we parked it up again.

Unwavering commitment to the programme in principle saw Ross continue discussion with the person who subsequently took on the lead facilitator role. The school’s statistics “weren’t that bad. The disparity was there, but they [Māori NCEA Level 1 and 2 attainment figures] weren’t at 35% and 40%. They were at 72% and 85%.” His biggest reservation lay in adequately resourcing the implementation process.

I could never figure out how the hell we were going to do it, despite the need we might have had. When the Phase 5 opportunity came around with the funding ... we said, “Right, we can make this work. We need to have a decent crack at the difference.”

### **Having a decent crack at the difference**

While participation in Te Kotahitanga had been mooted for some years, application deadlines saw commitment to Phase 5 of the project rapidly executed at governance level: “We signed up very quickly. In terms of the staff really knowing about it, it was really done by the board. We had to get the paperwork away.” This occurred in late November, placing considerable pressure on the school to rally support for the first cohort and work through programme logistics.

The problem was that everybody understood the gap but we didn’t

understand, really, the programme.... I can remember going over to [nearby school] to a meeting. It was all sort of a blur and I can remember coming away thinking, Jesus ... who's going to do it and how's it going to happen?

The enormity of what the school was about to undertake struck home, prompting Ross to seek reassurance from a respected principal colleague.

I can remember thinking, is this right? I've got to know that this is right and I don't want to hear [lead facilitator] tell me because he was converted, so to speak. I don't want to read stuff. I want someone to tell me ... so I rang [principal colleague] because I knew he was a cohort four and he said, "It's the Rolls Royce of PD" so I thought, right. He also said, "Look it's not the only thing. There are other things that happen that the collective result is you get some decent outcomes." So, on that basis, I thought, right, yeah, we're going to run with it. So then the problem we had was the lack of real knowledge, but we needed a cohort to start because it was late.... We had [the BOT and facilitators] sorted. We knew that we had the structure but we didn't have any teachers and we didn't have a timeline.

### **Enlisting the first cohort**

Consistent with Te Kotahitanga protocols, Ross issued an open invitation for staff to participate in the first cohort and, as anticipated, some teachers were eager to enlist: "Pick me, I'm an early adopter, I believe in this.... These were people who were committed.... These were people who were putting themselves forward on a voluntary basis." They were also "people who people respected" and reputation was to play a pivotal role in reform.

During the first year, Ross believes that in-school facilitators "in some ways, might have oversold and under-delivered." He attributes this to late timing and initial lack of programme clarity.

We were learning as we went to the first hui ... learning the roles and the language, and the debate, because its full of technical terminology. And some of that technical terminology is Māori, it's a second



language for most, so you have a whole lot of layers of confusion and that didn't help.

Facilitators were “getting an increasing idea about what was happening, but ... we didn't have it clearly in our minds because it's extremely high level, abstract, jargonistic early on, and there's this bombardment.” This, coupled with the lack of practical lead-in time, led to conflicting expectations amongst the staff.

Part of the problem was the first cohort came in expecting to - look, do these things in science with Māori boys and you'll get a high level of engagement and performance. And, in English, if you do these things, it will be that. In phys ed, if you do these things - as opposed to thinking more about your relationships, and the results and the gain will come.

Te Kotahitanga's priority on relationships required fundamental shifts in thinking that dispelled any notions of a pedagogical quick fix and generated some tension between facilitators and staff. While “the water cooler and photocopier conversations weren't always the most productive,” members of the first cohort were nonetheless “key movers and shakers” who were “crucial in the school” to Te Kotahitanga's messages and future success.

### **Subsequent cohorts**

There are a number of reasons why the second cohort have, in Ross's opinion “been better in every way.” Firstly, adoption by the board of trustees and public commitment to school wide implementation signalled that this was not a passing initiative. Secondly, “the facilitators have got one more year of experience that these guys haven't got.” Thirdly, the second wave of volunteers “have their eyes open.” They have “heard the pluses and minuses and they're still saying, even in the face of that, I'm in.” Finally, timing of the hui whakarewa within school time minimised personal inconvenience for participants.

“Waiting in the background is this large group of - well, I'm putting this thing off. Maybe it will go away.” The final cohort are proving far more

challenging and while there are more facilitators to “spread the load around, these are the resistors. And these are the public meetings where you go head to head.” Responding to dissenters’ claims that “No, we don’t have to do this,” Ross is adamant that they do: “Everybody is in. We didn’t give an opt-out clause to anybody.” He counts three or four staff amongst the staunchest resistors, but endeavours to keep this in perspective.

Last year I went to the SPANZ conference ... [and] there was a guy talking about educational change. One of the things he said was, “Look, the last 10% don’t actually matter. They occupy all your mind but they don’t matter.” So, for us, 10% of 70, that’s about 7 people. That means we’ve got 60 people doing some pretty good stuff. Plus it isn’t 7 or 8, it’s really 3 or 4, and some of it is age and stage in terms of their teaching.

This said, Ross admits that the last 10% do matter. He knows how cancerous pockets of resistance can be in undermining reform and doesn’t shy away from challenging resistors “head to head ... I have this view that people need to get on board. There’s one staff member who’s going to have to be much more professional about accepting that we have expectations of [them], like everybody else.” Put more stridently, “you can’t be half-pregnant about being at [school]. You’re either with us and this is what we do, or you’re out, you’re not.”

In his experience, the “objection [to Te Kotahitanga] is the classic one: I treat everyone the same.... This is racist and I’m not a racist.” Ross found vehement opposition initially affronting: “It’s not until you get your answer and your rationale clearly in your mind that you can actually cope with that.” His response is to question why “treating everyone the same” has not secured equitable outcomes: “I think, well hang on, some of the things that you’re doing are just not culturally responsive. You’re saying one thing and you’re doing the other. And if we’re Kiwis, we’re going to make a difference and you’re going to have to do that.” Resistors also point to the fact that students in their subject “do really well.” On closer inspection, Ross typically discovers that Māori students are not well represented in these

subjects: “There’s only three of them and they’re effectively hand-picked after three years in your subject.... How come? Why wouldn’t there be more?”

Though Ross is committed to interrogating defensive positions, challenging racist discourse and preventing dissenting voices from derailing reform, he is open to conversation about “closing [the achievement] gap, if you’ve got a better solution” and acknowledges that mind shifts take time.

Resistant as they may be, they’re intelligent people and you have put a point of view that will rattle around in their brains and, no matter what, if you show people things, intelligent people things, they will chew it over in their subconscious and subtly make changes in what they’re doing.

### **Te Kotahitanga facilitators**

While difficult conversations form part of the principal’s performance remit, Ross acknowledges that in-school facilitators have largely borne the brunt of these. This is an aspect of their leadership role that facilitators are often unaccustomed to, and somewhat disconcerted by. Ross is mindful that facilitators put themselves “at the forefront of professional debate and in schools that’s not always easy. You actually go to a dark side as far as many of the staff are concerned.” The “social hit” was something that facilitators, “all of them quite popular people on the staff,” didn’t foresee. Nor did Ross fully appreciate the emotional toll that ongoing dissonance between “us and them” might wreak.

And what I saw, and sometimes still see is the facilitators feeling professionally isolated and that’s not what they wanted. They signed up to do something good for education and something good for the Māori kids in the school, and found themselves going head to head with colleagues. And, for the teacher, one on one ... it was them telling the facilitator once, but if that happened five [different] times in a week ... I can see that that is debilitating.

## **Supporting the front line**

Ross concedes that his exhortation not to take resistance personally brings momentary cognitive respite but does little to assuage the hurt of relational fallout: “As you know, you always think about those other people and what are they thinking and saying.” For facilitators motivated by altruism, the “absolute reward” is undoubtedly improvement in student outcomes, but this takes a while and Ross concedes that facilitators “can only survive on warm fuzzies for a certain period of time.”

Reflecting on the school’s three year involvement in Te Kotahitanga, he perceives internal support for facilitators to be a critical, yet not well considered dimension of the change process. While having more than one facilitator and assigning a member of the senior leadership team to each cohort certainly helped, these strategies reflected a pragmatic response to resource constraints rather than coordinated formal support mechanisms.

One of the things we haven’t thought about is how we support them more than just saying, “No, it’s fine. You’re doing a great job.” I think that’s one of the learnings. I think they need, a bit like a counsellor, they need supervision. They need in-depth discussions about the issues that they’re facing, because they’re right there [on the front line]. They’re having the one-to-one conversations.

Lack of hierarchical status means facilitators are “not placed in a position of responsibility” over peers and may find themselves in the invidious position of saying to an HOD, “Look, your work’s probably not that flash and we need to set some goals around getting you to be far less traditional in your work.”

Cohort differences, together with changes in Te Kotahitanga personnel have made this “a watershed year,” however, the school has been fortunate to retain key people in the facilitation role. “Strength in numbers” has avoided the need, when lead facilitators leave, to “scratch around and find someone else to keep it going” and meant that changes in the facilitation team have been “relatively seamless.” Ross is consequently committed to keeping the four Te Kotahitanga facilitators together “and not going back to

three, two and one. I think that will be the issue next year, so we've still got to have a group around." The school intends funding the lead facilitator "at about 0.6 to do that work" and relying on the other facilitators to "effectively volunteer their time to run co-construction meetings." Ross is confident that goodwill and commitment to the programme means "they'll be happy with that."

### **Classroom observation and appraisal**

As each cohort completes the professional development programme and funding diminishes and eventually disappears, Ross is concerned to "capture the essence of Te Kotahitanga" and embed this within school systems and processes. With cohort three about to finish, he is mindful of the potential for this group to revert to default practice.

We didn't want them to say, well, I've been involved in a three year programme and they've done it to me and now I'm out and that's it. So we had to take what we thought was best because we didn't want to go back to where we were.

In determining what is best, Ross identifies classroom observations as key. He was somewhat perturbed to hear Te Kotahitanga advisers recommend that schools about to exit Phase 5 dispense with classroom observations and focus their resources elsewhere:

You're watering stones. If you haven't got it right now, you won't ever get it... be more focussed on co-construction and talking about individuals and how you're going to collectively connect with them and then increase their learning.

Ross recalls sitting with principals from two other boys' schools and "mumbling under our breath, there's no way! We're not going to stop this ... Individually and collectively we agreed that that was worthwhile probably because, in our case, it wasn't happening strongly anyway."

Reflecting on the somewhat cavalier approach to observation that happened "a lot" under the previous appraisal model and the "professional shortcuts" that take place when "mates" agree, "You tick mine, I'll tick yours, and we'll

get that stuff out of our hair,” Ross asserts, “We wanted to be above it. To be better than that.”

The school’s solution is a compromise whereby classroom observation is aligned to performance management system processes.

Since we last spoke, we have re-designed our own appraisal PMS [Performance Management System] processes.... Our solution is a peer visit. We’ve been in the programme for three years. We’ve had effectively, three, six, nine or ten visits, ten shadow coaching, ten feedback sessions. So now you’ve got to go and do an observation of a peer and give them some feedback and you’ve got to be observed by another peer, not the same person.

Peer groupings are cross-curricular and determined by the management team: “We didn’t want people to be socially comfortable in that. We wanted them to be professionally developed and, to do that, we had to select it. We had to sit down and think, who’s a good pairing and why?” Because the key purpose is “not control” but learning and “sharing across curriculum areas,” the team has endeavoured to “keep people of the same level of experience together.” This does not preclude novice-expert pairings, however Ross is mindful that while experts are comfortable observing less experienced colleagues, “the novice, going the other way, can feel a little bit overcome and overpowered by it and sometimes it’s good for two novices to have a nice meaningful discussion about what is and what isn’t happening.”

Overseeing this process is the assistant principal responsible for professional development, who is also a Te Kotahitanga facilitator. Involvement of the senior leadership team has been deliberate rather than serendipitous.

Around this table we’ve got someone who knows Te Kotahitanga inside out, knows the language, knows the procedures and the practices, and the background and everything, is committed to that. And then, each one of us was involved in one of the cohorts.... I was involved in the first cohort, the Deputy in the second, and [name] is in the third one.

Walking alongside facilitators not only streamlines implementation processes but sends strong messages of support.

There's no doubt amongst that team that we've got their backs. We've got their personal backs, their professional backs, and their backs of the programme, and that goes through to board level. So there's no disconnect between the board, management, facilitators. The rest of the staff see there's no chink in that armour.

Members of the first cohort are currently trialling the observation tool and successive cohorts will be fed in as they complete the programme. The observation tool co-constructed with the senior team is unapologetically derivative: "Learning intentions comes out of Te Kotahitanga, it's the language of Te Kotahitanga and then the lesson observation and evidence is out of the Effective Teacher Profile." In an effort to strike some balance between simplicity and direction, an accompanying appendix elaborates and illustrates what observers should be looking for. There is currently no expectation that all criteria are addressed, however, "the power of reading this if you are observing someone is maybe I'd better be doing it when I'm being observed." Having created the observation tool, the senior team realised it was "probably a bit tough" and briefly contemplated cutting dimensions such as 'demonstrating pedagogical flair'. With their agreement, Ross personally tested the tool on an experienced teacher, and decided to run with it. A review process with first cohort alumni will help the senior team "get a good handle" on the trial tool and make changes where required.

Ross acknowledges concern that peer appraisal "might water down some of the true essence of Te Kotahitanga" but believes, from the outset, there was "almost an acceptance" from Waikato that "how it looks in your school will be different from the template we have set out for everybody." He concedes that while Te Kotahitanga is "on the radar always", middle and senior management co-construction meetings have not always adhered to the recommended structure.

We probably haven't given that as much muscle as they might have

expected, so there's a compromise. We've sort of tried to do it in other ways with reporting.... So, as HOD of French, you're not co-constructing goals with English, because they're quite different. But you might have if you've had to talk about any Māori boys and the expectations that you have in the report, so we've cut it another way, really. It's in the spirit, but is it the essence? Probably isn't.

With regard to appraisal processes currently being trialled, his assistant principal is not convinced that guidelines for observation will suffice and that even "high implementers" whose practice is sound will struggle with aspects of shadow coaching. Whereas facilitators have been trained to make observational judgment and give feedback, cohort graduates are about to implement this without requisite training. In the assistant principal's view, this places huge trust in staff that may prove unfounded. He is concerned to see a more fulsome rollover process and an element of supervision introduced: "I think the shadow coaching's the bit that we need to do better.... How are the guys doing feedback getting feedback on their performance? ... Peer review of the reviewer needs to continue in some fashion."

Ross expects that the review process will highlight aspects of appraisal that need tweaking before staff exiting the second cohort are phased in. He is, however, committed to classroom observations remaining a central component and believes Te Kotahitanga has strengthened both the nature and frequency of pedagogical dialogue.

What we have, rightly or wrongly, put faith in is that the ten lots of observations and the ten lots of feedback that they have had in the last three years will rub off on them in a professional sense, that they'll be able to roll some of it out, with the help of a sheet, to have a meaningful conversation about the lesson they've just had. Before that, we had nothing to go on. There was no experience, there was no language, there was no professional intent, and there was no format for it. So, we've got to better off, we have to be.



## **We are a Te Kotahitanga school**

Appointing empathetic and experienced staff is another strategy in sustaining Te Kotahitanga and maximising spread. Ross refers to new staff as “cohort four.” In addition to advertisements that state “we are a Te Kotahitanga school,” he requires applicants to complete a self-audit that forms the basis for interview: “There’s probably eight or nine core skills for, say, a position in maths. So, have you taught the different levels? Calculus, use of IT, and Te Kotahitanga knowledge and experience. They have to rank themselves 1-5. And that’s interesting.”

What makes it interesting is that humility and fudging quickly become evident. Ross comments that the new head of Māori “ranked himself two. He was very honest. He could have said five, but he hadn’t been part of the programme,” whereas another applicant ranked herself four on the basis that she’d “read about that.” Ross’s involvement in Te Kotahitanga is such that he quickly discerns genuine substantive responses from superficially plausible ones: “You know straight away!”

The school is also fortunate that changes in BOT personnel have been minimal. “In terms of educational change, it could have been that a new board might say, ‘What is this stuff all about?’” however, the newly elected chairperson is “one of the few board chairs who’s actually gone away to the hui” and the board as a whole are “equally as committed to the ongoing discussion.” Ross believes they are both well-informed and realistic in their commitment to Te Kotahitanga.

I think they acknowledge, all of us acknowledge, that it is not the silver bullet.... If we haven’t got courses right, if we haven’t got engagement in other areas right, then being involved in Te Kotahitanga is not going to fix anything. But what we have got is a much better process of professional development.

## **The absolute reward**

During the initial stages of reform, the school had “some observational results that were actually quite powerful” but, without the “remembrance in

Year 9 and 10,” improvement in engagement, retention and educational attainment data was slow. “That was one of the anxieties we had, because in 2011 they didn’t move significantly, but last year they did, and quite substantially.... Level 1 Māori student performance improved by about 13 or 14%, and Level 2 improved by about 6 or 8%.” Two years on, Ross would “like to think that retention’s increased dramatically and attendance is at 98%. And it’s not. We’d like to think it was, but results are better.” Ross acknowledges that rapid gains are difficult to sustain but remains optimistic that results will continue to improve: “The test is this year. It’s easy to make a jump from 65 to 75 but every percentage point above 75-80 is difficult.”

Not only are facilitators and teachers becoming more experienced, the school has benefitted from lessons learned during earlier phases of Te Kotahitanga and will continue to resource facilitator release time once external funding ceases. For staff yet to be convinced, recent Education Review Office findings add weight to relational and pedagogical change.

One of the things, the pluses that I think the staff might start to understand is that our ERO report went very well, not that the one prior to that didn’t actually go well – it was a good report - but they acknowledged quite a number of aspects of Te Kotahitanga in the observations that they had.

For his part, Ross is just as committed as he was on day one “and probably more so.” More so because Te Kotahitanga fits with his personal ethos.

More so because we’re more comfortable with it. More so because – I was going to say it works. That makes it sound like a thing you do to people! More so because it’s all about relationships and the guys around the management table knew that in their own teaching relationships a sense of humour is [vital].



## CHAPTER NINE: DISCUSSION

### Introduction

Peter, Olivia, Keita, Jim and Ross's case narratives suggest that leading educational change is a complex, challenging and, at times, arduous undertaking. This appears particularly so when desired change disrupts prevailing professional norms and runs counter to heteronomous socio-political forces. Before commencing this chapter, it is important to state that these narratives stand alone. They are careful and faithful co-constructions of the actions taken and meanings elicited by Peter, Olivia, Keita, Jim and Ross in the midst of enacting Te Kotahitanga. Authored in the recounting and authorised by participants, these narratives reflect matters of significance to them, at the time and subsequently. Their ontological power lies in their ability to communicate personal insight and professional action.

Participants did not, of their own volition, explicitly theorise their experience of leading change, nor were they pressured to do so. As Shamir, Dayan-Horesh and Adler (2005) comment, "people do not tend to express their experiences ... in succinct, abstract generalizations. Underlying themes are unlikely to be encountered in explicit form, as most people avert abstract theories and most story-tellers revel in the concrete" (p. 19). Beyond the structural conventions of narrative, I resisted organising transcript material to mirror a specific theoretical framework. As readers bring their own interpretive lenses to bear, the case narratives will be read in multiple ways and evoke multiple meanings. And appropriately so, for there is neither a first nor a last word and no limits to a dialogic context that:

extends into the boundless past and boundless future. Even *past* meanings ... born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) - they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are

immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 170)

The intention in this chapter is therefore not to prescribe meaning nor constrain interpretation, but to open additional possibilities of listening and responding (Frank, 2012). Indeed, the demands of the academy require that I address the question of 'So what?' by driving a theoretical stake in the intellectual sand and making explicit the contribution that I believe this particular research study offers the field.

The narrative that follows assumes a different form. Having engaged in dialogue with each participant, I now initiate a conversation with academe. While the resulting text constitutes a co-construction of sorts, a bricolage of interpretation and literature, the intellectual and authorial responsibility becomes mine alone. This chapter discusses the three significant contributions to the field that the extended case narratives in this thesis make: firstly, they capture and bring to life the humanness of change; secondly, they reveal the dynamic, enabling and constraining interplay of actors and structures; and, thirdly, they demonstrate that leading and context are inextricably linked.

In making sense of Peter, Olivia, Keita, Jim and Ross's lived experience, I am drawn to Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, strategy and practice, thinking tools that highlight aspects of being and doing as these five school principals sought to transform the lives of disadvantaged young people. I consider the importance of personal biography in fuelling leader agency; the what, how and why of change; and I explicate a concept of context that is embodied, temporal, and more expansive than much of the literature suggests. In order to do so, I draw selectively from my findings to illustrate and highlight the points I wish to make, examine how the literature cited in chapter two supports these assertions, and signal the potential contribution of literature that focuses on practice and practice architectures rather than leadership and change per se.

### **Living leading: The importance of narrative**

As chapter two of this thesis demonstrates, the literature is replete with rational, linear and formulaic approaches that extrapolate from complex and often protracted change processes deceptively simple lists of key tasks and dispositions, all the while neglecting what this means for the human beings at the very centre of the change vortex. Neoliberal measurement typically prioritises performativity over people, effect sizes over emotion, regression analysis over relational fluidity, scientific modelling over situated portrayal. As a consequence, the majority of funded educational research seeks to quantify, predict and replicate. In so doing, it ignores the dictum that not everything that counts can be counted, fails to capture the humanity and ‘thrownness’ (Heidegger, 1967) of change, and misses the rich experiential insights that leaders on the ground offer.

Far from being relegated to the research periphery, leaders’ narratives are front and central in this thesis. And appropriately so, for this was no fleeting research encounter; instead a three-year conversation sustained by common interest, personal rapport, and professional goodwill. The five unique, situated, and nuanced accounts that form my research findings support a growing realisation that biography is as important as policy in determining how the theoretical rubber of educational reform hits the local road.

These narratives add to a small canon of literature (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998; Pountney, 2000; Prentice, 2006) that endeavours to portray in an extended rather than episodic manner the process of leading change from the perspectives of those charged with implementing reform. Combining the personal and the professional, they touch on affective, somatic and cognitive dimensions at an individual level, together with social, cultural and historical dimensions more broadly. As such, they permit rich insight into the intimacies, subtleties and complexities of lived experience in ways that honour and accord status to that experience (Conle, 2003; D. L. Giles, 2019; Pepper & Wildy, 2009).

Principals are not automatons programmed to execute a series of

sequential change manoeuvres. They are fallible, feeling human beings for whom leading change is an embodied process involving emotional, intellectual and physical labour (Crawford, 2009, 2018; B. Harris, 2007; West-Burnham, 2009). The case narratives reveal the whole gamut of emotion as events continually reinforce and challenge each leader's self-efficacy. Participants speak of feeling passionate, elated, excited, fizzy, hopeful, optimistic, affirmed, moved, humbled, impressed, satisfied, relieved, focused, determined, driven, impatient, perplexed, conflicted, worried, disbelieving, dumbfounded, shocked, indignant, offended, angry, horrified, terrified, exasperated, exhausted, and hurt ... and the list goes on.

Tangible progress and intellectual solace (see Peter, p. 138) replenish internal reservoirs of hope, while frustration, exhaustion and despair deplete this (Flintham, 2003a, 2003b, 2010). We sense the exhilaration generated by small gains in student attendance, achievement, and retention, and discernible shifts in reculturing the school. Keita, for example, holds fast to the promise of emancipation: "We know that there's a real opportunity for us. If we can transform the culture of the school, then that, in turn, can go out and transform the community. It's exciting. We're seeing some real shifts in culture now." Peter voices his outrage that staff would subvert reform: "How dare people operate their own agenda in a school that's committed?" and Jim finds it ironic that once the show "started to roll", it rolled him flat.

The personal toll on principals was something my practitioner experience led me to anticipate, however the departure of three of the five principals during the course of this research rammed home the embodied nature of change. Resilience sorely tested, the collision of toxic internal politics, bereavement and illness saw Jim resign his position and Olivia seek a new start in a school in a different region. While there remained more to do, Peter's health deteriorated to the point that he "kn[e]w when to go" and retired three months following our final research conversation.

As Day (2014) and Flintham (2003b) argue, when reservoirs of hope run dry, the courage and costs of conviction are high. Burnout on a personal

level (Friedman, 2002; Maxwell & Riley, 2017) and dysfunctional relationships on an organisational level not only inflict a severe human toll, they jeopardise reform longevity and leadership sustainability (Steward, 2014). Given the massive financial and human investment in educational reform, it is somewhat surprising that research examining the extent, impact and remediation of harmful change stress (Allison, 1997; Beusaert, Froehlich, Devos, & Riley, 2016; Carr, 1994; Hodgen & Wylie, 2005; Mitani, 2018; Tanner & Atkins, 1990) is relatively sparse and not more widely disseminated.

The case narratives in this study help break the silence in much of the educational leadership literature whereby emotions were considered, if at all, “as little more than pesky interlopers distracting us from a higher rational purpose” (Beatty, 2000, p. 334). And, despite growing acceptance of their omnipresence in leadership endeavours (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowsky, 2004; Crawford, 2007, 2009), emotions feature little in leadership preparation programmes (Bolton & English, 2010) and empirical educational change research (Berkovich & Eyal, 2015).

### **“Good” educational research**

Not only do the case narratives reveal the embodied nature of change, they become a powerful mechanism by which individuals holding dissonant views are able to contest hegemonic discourse, research and policy (Hackmann, 2002; Riddle & Cleaver, 2013). Speaking back to the mainstream offers new ways of thinking about leadership that potentially bridge the theory-practice divide and inform future educational research endeavours. Narratives integrate what has been separated by much of the literature: the knowing (professional habitus) and the doing (whether transactional, transformational, instructional or blended leadership responses to emergent situations), the compelling (moral purpose, courage and conviction), the invigorating and the enervating (both emotional and physical).

More likely than other forms of research to capture the holism of



leading change, narrative accounts open practice complexities for scrutiny (G. Johnson, 2009; Møller & Eggen, 2005). They enable a distinction between generic professional practices, itemised in much of the leadership and change literature, and practice that emerges when leaders take action in settings that enable and constrain their individual agency (Spillane & Hunt, 2010). These narratives add depth and texture to the reality of leading educational reform, surfacing heterogeneity and particularity in principals' responses. They help explain why actual practice deviates from, and is more complex than prescribed strategies and processes suggest.

In so doing, extended narratives pose an important riposte to sterile reductionist approaches that seek to generalize, homogenise and internationalize the principal's role. Criticising such approaches as methodologically narrow and culturally naive, Ribbins and Gronn (2000) advocate research that "makes the study of the individual person and his or her subjective [and ontological] interpretations of reality the foundation of any satisfactory account of life within a school" (p. 39). The case narratives in this thesis do precisely this. They describe the genesis of each principal's moral purpose, the development of their leadership style, and the ways in which they interpret and respond to organisational change dynamics.

This is not to dismiss, out of hand, the universal heuristics distilled from school effectiveness and improvement research but to recognise their limitations. The cost of simplification and generalisation is the totality of the very phenomenon that various schemata endeavour to encapsulate. As Peter insightfully comments, an "air of pragmatism ... masks a whole lot of other things." While narrative is not immune to charges of simplification, it seeks to explore rather than essentialise multi-faceted contours of experience. A focus on the particular thus offers unique and promising contributions to research and practice (Renner, 2001; Slater, 2011).

Narratives enable us to learn vicariously from the experiences of others, to make connections between their and our lived experience (Katira, 2003), and to expand our frames of reference (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). As Crow, Day and Møller (2017) comment, narratives "serve as mirrors into

ourselves” (p. 8). Reading Peter, Olivia, Keita, Jim and Ross’s case narratives will strike chords of harmony and dissonance that both comfort and disrupt. Given Conle’s (2003) contention that choice is delimited by the narratives available to us, exposure to multiple ways of knowing and doing can only increase the range of possibilities open to leaders. Engaging with narratives affords a human connection that potentially enhances sense and decision making, benefits that make research of this nature not only procedurally but socially ethical. Hostetler (2005) thus argues that “good” research must not only be methodologically sound but pay “careful, ongoing attention to questions of human well-being” (p. 16).

### **Biography and policy**

While leadership narratives have yet to gain the traction that they deserve, the inability of existing theory to account for local variation has led some 21<sup>st</sup> century scholars to eschew officially prescribed and funded research, in order to pursue less orthodox avenues. Shamir, Dayan-Horesh and Adler (2005), for example, argue that a leader’s biography is as important as her or his traits, behaviours and ‘style’. Further, they suggest “the telling of a life story is itself a leadership behaviour” (p. 14).

Conceding that this aspect of change leadership has been inadequately researched, Day and Gu’s (2018) small scale study of two British schools rated outstanding by Ofsted, but distinctly different in socio-economic and ethnic composition, illustrates the profound influence of a leader’s biography in shaping school culture, policymaking processes and educational practices. Whereas the first principal resolutely sought to provide learning experiences counter to his own, the second maintained unrelenting focus on an educational ethos that had benefited him. The influence of personal habitus was such that, under their leadership, one school focused on the skills of lifelong learning while the other pursued academic targets. This supports the conclusion that successful leadership practices consistently reported in school improvement literature conceal considerable variation in the manner in which principals use strategies to

effect change. Indeed, Day and Gu (2018) concede that “the influence of biographies of principals on their values in practice appears to be an important ‘missing link’ in the literature” (p. 334).

Exploration of life history and lived experience add nuance to what is already known about successful school leadership. This provides a compelling rationale for the funding and study of narratives such as the five in this thesis. In addressing the first research question - How do principals experience change leadership? - they bring to life, in participants’ own words, the holism of educational reform: the rational and the emotional, the personal and the professional, the institutional and societal. A focus on the personal and the professional invites consideration of biography and the formation of habitus, for which we turn to Bourdieu.

### **Why Bourdieu?**

Given the assertion that Bourdieu wrote about formal education in primarily deterministic ways (Connell, 1983; Giroux, 1982; Jenkins, 1982), a Bourdieusian theoretical lens might, at first glance, appear antithetical to leaders who seek to disrupt rather than perpetuate the educational status quo. Alert to the democratising potential of education, Bourdieu nonetheless recognised the paradox that restrictive access, dominant cultural capital (what got taught) and pedagogical action (how it was taught) reinforced a “functional duplicity” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 199) that served to reproduce rather than ameliorate inequity.

Whilst middle class children experienced seamlessness between lived reality and reified knowledge, working class children suffered dissonance so great that their experience of formal schooling served to alienate rather than emancipate. Further, the symbolic violence inflicted meant that, if they considered higher education at all, working class students perceived their uneven representation in the tertiary sector to be the consequence of academic (in)ability and *misrecognised* the discriminatory structures underpinning notions of meritocracy.

Bourdieu, himself, was not immune to the “differential elimination of

children by their social origin” (Bourdieu, 2008, p. 34). Born to parents of humble, lower middle class social and cultural traditions, he experienced this at a visceral level when attending boarding school in Beaune and, despite acquiring the symbolic capital that conferred distinction as a pre-eminent sociologist and philosopher, always perceived himself an outsider in French academe (Bourdieu, 1988). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) was thus a commentary on an education system that remained “relatively closed, elitist and intensely competitive in its structure” (J. Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002, p. 105).

In his preface to the second edition, Bourdieu asserted that *Reproduction* was also, in part, a rejoinder to “the dominant theoretical climate of the 1960s” (p. ix). While this suggests denouncement of French social mobility and class demise, it is important to remember that *Reproduction* was a product of its time and place. In other education systems, where there is greater equality of access, rigid social hierarchies are neither replicated nor perpetuated.

As an ethnologist, Bourdieu was alert to the pitfalls inherent in transplanting theory. Reflecting on the international portability of intellectual thought, he cautioned against reading texts out of context:

The fact that texts circulate without their context, that – to use my terms - they don’t bring with them the field of production of which they are a product, and the fact that the recipients, who are themselves in a different field of production, re-interpret the texts with the structure of the field of reception, are facts that generate some formidable misunderstandings. (1999, p. 221)

To Bourdieu, the most grievous of these was the accusation levelled by critics (Connell, 1983; Giroux, 1982; Jenkins, 1982) that his work was fatalistic, denying human agency and “the resistance of the dominated” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. viii), misinterpretations that he explicitly and repeatedly rejected (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 116; 2008, pp. 52-53, 144; Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989, p. 36).

Scholars subsequently have explored the concept of education both as

habitus reinforcer (Brantlinger, 2003) and “habitus interrupter” (Clarkin-Phillips, 2016, p. 268). Those who favour the latter approach suggest that dedicated and agentic teachers transform the habitus of children in early years and primary school settings, and increase parent agency (Barrett & Martina, 2012; L. R. Bass, 2014; Clarkin-Phillips, 2016; R. K. Harker, 1984). Moreover, Sullivan (2001) contends that given the late 20thC decline in the status of the teaching profession, it seems increasingly “odd to portray teachers as an elite (cultural or otherwise) who are prejudiced against non-elite pupils” (p. 910). The humble working and middle class origins of teachers in many contemporary western education systems, New Zealand included, do not preclude other forms of prejudice, however.

As teachers who have progressed through the ranks to become senior leaders, school principals’ direct influence and decisional power extends beyond individual classroom and whānau actors, to include the entire staff and systems. Applying Bourdieu to the field of educational leadership, research suggests that leaders who experience disjunction between their habitus, the habitus of other actors, and structural conditions within the field, are both subjected to and able to effect change (Gunter, 2003; Lingard & Christie, 2003; Thomson, 2017). This leads Edgerton and Roberts (2014) to argue that when incorporated in a structure-disposition-practice framework, habitus, capital and field hold significant explanatory potential that may “equip us with practical tools for disrupting mechanisms underlying the perpetuation of social disparities in educational attainment” (p. 194). Such a prospect makes consideration of Bourdieu’s thinking tools and theory of practice a potentially important piece of the educational leadership puzzle (Addison, 2009; Lingard et al., 2003; Thomson, 2001) and warrants greater attention than that given in chapter two.

### **Bourdieu’s thinking tools: habitus, capital, field, strategy and practice**

Bourdieu’s “*thinking tools*” (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989, p. 50, italics in original) developed in the field, emerging from formative experiences in Bearn and sustained immersion as a self-taught ethnologist in Kabyle

society in Algeria. To more fully comprehend the socio-political and economic forces that simultaneously mediate and reproduce social stratification, Bourdieu argued that new analytical tools were needed. Rather than impose ethnocentric interpretive frameworks on Kabyle society, Bourdieu focused his attention on everyday social practices and the seemingly ritualistic and non-conformist actions of individual agents. These empirical observations led him, over time, to question western dichotomies of agency and structure, subject and object, change and determinism, public and private, and to develop what he termed 'thinking tools'. In the sections that follow, I revisit Bourdieu's three most well-known thinking tools - habitus, capital and field - and connect these to aspects of the case narratives. I then consider how Bourdieu's concepts of practice and strategy illuminate the process of leading educational reform.

### **Habitus defined**

Central to Bourdieu's philosophy of practice, habitus focuses on embodied ways of feeling, thinking, acting and being. Bourdieu (1990c) defines habitus as:

Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (p. 53)

These internalised schemata of perception, conception and action arise from subjective lived experience within objective social structures, a dialectic Bourdieu (1977) described as the "internalisation of externality and the externalisation of internality" (p. 72). Put more simply, habitus "captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others" (Maton, 2008, p. 52).

Habitus is thus formed tacitly during childhood, shaping what we

believe to be reasonable, common sense behaviours. As such, habitus is taken for granted “precisely because [we are] caught up in it, bound up with it; [and] inhabit it like a garment. [We] feel at home in the world because the world is also in [us], in the form of the habitus” (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 142-143).

In orienting individuals to the social world, habitus shapes but does not strictly determine “parameters of possibility and agency amidst the external and historical factors that condition, restrict and/or promote change” (Costa & Murphy, 2015, p. 3). While early dispositions are durable over time and transposable from one sphere of social action to another, this does not preclude changes in habitus:

Because the habitus is an infinite capacity for generating products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions – whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioned and conditional freedom it provides is as remote from creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from simple mechanical reproduction of the original conditioning. (Bourdieu, 1990c, p. 55)

In other words, habitus is characterised both by fluidity and fixity.

### **Personal habitus**

The determination to pursue a counter-hegemonic agenda has its antecedents in defining moments that conscientise, both in the sense of awakening consciousness of injustice in its multiple guises, and compelling action in accordance with one’s conscience. Indeed Freire (1998a) argues that it is the critical dimension of consciousness that drives leaders to become active agents in transforming their world. Attention to a leader’s personal biography elicits seminal events that have shaped their habitus, attuned them to issues of social justice, and compelled them to pursue a transformative agenda.

For Olivia, Peter and Keita, formative early experiences generated a powerful sense of outrage that compels and sustains their efforts to transform education. Being dyslexic at a time when grammatical accuracy

outweighed quality of thought meant Olivia felt the sting of academic failure that was to undermine her perceived ability to learn. This was restored almost a decade later when a university lecturer recognised and met her specific learning needs. Joy in succeeding academically saw Olivia frame her 'A' grade assignment, fuelled her ire at teacher ignorance and lack of responsiveness to diverse learning needs, and cemented her resolve to do everything in her power to instil and preserve in children a love of learning.

Had it not been for his mother's tenacity in questioning her son's class placement, Peter would have found himself in the lowest year nine class and, in all likelihood, consigned a similar academic fate. Witnessing his mother's interaction with the deputy principal not only reinforced for him the importance of taking a stand and advocating for others, but also generated an aversion to streaming practices that shape class placement in schools other than the ones he leads.

Keita was an able student who knew her ability to conform to school expectations and succeed academically set her apart from members of her whānau who dropped out at an early age. Grief over the loss of human potential was etched into her youthful being and sharpened when, as a social worker, she strove to re-engage disenchanted rangatahi in education programmes. This strengthened her resolve to lead with emancipatory intent (Fuller, 2012) and create a schooling environment in which her people, indeed all students, could flourish.

In addition to being 'othered' academically, all three experienced cultural dislocation at a young age. Keita and Peter lived in two distinct worlds, torn between their vibrant heritage and the "beige" monocultural education system. To succeed academically, Keita felt pressure to disregard her heritage, "to be not Māori" and embrace a Pākehā world. Peter experienced similar sadness at having to "leave his identity at the door." While Keita and Peter traversed the cultural divide on a daily basis, Olivia was initially oblivious to difference. Growing up in a poor, predominantly Māori rural community seemed unremarkable until she heard boarding school teachers commenting on the "poor little white kid hanging out with



the Māoris.” These jolts surfaced taken for granted aspects of a secure familial habitus into the conscious realm and disrupted innocent ways of knowing.

In the same way that we teach who we are (Palmer, 1998), we lead who we are. A determination that young people should revel in rather than relegate their culture, discover rather than hide their multiple talents, fulfil their scholastic and life potential, and dream differently propelled Olivia, Peter and Keita into the teaching profession. Childhood experience of dislocation and discrimination helped shape social conscience, solidify moral purpose and spur an ongoing quest for justice that sees these principals advocate and agitate on a daily basis. That formative early events and defining moments shape the adults we become seems self-evident, yet much of the leadership literature emphasises the mechanics of doing over more esoteric processes of becoming.

While solutions to injustice might be the preserve of the oppressed (Freire, 1970), raging against injustice is not. Conscientisation also arises out of vicarious experience, as Peter’s reaction to American civil rights footage and his friend’s class placement demonstrates. In this case, we see how fledgling dispositions heighten attunement to the plight of others and set the scene for activism.

### **Habitus and field location**

Field, in Bourdieusian terms, refers to semi-autonomous sites of practice, bounded social spaces in which self-interested agents compete for recognition according to various logics of practice (Bourdieu, 1988, 1998). Fields are hierarchical in that, at any given time, some agents enjoy a dominant position within the field, whilst others are subordinate. Ongoing struggle between autonomous and heteronomous forces thus underscores the propensity for shifts in the field positions individuals occupy and the overarching logics of practice. This means that fields are historically shaped and temporally evolved.

As indicated in chapter two, fields can be divided into subfields, each

with their own rules or logics of practice. In this thesis, principals are situated in schools that form subfields of the secondary school field which, in turn, is a subfield of the formal schooling field. The latter forms a subfield of the education field which, in turn, is a subfield of the field of power. While successive subfields mirror elements of the larger field, they each contain internal logics that pose “a genuine qualitative leap” (Thomson, 2008, p. 73) for social agents moving from one subfield to another. In its extreme form, Bourdieu (1977) terms this leap, or rupture between habitus and field, ‘hysteresis’.

In each of the case narratives, we see the impact of habitus on the selection of school, when this is both aligned and non-aligned. While appointment to one school provided the opportunity to lead a geography department, Peter soon discovered that he “wasn’t into their whole school ethos that much” and “didn’t want to be changing the lives of rich kids.” He subsequently sought more “authentic” environments, culturally rich and socio-economically deprived schools that enabled his return to socialist egalitarian values and education “predicated on everyone being successful.” Unable to “divorce the personal from the professional,” Peter experiences harmony when working in a school on things he believes in: “I’m quite at peace with myself.”

Keita and Olivia also gravitated towards schools that reflected their heritage and moral purpose. Spurred by emancipatory mission, Keita deliberately sought school settings where she believed she could make the most difference: predominantly Māori, low decile, struggling. While her aspiring principal peers expressed surprise that a first time principal should seek such a formidable assignment, Keita had no such reservations: “It feels like I’m meant to be here.... For me it’s a privilege.... I knew there were issues and, eyes wide open, that’s why I wanted to come here.” Olivia’s first principalship in a conservative and reactionary community convinced her that she needed to be “back in the Bay.... I accepted that I wasn’t [region], that I was East Coast.” Appointment to her current school provided a timely “escape hatch” and a return to the “strong cultural base” with which she felt

greatest affinity: “I just felt more comfortable there. I understand that that was what I’d grown up with. I was never going to end up in a decile 10 Remuera school. I wasn’t going to fit.”

In contrast, Ross has spent his entire teaching career in single sex boarding schools, environments in which he feels at home with students from rural communities and the routine of boarding school life. Coming from a family who settled post-WW2 on marginal farming land, Ross knows only too well the struggle involved and the need to leave home for secondary schooling. His childhood experience means he “quite like[s] an underdog scenario” and feels a strong sense of “fit” in the schools in which he has taught. It’s what he knows.

Bourdieu (1992) writes that “when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a ‘fish in water’: it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted” (p. 127). Surfacing habitus into the conscious realm requires disruption, either in the form of focused investigation (a reflexive endeavour that Bourdieu (1990a) termed ‘socioanalysis’) or in an experienced disjunction between habitus and field (Reay, 2004). With regard to the former, research and professional activities that invite contemplation of personal and career biography as an integral component of any change initiative (as this thesis does) reveals formative events that have led to the present and shape the future (Eacott, 2010).

With regard to the latter, all five principals have experienced feelings of unease when habitus and field are non-aligned. In the company of principal colleagues imbued in a competitive neoliberal ethos, Peter recognises that he is “a fish out of water” and seeks intellectual stimulation elsewhere. Jim’s narrative sheds light on what can happen when principals not only shift schools but cross school sectors. As an experienced principal of five primary schools, Jim initially perceived the prospect of appointment to a secondary school as completely foreign: “Oh, come on mate, that’s not me at all.” The “compartmentalised, siloed, competitive and, in some ways, confrontational” secondary landscape proved as much, with Jim confounded

by the mismatch between the level of expertise within the organisation and the rate of change. This, together with staff scepticism over the ability of a primary school principal to lead a secondary school, made for a “bloody terrifying” first year.

### **Capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic)**

Accumulated over time (Bourdieu, 1986), capital is a resource that assumes monetary and non-monetary, tangible and intangible forms. It includes “adaptive cultural and social competencies such as familiarity with relevant institutional contexts, processes, and expectations, possession of relevant intellectual and social skills (e.g. ‘cultural knowledge’ and ‘vocabulary’), and a more ‘strategic conception of agency’” (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 196).

When different forms of economic, cultural and social capital are perceived legitimate within specific fields of interaction, Bourdieu (1989) deems them to have symbolic power. The ability to act thus depends on the total volume of capital one possesses and the relative weightings of these capitals. In Jim’s case narrative, it appears that the reluctance of some staff to acknowledge primary principal experience undermined his symbolic capital, obstructed access to what Halverson (2004) terms the “particularity of local circumstance” (p. 92), and made leading change fraught from the outset. Conversely, established relationships and long tenure in a school held in high esteem afforded Ross a legitimacy that transcends positional power or force of personality alone.

More recently, in the context of continuous professional learning, Fullan and Hargreaves (Fullan, 2016; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, 2013) adopt the term ‘professional capital’ to describe human (individual talent), social (group collaboration) and decisional capital (sound judgment). They argue that the best principals build social capital for change and, along with others (M. Jones & Harris, 2014; Leana, 2011), contend that this is a crucial yet often missing link in school reform.

Bourdieu did not write about professions other than academe and cautioned that the very “notion of profession is dangerous because it has all

the appearances of false neutrality” (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989, pp. 37-38). There is little doubt that he would dispute the term ‘professional capital’, arguing instead that the accrual and exercise of economic, cultural and social capital requires their recognition in specific fields of interaction. Further, the competitive nature of these interactions means that while principals might, and do, employ social capital, their ability to build collective social capacity will always be mediated by conflicting interests and plural habitus. This can be seen in the assertion that:

depending on their trajectory and on the position they occupy in the field by virtue of their endowment (volume and structure) in capital, [agents] have a propensity to orient themselves actively either towards the conservation of the distribution of capital or towards the subversion of that distribution. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 108-109)

### **Practice, strategy and a ‘feel for the game’**

Practice, in the Bourdieusian sense, refers to the quasi-embodied, almost intuitive manner in which agents navigate competing interests in the social field. Expressed mathematically, Bourdieu (1984) conceives of social practice as the interaction of habitus, capital and field: “[*(Habitus)* (*Capital*)] + Field = Practice” (p. 101). In other words, habitus, as a practice unifying and practice generating principle, is enacted in concert with the capitals one possesses and the field circumstances in which one finds oneself. This enactment takes the form of “strings of ‘moves’ which are objectively organised as strategies ... which would presuppose at least that they be apprehended as one among other possible strategies” (Bourdieu, 1990c, p. 62).

Researchers are divided over the degree of intentionality inherent in strategies. On the one hand, Eacott (2010) suggests that Bourdieu conceived of strategy as “appropriate actions taken without conscious reflection” (p. 268) whilst, on the other, Lane (2000) argues that Bourdieu’s position on the extent to which the strategies of the Kabyles represented a

*“practical or implicit sense of what was to be done”* (p. 106, italics in original), rather than rational choice, was indeterminate. This is evident in Bourdieu’s (1990c) seemingly contradictory assertion that although strategies were not the “product of a genuine strategic intention” (p. 62), it could never be ruled out that:

The responses of the habitus may be accompanied by a strategic calculation tending to perform in a conscious mode the operation that the habitus performs quite differently, namely an estimation of the chances presupposing transformation of the past effect into an expected objective. (p. 53)

In another treatise, Bourdieu (1990a) posited that habitus might be *“controlled through awakening of consciousness”* (p. 116, italics in original) and the sharpening of leader reflexivity, the significance of which is discussed in the next chapter.

Importantly, Bourdieu’s definition of strategy as habitus enacted calls into question “hyperrationalist” (Eacott, 2010, p. 268) notions that confine strategy to a series of logical, technical, and sequential steps. Strategy, in Bourdieusian terms, reveals the dynamic interplay between internalised dispositions and historically prescribed courses of action, a concept far more complex than the prescriptive and normative action lists permeating much of the change, business and leadership literature would suggest (Eacott, 2011).

The deftness with which agents use various strategies to accumulate capital and maintain or improve their position in the field constitutes a “feel for the game” (Bourdieu, 1990c, p. 66). Feel for the game arises solely through experience of the game and the “objective structures within which it is played out” (1990c, p. 66). This takes time for, as Bourdieu (2000) argues, in order to

use a tool (or do a job), and to do it 'comfortably' - with a comfort that is both subjective and objective, and characterized as much by the efficiency and ease of the action as by the satisfaction and felicity of the agent - one has to have 'grown into it' through long use. (p. 143)

Developed through the accumulation of capitals and rigorous apprenticeship in the field, mastery of the game enables leaders who have “incorporated the structures of the field” to “find [their] place” and initiate: without even thinking about it, 'things to be done' (business, *pragmata*) and to be done 'the right way', action plans inscribed like a watermark in the situation, as objective potentialities, urgencies, which orient [their] practice without being constituted as norms or imperatives clearly defined by and for consciousness and will. (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 143, italics in original)

This aligns with the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*, value infused experiential knowledge or practical wisdom gained through immersion in a field (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

The ability of school leaders to apply general change principles and generic tools to idiosyncratic bounded school systems arguably distinguishes expert leaders from less effective counterparts and explains why a principal can be considered highly successful in some settings and ineffectual in others. Finesse lies in selection, adaptation and timing, rather than knowledge of the generic and technical skills that form the nucleus of much of the change and leadership literature. This leads Kinsella and Pitman (2012) to deem the privileging of *episteme* (knowledge) and *techne* (strategies) over *phronesis* a crisis that diminishes the work of serving and aspiring professionals.

Rather than confining sense making and action to rational will and reflection, Bourdieu situates *phronesis* historically, socioculturally and discursively, thereby distinguishing his work from much of the educational leadership canon. In contrast, authors such as Macbeath and MacDonald (2000) emphasise “a well-rehearsed cognitive databank of principles and experiential lessons internalised” (p. 34) and Scott (2003) the set of “diagnostic maps” derived from “previous practice problems in the unique work context” that enable a leader to “determine when and when not to deploy particular generic and technical skills” (p. 4). Resulting intuition, social and emotional intelligence are thus framed as outcomes of conscious

deliberation.

Bourdieu does not discount these approaches but contends that practice is less intentional and far more complex than rational strategies alone would suggest. In a similar vein, Lumby and Coleman's (2007) assertion that a "platform of conscious rationality floats on a sea of often unconscious irrationality" (p. 31) highlights the embodied and subliminal nature of habitus. Professional habitus not only includes technical knowledge and skill, but socially constituted dispositions that influence how principals perceive, think and act over time (Noordegraaf & Schinkel, 2011; Spillane & Lee, 2014). Leading is therefore situated in that "bodily action in and on the world" (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008, p. 49) occurs in a particular place, at a particular point in history, under local circumstances and conditions, and within a matrix of cultural, discursive, social, and material-economic arrangements. This highlights the dual influence of personal histories and circumstances and conditions beyond individual actors (Day, 2011; Notman, 2011).

### **Developing a feel for the reform game**

In Peter and Olivia's case narratives, prior experience of leading Te Kotahitanga has shifted priorities and approaches to reform. Compulsion has replaced voluntarism and both principals have strengthened working relationships with in-school facilitators. When the opportunity to join Te Kotahitanga arose in his previous school, Peter relied on "feeding the hungry", enlisting enthusiasts and trusting them to drive reform while he focused on other initiatives. Second time around, he has "used the rhetoric cleverly" to lay the foundations for involvement in Te Kotahitanga. This has included sharing his narrative of experience and hope, appealing to the ethic of care and history of curriculum innovation underpinning school kaupapa, laying bare disparities in achievement, aligning charter statements and other documentation, and communicating the language of expectation. While holding off applying for a year did not stave off all opposition, a groundswell of support and "state of readiness" meant the school's inclusion



in Te Kotahitanga was well received: “People were hugging me. ‘Oh, we got it!’”

Peter is now more attuned to inherent pitfalls and the need to walk alongside the facilitation team, rather than awhi them from a distance. When initial staff focus settled on student behaviour rather than pedagogy, he cautioned the school co-ordinator that this would stifle change: “They’re not going to go anywhere with this ... get them on learning outcomes.” Now mindful of the tenuous position relatively inexperienced in-school facilitators sometimes find themselves in, Peter reflects:

You have to give people power and let them go with it, but you also have to be there for them.... You need to learn more than I learnt at [previous school]. You have to make quality time to talk with them, rather than just say, “I’ve got your back.” ... They’re potential leaders and vulnerable. I had to stand with them and I had to stand with them in quite public spaces.

To bolster and sustain the facilitation team, Peter has introduced a co-facilitation role and expanded the team to “four plus me.”

Other important learning, consolidated during his first engagement with Te Kotahitanga, includes a “fad filter” that ensures complementarity of parallel change endeavours and reduces initiative overload. Tempering the pace of change to accommodate early and late adopters means keeping an eye on the “long game”, “work[ing] the room” and knowing when to “put a stopper on things.”

Olivia’s prior experience of Te Kotahitanga in a racially divided community alerted her to the importance of a softer repositioning process that meant, second time around, “talk wasn’t as ‘in your face’ as it had been previously. It had to be much more subtle.” While this felt a little like dripping water on a stone, inserting student narratives (*Culture Speaks*, Bishop & Berryman, 2006) and pithy, pertinent literature into senior team discussions helped create the subtext for change. Flipping achievement and attendance stats revealed darker aspects of success that convinced “the most pivotal person in the management team” of the cultural divide

between achievers and non-achievers: “It didn’t take much to show the yawning gap.... Here we are saying we’re passing this number of kids. Well, that means we’re failing this number of kids. If we look at who we’re failing, they’re all brown.” Early on, Olivia also identified potential facilitators on the staff with a view to “grow[ing] the people, grow[ing] the potential, awhi, awhi, awhi.”

Both principals were adamant that, contrary to Te Kotahitanga’s initial kaupapa, staff participation should be mandatory, and both used board sanctioning of the project to reinforce this expectation. As Olivia comments, “There’s no might. There’s no maybe. There’s no when. There’s will.” Having embarked on Te Kotahitanga with two volunteer cohorts, Ross is more forceful in his expectation that everyone will participate: “You can’t be half pregnant about being at [school]. You’re either with us and this is what we do, or you’re out, you’re not.”

Previous experience of Te Kotahitanga naturally means fewer unknowns, greater awareness of potential pitfalls and the opportunity to apply prior learning to new situations. These insights, along with others discussed in the next section, arise from particularities in the field and are amassed over time. It is hardly surprising, then, that Fullan (2005) contends a decade of application (doing) and critical reflection (knowing) is necessary for the job to become ‘doable’. This said, sureness of touch neither eliminates conflict, nor guarantees smooth implementation.

### **The dynamic, enabling and constraining interplay of actors and structures**

As already stated, extended case narratives demonstrate human and structural forces that simultaneously serve to afford and block, accelerate and decelerate change initiatives. This section examines the manner in which micropolitical activity, institutional arrangements, education policy and societal discourse temper the pace of Te Kotahitanga reform.

## **Micropolitics**

Educational change is an inherently political act that seeks to disrupt the status quo in order to optimise resource allocation and improve outcomes for students. The natural, often inevitable corollary of this is that power shifts among existing position holders, and from incumbents to newcomers. This causes self-interested actors within the school field to seek preservation and enhancement through continual negotiation of the micropolitical space. Competing interests mean that actual and potential conflict are ever present (Hoyle, 1986).

Given the potential for this activity to both secure and derail change, it is imperative that principals identify and proactively navigate the micropolitical landscapes within their schools (Caruso, 2013). As Flessa (2009) argues,

the skill school leaders need is not the perfect strategy to engage in the impossible struggle to eliminate micropolitics but instead the skill of inquiry to look for it in every instance, to examine who gains and who loses under important school decisions, and to develop a better understanding of the concerns that motivate people to join together in support or opposition. (p. 346)

For the most part, altruism rather than material interests motivated teachers to become early adopters (Rogers, 2003), either as in-school Te Kotahitanga facilitators or volunteers in early cohorts. Participation, in these groups, of esteemed members of staff encourages what Rogers (2003) terms the early majority. Ross, for example, recognised that “key movers and shakers” in the first cohort were pivotal to reform momentum. The involvement of a facilitator known for independent thinking was also instrumental in balancing the fervour of passionate converts and helping persuade colleagues that Te Kotahitanga merited serious attention. The fact that this facilitator was also a member of the senior leadership team added further weight to the change coalition (Kotter, 1995).

While training senior leaders as facilitators served an ideological purpose in communicating commitment to reform and a pragmatic one in

resourcing shadow coaching and co-construction processes once external funding ceased, this was an emergent rather than foundational strategy. Most facilitators were recognised classroom teachers whose lack of hierarchical status placed them in a difficult position when observing and critiquing the practice of reluctant, or more senior colleagues. Olivia recounts an example of this whereby highly resistant, senior, and long-serving members of a certain faculty would “constantly rate themselves as 5s on the Te Kotahitanga scale regardless of whatever evidence was presented. Very hard to challenge that, particularly for the young [facilitation] team working in that area.”

Another challenge to established field positions arose from the advent of new career paths, with facilitators bypassing traditional pastoral and curriculum routes to senior leadership and, indeed, principalship. This presented some threat to incumbents who had served longer apprenticeships and for whom positional status mattered. For example, when Peter’s TK facilitator joined the leadership table, her sense that the two APs were “asserting their power” made for fraught relationships and, while Peter believes tension has now subsided, he comments that power is always an issue. Jostling for field position is an ongoing contest.

The deleterious impact of micropolitical activity is foremost in Olivia’s case narrative. When an extended family illness necessitated a period of sustained leave, a small group of teachers resistant to changing pedagogical practice took advantage of “the mass power vacuum” created by Olivia’s absence in order to pursue a defensive agenda designed to undermine the principal, the senior leadership team and board, and ultimately derail reform. To safeguard their interests and a fervent desire to revert to the way things were, disaffected staff allegedly absented themselves from professional development sessions, failed to engage in discussion, disregarded official complaint procedures, met in secret, enlisted union involvement, conducted a non-sanctioned staff survey in an indiscriminate manner, converted easily influenced new and younger staff to their cause, uplifted confidential school documents, ‘passed’ a vote of no confidence in

the principal and board, and broke the code of ethics. Quiet in open internal school forums and externally vocal, the voice of this underground minority was channelled in such a way that not only were dissenters able to hide behind a cloak of anonymity, they received what Olivia perceives as disproportionate attention from ERO and the Ministry. This was evidenced in the damning draft ERO inspection report released to the board the day after it received a letter from the Minister of Education congratulating the school on outstanding student achievement results.

The power exercised by senior and middle leaders in their absence thwarted Jim and Olivia's ability to fully implement Te Kotahitanga. Jim felt increasingly ostracized by his senior team and one middle leader's adversarial union approach meant that not only could Olivia not initiate performance measures without these being seen as retaliatory, the middle leader was able to galvanise opposition and disrupt reform. This underscores the need for micropolitical literacy, the ability to identify and mediate staff interests and positions (Ball, 1994; Caruso, 2013; Clarke, 2003; Flessa, 2009; Hargreaves, 1995; Jäppinen, 2017; B. Johnson, 2004; Louis & Murphy, 1994; Smeed, Kimber, Millwater, & Ehrich, 2009).

Principals sensitive to the micropolitical landscape possess insight that helps them secure support for change in general, surface resistance before this becomes counter-productive, and maintain some control over the change process. It means they are more likely to acknowledge the human dimension of change; bring feelings, frustrations and differences into the open; encourage free expression, and adjust the pace of change accordingly. When combined with an ethic of care, attunement to the interests and motivations of those in the field is a form of relational sensitivity (Branson, 2010; D. L. Giles, 2019) that enables what B. Johnson (2004) terms the "positive politics' of negotiation, collaboration and conflict resolution" (p. 267).

### **The pace of change**

In the case narratives, there are multiple examples where principals'

assessments of organisational pulse temper the pace of change. Peter and Olivia's initial summation of school context meant they "could sit on their hands for a couple of months," undertake cultural audits, build relationships, and set the scene for change. Olivia's initial task was to disrupt perceptions that the school was doing well. Disaggregating student achievement data and "flipping the stat on its ear" enabled her to expose inequity in student results and the naive, prejudicial manner in which these had been interpreted.

In contrast, Keita experienced critical "entry and encounter" (Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 433) that forced her to abandon a short period of planned stasis and relationship building, in favour of direct intervention to avert disastrous NCEA results. While the board and some staff were quick to support this, entrenched culture and routines meant many were not. Challenging the legacy, practice and style of her predecessor placed Keita at odds with those accustomed to a *laissez-faire* approach, some of whom actively sabotaged change initiatives.

In Peter's and Olivia's narratives we see a disjunction between their propensity for change and that of the staff as a whole. Mindful that change overload "pisses people off," Peter acknowledged the importance of "putting a stopper on things" and consolidating "cumulative stuff" before embarking on "games still to be played." Olivia similarly staggered system reform, making "political concession[s]" in the revised leadership structure and delaying a move away from vertical forms.

While some staff liken her continual press for change to "a bull at a gate," Olivia recognises there is a tipping point beyond which "you start to see the fear in the eyes of staff who become automatically resistant to any change, even though it's sensible." Her internal change barometer suggests that when pivotal staff are prepared to "stand up in front of their colleagues and say [they] want to shift" rather than stand "right behind you if you get up and tell everyone we're changing," there is sufficient courage and resolve to proceed. A sizeable change coalition (Kotter, 1995) is essential if reform is to be successfully implemented and sustained over time. As Olivia

comments, “change shouldn’t be left to just a few people. It’s everybody’s business.”

She likens contemplation of each substantial change move to an “elaborate chess game” in which the senior leadership team must gauge whether there is “enough bang for the buck in that shift to cause carnage.” This often presents a dilemma between concentrated and extended timeframes that advantage students over staff and vice versa. Knowing when to expose the queen and when to sacrifice pawns is not easy: “What’s pushing enough and what’s not pushing enough?”

When the future of young people is at stake, this is a crucial question, the ‘answers’ to which must emerge in situ. Determining the appropriate pace of change requires a relational sensitivity far deeper than any technical monitoring of change act implies, and underscores the importance of transformational leadership activities, individualised consideration and intellectual stimulation, in particular.

The shift to horizontal forms shows that outcomes cannot always be predicted either. Having extended the consultation process to include student voice and BOT endorsement, Olivia and her senior team donned “armadillo coats” and announced to the staff that they would “concede on some things” but not this. When the staff acquiesced without murmur, the senior team were so stunned that for the next week they were on “tenterhooks that something terrible was going to happen. And it never did.” Reflecting on this, Olivia suspects that battling the senior team (the game) was more important to some people than the locus of battle. She also points to the importance of “playing back” the evidence gathered, connecting this with what people said in order to establish ownership, and ensuring that nothing is hidden: “The emotion just goes out of it and maybe that was why it got to the point where everyone rolled over.” This example reveals responses to change that are both rational and irrational, predictable and surprising.

### **Attending to the middle**

While resistance within education settings has not been extensively researched (Starr, 2011), evidence from business organisations supports greater attention to the role of middle leaders as recipients and deployers of top-down change initiatives (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). Balogun and Johnson's (2005) research suggests that middle leaders interpret and mediate reform initiatives primarily through informal interactions with peers. When these digress significantly from formal intentions, official strategies are more likely to produce unintended outcomes.

It follows, then, that if principals wish to maximise congruent and minimise counteracting change consequences, they must be proactive in facilitating sense making (Weick, 2012) conversations with DPs, APs and heads of faculty, in particular. This not only affords them an opportunity to contribute to these conversations but potentially reduces the frequency and intensity of counterproductive lateral processes to which they are not privy. As J. D. Ford, Ford and D'Amelio (2008) and van Dijk and van Dick (2009) point out, resistance is a socially constructed phenomenon in which the action and inaction of leaders (in this case, principals) in interpreting, escalating and mitigating opposition forms the other side of the resistance story.

Grint (2010) further suggests that a leader's sense making is also sense breaking in that alternative versions are quietened. This leads him to argue that sense making is "not an analytical act but an act of power that operates in two dimensions" (p. 101), the first serving to silence resisters in their tracks, and the second, more altruistically, to silence the natural anxiety that accompanies transition from one way of behaving to another (Fisher, 2012). The most effective leaders pay careful attention to the way in which dissent is managed (Collinson & Ackroyd, 2005).

In Peter and Ross's case narratives, we see timely intervention while, in Jim and Olivia's, the consequences of oversight are detrimental to organisational, professional and personal wellbeing. Alert to power dynamics, Peter knows the importance of conversations with dissenters. He



first seeks to understand their perspective, reiterate how proposed change aligns with the school charter and strategic plan, and negotiate a way forward:

It seems to me that if someone's not happy, I'd better talk to them and say, "Look, I hear you don't want to be involved. What's the story? Is there a way we can work around this?" rather than give resistance honour and status. That's why I think the charter and sense of direction are crucial. This is where we're going. These are the things we believe in.

Ross similarly perceives that "resistant as they may be, [teachers are] intelligent people" who will ruminate and respond to different sense making perspectives: "No matter what, if you show people things, intelligent people things, they will chew it over in their subconscious and subtly make changes in what they're doing."

While we don't see the same proactive attention to powerful individuals in Keita, Olivia and Jim's case narratives, the influence of middle leaders and other key actors is acknowledged in retrospect. Despite mitigating circumstances, Olivia considers failure to bring in an additional senior support person during her absence a "critical mistake" that created a "mass power vacuum" in a "pressure cooker environment" endeavouring to move "resistors out of their comfort zone." Reflecting on what has been a combative and harrowing experience, she recognises that the senior team "should have invested more time in that middle layer," sharing power and "train[ing] them as observers much earlier on." Whether this would have circumvented "the torrid tale of 2013" is a moot point, however micropolitical finesse may have alleviated the situation somewhat.

### *Board and community*

Governance support from the BOT also falls within the micropolitical realm, something that the principals in this study were keenly aware of. As Peter comments, "You need a board that's right on your side. If you haven't, you're in big trouble." When a "right wing conservative board" replaced the

progressive board that introduced Te Kotahitanga and appointed her principal in “a racially divided community”, Olivia experienced:

A good lesson in politics around boards.... When boards go bad, life gets very difficult for everybody. So here we were, change agents in a school in flux, in to do ‘x’ job with the board wanting you to do ‘y’ job. It’s just the incompatibility of it.

Conversely, board unity and continuity carries with it a community mandate that reinforces a change agenda. Olivia’s current board chair was “elected with the highest number of votes ever recorded” and a recent community survey returned an 80% satisfaction rating on “the direction the board is taking for the school.” Far from being “sock puppets to the principal”, the board has both endorsed the expectation that all staff will be involved in Te Kotahitanga and required Olivia to “argue the case for every single thing we were trying ... really robust discussion.”

### **Countering prevailing discourse**

Robust discussion includes not just practical and financial site logistics but debates around what it means to be educated, culturally responsive curriculum and assessment, and the extent to which schools can mediate external policy. While an equity discourse features more strongly in recent education policy, this has not always been the case. In 1939, Beeby’s egalitarian vision for the New Zealand education system was, in essence, an attack on the principle of selection that discriminated against the children of the poor (Alcorn, 1999; Beeby, 1992). Half a century later, *Tomorrow’s Schools* legislation (Department of Education, 1988b) heralded neoliberal approaches to education that positioned education as an individual rather than societal good, schools as competitors, and principals as chief executive officers.

In addition to cementing middle class advantage, neoliberal policy arguably solidified deficit perceptions of the teaching profession as a whole, and the manner in which many teachers within the profession viewed their students (Bishop, 2005; Valencia, 2010). The dark side of meritocracy

meant that responsibility for academic non-achievement lay with the individual (student and family, rather than teacher and school), regardless of the obstacles, discriminatory structures and Eurocentric cultural capital inflicted on minoritised groups. It is somewhat ironic, then, that a counter-culture intervention such as Te Kotahitanga should be sponsored by the very system it sought to challenge.

Challenging hegemonic views in an articulate and convincing manner is not easy, as participants in this study discovered. Peter learnt the importance of making “really unambiguous statements ... about why you’re doing it” and countering stalling tactics: “Oh, the last 170 years. That’s your control group.” In a similar vein, Ross found vehement opposition initially confronting: “It’s not until you get your answer and your rationale clearly in your mind that you can actually cope with that.”

A competitive market environment has, in Peter’s opinion, meant “*Tomorrow’s Schools* has been a context that has actually worked against addressing national issues” such as poverty and racism: “What are people fighting for? To maintain advantage over the neighbouring school it seems.” In contrast, Te Kotahitanga has not only challenged deficit thinking and the realm of professional responsibility, but also created a learning environment in which principals are able to collaborate rather than compete. Olivia values the sense of community that working with like-minded principal colleagues brings:

At least a Te Kotahitanga principal has a common link and a common thread with a series of schools. Okay, we know that we can’t necessarily uplift things and drop them straight on top of another school, but we sure as hell can learn from those experiences. Other principals don’t have that unless they accidentally fall upon it.

Further, the iterative nature of reform means that schools in successive phases of the project have benefitted from the experience of predecessors, hence Keita’s comment that the leadership components in GPILSEO “add so much more to Phase 1, 2 and 3” and Olivia’s observation that “the difference between Phase 4 and Phase 5” has been “understanding the

systems framework that sits underneath it.”

Another consequence of *Tomorrow's Schools* legislation has been the intensification of principal workloads and the diverting of attention from learning to managerial and entrepreneurial activities. Far from being the head teacher, Ross comments that his first priority on becoming a principal was ensuring the hostel remained economically viable. There wasn't “a hell of a lot of focus on principals leading learning. You were the CEO.” This echoes research findings highlighting workload deterrents to the enactment of direct instructional leadership (Horng et al., 2010; Lemoine et al., 2014; Louis et al., 2010; Terosky, 2014).

While site-based management allows principals considerable flexibility in designing school structures and systems, Peter comments that externally imposed performativity measures render many neoliberal freedoms illusory. Prime examples of this are rigid templates and pedantry surrounding strategic plans and school self-review, and a raft of data collection mechanisms that prioritise literacy and numeracy. Although compliance is mandatory, Peter “can play the game as well as anyone else”, satisfying minimum requirements in order to focus on a broader agenda.

In addition to playing the game, principals seek to challenge the umpires. Peter called the Minister of Education out over poverty within his school catchment area and the Ministry of Education over relocation expenses for experienced principals taking on smaller, low decile schools. Olivia similarly rebutted the Minister of Education's rhetoric around parents purchasing cigarettes and alcohol at the expense of pushbikes: “If they can't afford milk and bread and the bus token, how can they actually afford the bloody bikes? And would you send your kid through six roundabouts?” Aware that transportation difficulties significantly impede student attendance, Olivia joined with principal colleagues in the region to successfully petition local government for a free bus trial for students residing in the poorest suburb. This shows a willingness to publicly contest the politics that shape policy, to advocate and agitate at a regional and national level, and to span field boundaries (Miller, 2008).

### **Instructional and transformational leadership acts**

The case narratives lend credence to the argument that both transformational and instructional leadership acts are needed to secure educational reform (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016; Day et al., 2016; Printy et al., 2009). With regard to envisioning a desired future state and setting goals accordingly (elements common to both transformational and instructional leadership), it appears that preliminary work in communicating Te Kotahitanga's vision of equitable educational achievement, aligning this with the school's mission and building a change coalition was successful, on the surface at least. All five principals used the rhetoric "We are a Te Kotahitanga school" to position reform for current and prospective students, staff and community, thereby ensuring consistent language and symbolism in oral communication, written documents, and visual artefacts. A common lexicon carries espoused moral purpose (Burns, 1978; Fullan, 2003), the 'sayings' of practice (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008), symbolic frames of organisation (Bolman & Deal, 1984, 1997, 2013; Sergiovanni, 1984, 2000) and, in this study, a transformative narrative.

### **Improving the instructional programme**

Designed to strengthen the instructional core through applied action research, the establishment of cross-curricular professional learning groups complemented Te Kotahitanga's focus on culturally responsive pedagogy. In Jim's and Keita's case narratives, various inquiries into practice fostered collaboration between colleagues who would not normally work together and opened new ways of seeing. Jim found this a useful device in traversing curriculum silos, creating space for new and less dominant voices to be heard and disrupting faculty group think: "It's inter-departmental, so there's no 'This is what we think.' It's what I think. Everybody has a say." The provision of a forum conducive to the creation, sharing and application of new knowledge focused teachers on classroom pedagogy and helped meet broader professional needs for intellectual stimulation (B. Bass, 1990a). Further, cross-curricular PLGs introduced new ways of working that

countered traditional arrangements, thereby reducing structural rigidity.

Interestingly, Ross was the only principal in this study to engage in direct forms of instructional leadership. While this simultaneously meets registration and performativity requirements that sit within managerialist discourse (Hallinger, 2005; Purinton, 2013), he views regular classroom presence as being “where the leadership is. If I delegated that, how the hell would I know how good [teachers] are?” This underscores Rigby’s (2014) view that acts of instructional leadership serve multiple purposes, the prevailing logic of which is not immediately visible and must be ascertained through dialogue. Ross’s emphasis on non-fiction writing, “cracking algebra,” and the frequent circulation of pertinent teaching research are further examples of direct involvement in pedagogical practice.

Lack of mention suggests that Peter, Olivia, Jim and Keita, like many of their secondary principal counterparts, distributed pedagogical and instructional programme responsibilities (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985) to senior leadership team members and faculty heads, and engaged primarily, if not solely, in acts of indirect instructional leadership. From their narratives, it appears that the two remaining dimensions identified by Hallinger and Murphy (1985), *defining the school’s mission* and *creating a positive school climate* consumed the bulk of their energies. This aligns with literature arguing that these managerial functions form “the bedrock of principal instructional leadership in secondary schools” (Bendikson et al., 2012, p. 3) and that, in large schools in particular, principals must “work directly on their indirect influence” (Southworth, 2004, p. 102).

### **Developing people**

The second principle of transformational leadership, *developing people*, requires not just intellectual stimulation but individualised consideration tailored to accommodate people’s talents and strengths, hopes and concerns. Principals in this study supported personal and professional growth in a variety of ways. Psychosocial support for the in-school facilitation team has already been mentioned, with principals alert to both

personal toll and professional opportunity. In Olivia's view, "it's not just about facilitating Te Kotahitanga, it's actually learning to be leaders."

Peter concurs that mentoring Te Kotahitanga facilitators is crucial, both in terms of building vertical capacity within the school and engineering a system wide paradigm shift: "I actually work for the public school system. That's my real employer.... I need subversive people within the system. That's how I see sustainability." In his view, supporting aspiring leaders with "similar beliefs and passions" to avoid "the road more travelled" is a core professional responsibility that accelerates system change. He was understandably delighted when two of his Te Kotahitanga facilitators were appointed principals and able to lever change in new settings (Fullan, 2003, 2005, 2011).

In a similar vein, Peter has sought to transform student perceptions of what it means to lead, promoting a humble service ethic and dispelling notions of privilege. Tuakana have replaced prefects and Peter has "learnt that it takes a while to deconstruct [and reconstruct] people's notions of power." This has not been without error on both sides. Peter confesses to being a "duffer" in giving students free rein over budget expenditure, without first establishing base line parameters, and has become more attuned to apparent contradictions: "In a way, you're a walking enigma because you're doing all the power things, wearing a suit." This makes dialogue around power a vital component of leadership formation and educational change.

Complementing the primary focus on pedagogical change, professional development around the formulation of personal education plans and academic mentoring supported Peter's and Keita's staff to assume expanded pastoral roles, however this form of intellectual stimulation appeared global rather than personalised in design. Imposing new conditions for appointment to senior positions demonstrates that, on occasion, transactional moves and the exercise of positional power overrode transformational approaches: "It's a bit like a mafia move: they're made an offer they can't refuse" (Peter). When he deems it necessary, Peter has no

compunction about doing this: “That’s where moral purpose comes in. You’re the principal. The board selected you.”

Less well attended to, a person’s need for individual consideration arguably intensifies oppositional micropolitical activity and imperils change, whereas recognising and attending to these needs more likely secures acquiescence, if not absolute commitment. If, as Kwan (2016) and Printy (2010) assert, transformational leadership behaviours are prerequisite to instructional practice, developing people in ways that are meaningful to them warrants serious consideration on the part of principals.

### **Redesigning the organisation**

All five participants spent considerable time redesigning the organisation to support and sustain reform. Changes were made to senior leadership team composition and roles, appointment processes, staff meeting frequency and focus, appraisal and reporting mechanisms, timetable, and form structures. These ranged from system tweaks to wholesale redesign, depending on each principal’s assessment of the extent to which components aligned with Te Kotahitanga and the relative priority given to pedagogical and structural change.

When Keita discovered too late the systemic failure in senior course advice and placement that prevented many students gaining the minimum credits required for NCEA, she prioritised practice and professional learning over immediate structural change. This was a pragmatic decision given how little remained of the school year, however, it also reflected her conviction that “making big structural change” has a limited effect size on student outcomes and makes staff feel “very nervous and uncomfortable and unsure.” This echoes Elmore’s (2004) contention that system modification should emerge from and complement a focus on practice, a design principle to the fore in Te Kotahitanga.

Differing interpretations of this are evident in Olivia and Peter’s case narratives. Unlike Keita, they both led earlier phases of reform and had time



in their current schools to prepare the foundation for Te Kotahitanga's arrival. Whereas Peter previously "attacked systems and structures first", his priority this time has been to strengthen vision, "stack the charter" around that, and pursue academic results: "I'm not waiting for those systems to change because they just take too long." As a consequence, "widespread criticism of existing systems and structures" and growing impetus for change has come from staff. Peter's comment about this being a "semi-cunning" move on his part suggests a combination of practical wisdom not fully grasped in the planning, together with serendipity of outcome.

Olivia's prior experience leads her to adopt a more ambivalent perspective on system change. On the one hand, she maintains this is a necessary prerequisite for "true reform", whilst, on the other, she recognises the risk that structural change alone relabels existing practice and creates "stick-on reform which gets easily peeled off the minute you disappear." The proposed shift to horizontal forms provides a useful illustration of the disruptive and reinforcing potential inherent in any strategy, and the importance of situational dynamics in determining which force dominates. While Olivia is committed, in principle, to vertical form structures, "all the right intent in the world but absolutely the wrong execution" means whanāungatanga is scarce and staff perceptions of their administrative role so entrenched that:

There's almost a need to crash it and rebuild it. In other words, dump it, go to something else and then come back to it when we're in a more advanced state. The worry here is that unless you actually change a system in a big way, people revert to type and go underground.

### **Timing**

The case narratives suggest that the timing of interventions, structural or otherwise, is as important as the range and layering of leadership acts. Positive data shifts both reinforce and accelerate momentum. Peter's comment that "you can be brave when the results are going your way" illustrates the importance of data analysis and the short-term wins that

feature in n-step change processes (Kotter, 1995). NCEA results showing that 70.8% of the year 11 cohort achieved Level 1, well above the less than 50% predicted, confirmed for Keita the appropriateness of her short-term emergency response and helped convince staff that “we can do this.... Look at what we achieved in that small time.” In a similar vein, impressive NCEA results not only silenced some of the loudest opponents in Olivia’s school, but generated “a renewed sense of vigour” amongst teachers whose students exceeded their expectations and restored their sense of efficacy.

While some interventions are projected and proceed according to plan, others are serendipitous. Staff turnover enabled Olivia to appoint 14 “absolutely keen bunnies” and when her DP received a national study award, she took the opportunity to restructure the senior team. This further highlights the uncertain, fluid and often improvisational nature of leading change (Duffy, 2003).

### **Practice not strategies**

Successful implementation requires skilful practice. Day, Gu and Sammons (2016) define this as the ability to differentially combine transformational and instructional strategies in ways that address “ongoing diagnoses of the needs of staff and students, the demands of the policy contexts and communities that their schools serve, clear sets of educational beliefs and values that transcend these, and the growth of trust and trustworthiness” (p. 253). It is the application of strategies rather than the strategies themselves that determines the extent to which leaders are able to transform the settings in which they work. This lends credence to the conclusion that whilst effective principals adopt most, if not all successful strategies identified in school effectiveness and improvement research, the manner in which they selectively bundle and layer these varies according to personal predilection and attunement to institutional dynamics.

The importance of customising leadership responses accordingly (Gurr, 2015; Jacobson et al., 2005; Thomson, 2001) was echoed by participants in this study. Most articulate in this regard was Ross who recognised that “it would be extremely dangerous to say this worked here so

it's going to work there. These theories apply. If I take this pill and everybody swallows it ...” While he acknowledges that some principles and strategies apply in all settings, Ross attributes the ability to “bring those fundamentals to the fore and to activate all those things that might be missing” to relationships with people. This highlights the centrality of leadership as relational practice, a point well made by Burns (1978), Branson (2010) and D. L. Giles (2011, 2019). Building and sustaining collective commitment to a change agenda requires principals to know the interests, strengths, concerns and weaknesses of those involved, and respond in ways that preserve both the mana of the people and the integrity of reform. The human remit thus underscores the importance of the transformational leadership practices that Printy (2010) and Kwan (2016) argue form the prerequisite for pedagogical shift, and supports the case for integrated leadership models (Day et al., 2016; Printy et al., 2009).

Practice is revealed in the perceptions, positions and actions of leaders as they engage on a daily basis with circumstances and conditions of their making and beyond their control. Applying Bourdieu’s habitus, capitals and fields, Lave and Wenger’s (1991) community of practice, and Schatzki’s (2005) site ontologies to education research, Kemmis (2012) and colleagues (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008; Kemmis et al., 2014) contend that leading educational change is best understood as relational practice shaped not just by “intentional action and practice knowledge ... [but by] *practice architectures* [semantic, social and physical spaces that] prefigure and pre-form the sayings, doings and relatings” (Kemmis, 2012, p. 887, italics in original) of practice. Conceptualising leading as practice prompts us to consider the situated, interdependent nature of habitus and field, and to recognise the analytical folly of separating leaders from the context in which they lead.

### **Leading as context: Through a Bourdieusian lens**

The case narratives in this thesis demonstrate that principals are at once a constitutive part of context and constituted by it. They are both embedded

in and embody context, conscious of and oblivious to the forces that shape their being and behaviour as leaders (Seddon, 1994, 1995). To suggest otherwise is to ignore the dialectic shaping the formation, reformation and transformation of practice; and the manner in which architectures of practice help and hinder the enactment of educational change.

Bourdieu's account of human activity in natural settings suggests that people act in neither purely rational nor purely impulsive ways. Rather, their social interactions are shaped both by individual consciousness and societal structures. Bridging dualities of agency and structure, discourse and action, is Bourdieu's concept of habitus, the dialectical relation that generates thinking and deeds. As Bourdieu (2000) commented, "One should not say that a historical event determined a behaviour but that it had this determining effect because a habitus capable of being affected by that event conferred that power upon it" (p. 149).

The presence in a field of at least one player whose habitus does not align with others in the field opens a window for questioning the doxa, or perceived natural order of the field. It is this contestation that gives rise to possibilities of change. While limited within highly regulated fields, the potential for transformation nonetheless exists and this often overlooked aspect of Bourdieu's work holds most hope for educational reformers. If, as Bourdieu suggests, the greatest shift is likely to occur within niches at the limits of a field, a focus on individuals whose habitus leads them to challenge education orthodoxies offers important insights into the dynamics of change leadership.

Leading can therefore be construed as a constructivist activity arising from ongoing engagement in, and interaction between, micro, meso and macro spheres of influence. Unlike a helix in which leadership DNA is fixed and outcomes predetermined, I contend that leading is better represented as a logarithmic spiral in which boundaries of influence between sociocultural, personal, institutional and national forces are permeable, and successive layers exponentially bigger in order to accommodate growth (see Figure 6, next page). Like the koru, the silver fern frond integral to Māori

art and lore, spirals symbolise perpetual motion between an unfurling of new understanding and recursion to different points of origin. Both inward and outward looking, they convey the manner in which life both changes and remains the same, in which structures are both structured and structuring, and habitus both fixed and fluid. This enables us to better visualise Bourdieu’s logic of practice and the interaction between habitus and fields.

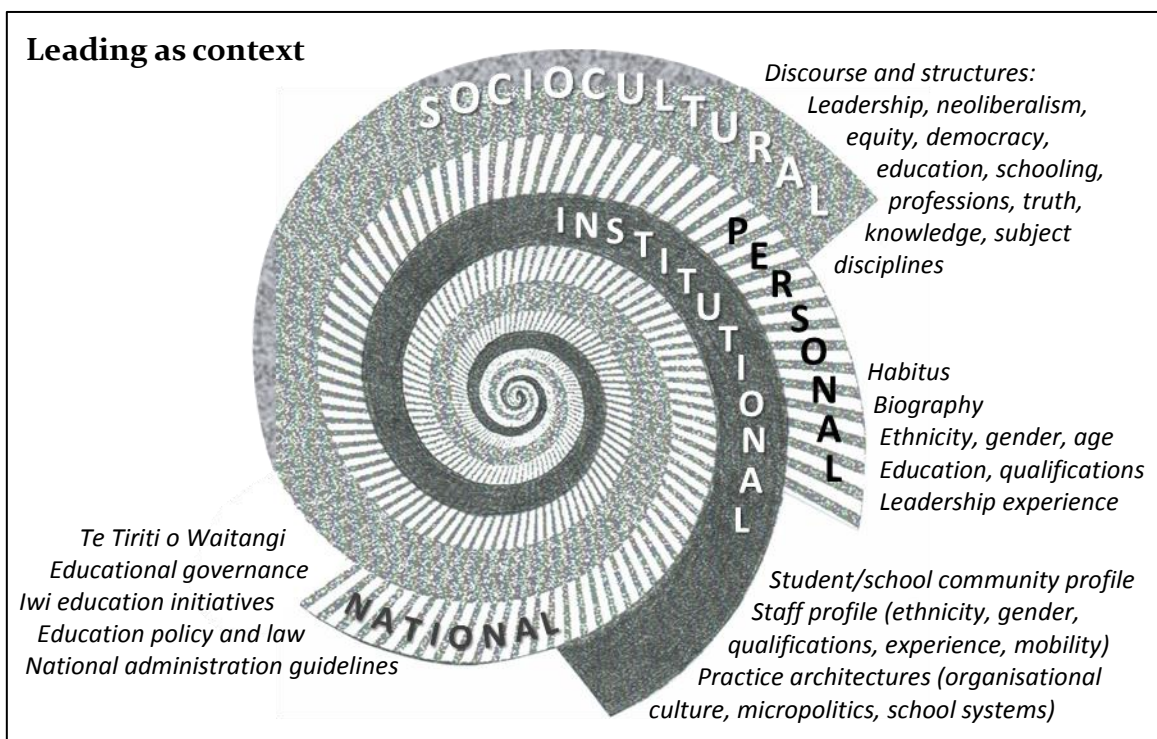


Figure 6: Leading as context

The ‘leading as context’ spiral shows that leaders are born into and conditioned by sociocultural discourse and structures that shape belief systems and frame notions of citizenship, education, schooling and profession. While being ‘othered’ culturally, socially, or economically, does not necessarily call a leader to an equity discourse, marginalisation combined with values instilled in childhood heightens awareness of injustice and strengthens commitment to ameliorating this. In the case narratives, we see how principles of egalitarianism and fairness frame the manner in which Peter interprets both actual and vicarious experience. We see how emancipatory zeal compels Keita to seek roads less travelled and

how each small step forward augments her sense of health and wellbeing.

We see schools as sites of institutional struggle in which actors seek to variously entrench and disrupt the status quo. We see how the pursuit of individual and collective interests leads members of the school community to acquire capital, form coalitions, exploit informal influence, and exercise positional power. We see how traditional hierarchies (leadership, curriculum, pastoral), structures (discrete disciplines, single cell classrooms, timetables), and notions of profession (autonomy, recognition, longevity) support ingrained cultural norms. And we see how determined leaders and colleagues chip away at hierarchies, structures and notions of profession in order to deprivatise and re-form practice in ways that better meet the needs of minoritised learners.

We see how leaders are both subjected to and subvert prevailing national discourse. While external accountabilities curtail the freedom that pure market ideology would allow, decentralisation of educational governance affords New Zealand principals a degree of autonomy. There are games to be played as principals committed to social justice mediate educational, social, political and economic imperatives within school bounds and seek “salvation within ... a marriage of convenience between dutiful compliance and intellectual subversion” (Macbeath, 2008, p. 147). These games include couching school charter and strategic plan documentation within narrow frames and furnishing basic data, all the while manoeuvring within specific school fields to develop school kaupapa, build local curriculum, pursue holistic assessment, and grow community.

We see how principals are able to align individual school policies and processes with an equity discourse, and hasten reculturing through the recruitment and appointment of teachers committed to desired school ethos. In all five case narratives, Peter, Olivia, Keita, Jim and Ross position their schools as Te Kotahitanga schools, making explicit their philosophical stance and long-term commitment to reform. Further, the rationale for defining a school kaupapa or way of doing things lies not in the delineation of competitive market edge but the establishment of a community of

learning in which culturally responsive practice becomes the norm. This highlights the importance of dialogue in establishing the philosophical underpinnings of outwardly observable actions (Horng et al., 2010).

We see that perceiving leading as context necessitates a move away from reductionist approaches to change towards holism and situated complexities of practice. Perceiving leading as context takes us beyond literature that itemises leader dispositions, behaviours and styles, beyond literature that prescribes rational change processes and strategies, towards practice perspectives that endeavour to capture and account for the situated and nuanced manner in which school principals enact educational reform. Extended case narratives, such as the five in this thesis, provide a window into experience that illuminates the embodied nature of change, the variant, invariant and shifting particularities of individual school fields, and the diverse ways in which principals respond to these.

We see the utility of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capitals, field, strategies and practice in helping discern patterns of interaction in the social world. We see that school leaders both shape and are shaped by the fields in which they work (Rowlands & Gale, 2017) and that, far from being uniform, patterns of interaction are plural and non-linear. And we see that praxis evolves in both deliberate and subliminal ways, hence Peter's emergent realisation that "you flavour the school and the school flavours you."

## **Conclusion**

In discussing the three significant contributions that this study makes to the field of educational leadership, I have established that extended narratives are necessary for us to understand the situated and nuanced manner in which principals lead educational reform. Situated in both historical and contemporary time, place and circumstance, they reveal particularity in the perception, interpretation and application of generic leadership and change principles. Further, extended narratives surface the monistic nature of leading and context, thereby exposing flaws in literature

that dichotomises the two.

The implications for practising and aspiring leaders, employers, researchers and policymakers arising from this thesis are fourfold: leadership narratives matter, personal biography is central rather than peripheral, emotional and micropolitical literacy is crucial, and professional support essential. In the concluding chapter, I elaborate on each of these implications, present recommendations for professional growth, consider the reach of this thesis, and suggest ways in which it might inform future research endeavours.





## CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSION

### Summary

The purpose of this thesis was to record and seek to understand five principals' experiences of leading Te Kotahitanga in Phase 5 secondary schools. The extended case narratives documenting this three year period of intentional educational reform demonstrate that leading change is a situated, complex and demanding endeavour, the intensity of which eludes much of the leadership and change literature.

The thesis further argues that Bourdieu's lens on practice as a temporal, embodied, discursive and social activity offers three important insights into the holism of change leadership. Firstly, leaders are embedded in context rather than detached observers of it. Secondly, they are both buffeted by and buffer situational factors that reinforce and undermine change initiatives. Thirdly, effective leadership of change requires more than the episteme (knowledge) and techne (rational strategies) consuming leadership and change texts; it demands a phronesis (practice wisdom) that can only be gained in the field.

While vicarious learning can never replace actual experience (Branson, 2010; Fullan, 2014), the research methodology adopted in this thesis meets Ribbins and Gronn's (2000) call for situated portrayals that offer rich insight into the perspectives that principals bring to their work. Moreover, dialogue over an extended period of reform reveals how these perspectives evolve and shift as principals respond to dynamics within and beyond the immediate school setting. Building on the metaphor of motion (Porter & McLaughlin, 2006) cited in the introduction to this thesis, a longitudinal dimension helps replace the 'snapshots' of isolated moments in time with 'movies' that connect a series of images to a coherent storyline. In movies, context is never tangential, neither an "afterthought" nor a "primary **object of interest**" (Porter & McLaughlin, 2006, p. 573, emphasis added) but integral and ever present.

## **Implications for school leader practice**

Perceiving leading as context raises important implications for the preparation, appointment, induction and reflexive practice of school leaders: personal biography is of central rather than peripheral importance, emotional and micropolitical literacy crucial, professional support imperative, and leadership narratives an essential means by which we come to know the realities of leading educational reform.

## **The lived life**

Accepting that a leader's biography is of central rather than peripheral concern means that attention to the personal and professional self is vital. Awareness of the events and discourses shaping individual habitus, and the centrality of interpretation in professional knowledge, development and discipline, requires critical reflection on the part of leaders.

Surfacing elements of habitus into the conscious realm requires us to question what we take for granted and have long since become oblivious to. There are three main ways in which disruption to customary knowing and being is precipitated: through displacement in foreign fields of practice (Bourdieu's experience in Algeria, Jim's movement from the primary to secondary sector); events that generate conflict as agents compete for field position within familiar fields of practice; and rigorous 'socioanalysis' (Bourdieu, 1990a). The latter requires disciplined interrogation of the sociocultural, affective and embodied dimensions of self, together with knowledge of the symbolic, structural and practice conditions of various fields. In part, this can be achieved through guided self-reflection (see Branson, 2010, for one useful model), however a human propensity for self-deception means that dialogue is a more powerful catalyst in revealing and critiquing what we think we know.

If employing boards of trustees are to appoint principals committed to and able to effect educational change within the school subfield, greater discernment will be required. Rather than a peremptory focus on educational philosophy and scrutiny of tasks completed or positions held,

appointing boards would be well advised to pay greater heed to who the leader is, their ways of knowing and relating, and the manner in which they have navigated internal micropolitics and structures in order to improve learning conditions and outcomes. This has implications for the entire appointment process, from the conceptualisation of person descriptions, to the contents of curriculum vitae, the process of interview, the focus of pre/post referee checks, and the nature of support provided to lay boards of trustees.

### **Emotional and micropolitical literacy**

This thesis highlights the importance of emotional and micropolitical literacy in galvanising support, maintaining momentum, and managing dissent. In particular, attention to power brokers within middle echelons appears key in building and sustaining a change coalition, yet research suggests that many school leaders lack the knowledge and skill to navigate divergent, emotionally charged groundswells of overt and covert resistance (Blase, 2005; Starr, 2011). The consequences of this are stark and, as participants in this study discovered to greater and lesser degrees, the change agent who is not politically skilled will fail (Buchanan & Badham, 2008).

Ross is not alone in struggling to get his “head around the discourse.” Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis’ (2016) synthesis of culturally responsive leadership literature, over a 25 year period, highlights as “tragic” a finding that while principals are central to social justice change, many are unable to “articulate meaningful discourses around diversity” (p. 1279). This makes the ability to confidently articulate, defend and counter discourses in unambiguous ways a critical component of leading and leadership preparation programmes.

Tackling inequity in student outcomes involves questioning educational doxa, discourses of blame (such as those outlined in the prologue to this thesis) and, in the case of Te Kotahitanga, what Khalifa et al. (2016) term race talk. This poses serious challenge to those who enjoy

privileged field positions and/or whose habitus is aligned with the status quo. Perceived attacks on the core of people's professional being and underlying values systems will inevitably generate emotive responses, however neutrally framed these may be. Anticipating and responding to this in ways that preserve the mana of all involved is a demanding undertaking, one that requires awareness of personal emotions and biases, and attunement to the feelings of others. Manglitz, Guy and Merriweather (2014) thus emphasise the importance of "emotive capacity" which enables leaders to "hold one's own emotional responses, while listening to others who are just as emotionally laden" (2014, p. 113). In addition to self-control, finely honed interpersonal skills are necessary for leaders to successfully confront silence, alleviate tension and anxiety, and address privilege.

The fact that practice wisdom can only be gained in the field does not negate the importance of theoretical knowledge and vicarious learning in sensitising leaders to micropolitical interactions and emotional selves. This makes the inclusion of this content, together with appropriate pedagogical strategies such as structured dialogue, autobiographical hermeneutic writing, and the examination of leaders' narratives vital components of leadership preparation programmes.

### **Leadership narratives matter**

Not only do rich, situated accounts illuminate particularities of people, events, time and place, from the perspective of those charged with leading educational reform, they enable practising and aspiring leaders to engage vicariously in the lived experience of colleagues, to gain a sense of how others lead change and to reflect on their own practice in light of this. As such, narratives "serve as a key for unlocking an oftentimes blocked door for making sense ... and a primary means for exploring the relationship between agency and structure" (Andrews, 2012, pp. 34-35). In the same way that the Te Kotahitanga student narratives of what it is to be Māori and marginalised struck an intense emotional chord that spurred teachers to

confront discourses of blame, reject deficit theorising and strive to build a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations, leadership narratives serve a similar learning function. They enliven the historical record, help surface subliminal ways of knowing and meaning making, awaken political consciousness and inform future change endeavours. This makes the creation of a narrative repository within the education field a worthy imperative. Later in this chapter, I identify ways in which these narratives might usefully be expanded.

### **Professional support**

Shifting from the hypothetical to practical realm, there is a clear need for professional support that assists principals to strategise and implement change processes, boosts intellectual and emotional wellbeing, and pays attention to the development of phronesis. This requires much more than episodic coaching in the mechanics of reform implementation or the techniques of mindfulness, useful though these exercises may be; it involves sustained commitment to critical dialogue within a longer term mentoring relationship.

There is considerable evidence to suggest that holistic approaches combining task related and psychosocial support buffer stress and reduce the likelihood of burnout (Beausaert et al., 2016; Boyatzis, Smith, & Blaize, 2006; Steward, 2014). Further, Reiss (2007) cites research showing that personalised learning of this nature represents the highest return on investment from both an individual and organisational perspective. Benefits include increased expertise, improved working relationships, reduced conflict, enhanced wellbeing and job satisfaction, all of which strengthen commitment and retention.

Deliberating with informed neutral others enables leaders to metacognitively explore the dilemmas, uncertainties and contingencies inherent in vexing practical problems, avoid “a monocular perspective and a single interpretation” (Eisner, 2002, p. 382), and maintain compassion for self. As Andrews (2012) comments, “There is something very fundamental

about validating one's own life experiences, regarding them as a legitimate source of knowledge, all the while recognising the inevitable limitations of what we know personally, and even what can be known" (p. 33).

In assisting leaders to surface habitus and respond to the particularities of practice, Branson (2010) suggests that competent mentors serve several important functions. As communicators, they assist leaders "to name what is unfolding around them and inside them"; as interpreters, they help leaders "make sense of patterns emerging among complex systems within the school and the leader's own involvement in these patterns"; and they model the socioanalytical habits of the "dedicated self-reflective professional" (p. 42). To these functions, we might add that of the provocateur whose skilful questioning and interlocution enables leaders to see beyond and critique the habitual explanations underpinning their theories of practice.

For mentoring to alleviate rather than intensify workload pressures, this learning relationship will need to be appropriately resourced within the school day rather than an adjunct to it. Otherwise, principals will likely concur with Jim that they are "too bloody busy" to deeply analyse their practice and focus instead on the daily grind. Professional mentoring will necessitate system wide consideration of principals' employment conditions, the potential expansion of senior leadership teams to enable realistic task distribution, and the recruitment of suitably qualified mentors.

Mentors will need to be conversant with change and executive coaching processes, attuned to the specifics of the school field, focused on each principal's diverse learning needs and eclectic in meeting these. In mentoring practice, eclecticism implies the ability to selectively apply a range of approaches, tools and techniques, rather than impose a one-size-fits-all model (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2011). This requires mentors to be fully present, to authentically partner with mentees as co-inquirers, and to embrace a high degree of ambiguity and uncertainty.

Not every school improvement initiative will challenge educational doxa and agents' field positions in the way Te Kotahitanga does. Many seek

to refine rather than reform existing pedagogies and school structures, and deliberately or unwittingly reify dominant discourses. Nonetheless, any change, however small, has the potential to undermine vested interests and intensify conflict. This makes micropolitical nous an essential attribute in any change endeavour, a consideration that school leaders, education reformers and policy makers would do well to pay heed.

### **Research reach**

Having outlined the practice implications of this thesis for the personal and professional growth, sustenance and longevity of school leaders, I now turn my attention to the research community. Rather than re-examine the limitations of my qualitative research methodology acknowledged in chapter three, I focus on ways in which a narrative repository might be augmented, the challenge that conducting longitudinal case study research in a performative higher education environment poses, and the reach of this thesis in terms of the knowledge generated.

### **Expanding the narrative repository**

If, as this thesis argues, narratives of lived experience matter, we quite simply need more of them. Not the illustrative snapshots interspersed in research reports, as was the case in chapter nine, but self-contained artefacts in their own right (chapters 4-8). Artefacts that reduce layers of separation between narrator and reader and the fog of successive analytical lenses. Artefacts that invite readers to see for themselves rather than being told how to interpret. Artefacts that confirm and counter, comfort and challenge, inform and inspire. Generating a rich narrative repository means prioritising these artefacts alongside other research methodologies and allocating research funding accordingly.

Given the inevitably partial and partisan perceptions of school principals charged with leading educational reform, another avenue for fruitful research lies in extending the narrative repository to include the experience of others involved (senior and middle leaders, teachers,



students, BOT representatives and so on). The generation of multiple narratives within the same field would not only broaden our understanding of change in particular settings but more clearly reveal the micropolitical interactions of invested agents.

### **Playing the research game**

Early in chapter nine, I contrasted positivist neoliberal research approaches with the major imperatives compelling qualitative researchers such as myself. There is no doubt that longitudinal case study research is a time consuming undertaking, the benefits of which come at some cost.

In higher education, research assessment exercises such as performance-based research funding (PBRF) frame the conditions of knowledge production, channelling intellectual attention and the focus, form, and reporting of research (Boston, Mischewski, & Smyth, 2005; Cupples & Pawson, 2012; Middleton, 2009). The neoliberal ‘publish or perish’ mantra prevalent in most western universities not only inflicts what Curtis and Matthewman (2005) term the “managerialist erosion” (p. 13) of professional control, but means many researchers feel “pressured to comply with Taylorist methodologies and production-line values” (Thwaites, 2011, para. 4).

Compounding an output focus is the expectation that academics generate external income. In education, this largely comprises contestable public research funding and requires researchers to meet rigid tender specifications. The role of universities as critic and conscience of society is thus constrained by politicians who reject inconvenient research (Edmonds, 2016; N. Jones & Nippert, 2016; Lubienski, 2008), cabinet ministers who declare that “advice we disagree with is bad advice; advice we agree with is good advice” (B. English, 2009), and organisations that seek to suppress counter perspectives. In such an environment, field spaces are hard fought and the research game often requires sacrifice of a narrative habitus. For those who resist, the hope of gradual field transformation outweighs material reward, however hope alone does not meet survival needs and

there are compromises to be made.

### **Theorising from case study?**

However tempting it might be to gingerly make an argument about both the particular circumstance and the universe (Walton, 1992), it is only from a greatly expanded narrative repository that any potential for broader conclusions might be realised. The focus of the case narratives in this study is on interpretive sense making and, as such, positivist approaches such as the identification of empirical regularities and inductive theory building and testing (Tsang, 2013; Welch et al., 2011) are incongruous to this study's aims.

Bourdieu's insistence that habitus, capital, fields, strategies and practice constituted thinking tools rather than theory adds further weight to this argument. In conversation with Wacquant (1989), he vehemently stated that his intention was never "to 'do theory' or to 'construct a theory' *per se* ... The thread that leads from one of my works to the next is the *logic of research*, which is in my eyes *inseparably* empirical and theoretical" (p. 50, italics in original). In Bourdieu's view, the analogous nature of research and theory meant his field research was idiographic rather than nomothetic, generalisations naturalistic (Stake, 1995) rather than scientific, and knowledge claims tentative rather than declarative. The same applies here.

### **Concluding statements**

In the epigraph to this thesis, Frame's (1966) protagonist wondered whether what lay in the 'room two inches behind the eyes' would ever be captured and named. By sharing their lived experience of leading change, Peter, Olivia, Jim, Keita and Ross have opened windows into those rooms, not just for themselves but for viewers who enter vicariously into their world. And, while dark corners and dimly lit contents might yet elude capture, Bourdieu's thinking tools offer important keys to the treasure that lies within.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix One: Letter of invitation

[Date]

[Name of principal and school]

Dear [principal]

[Salutation in te reo]

#### Invitation to participate in research

Throughout my secondary and tertiary teaching career, I have become increasingly aware of the importance of context in shaping educational leaders' thinking and practice. While 'context, context, context' appears to be the new mantra in educational leadership policy and research, closer inspection suggests that context is often used in dismissive terms to mask factors which are deemed to be of secondary interest.

As Principal, you will know that context is central to your leadership experience and crucial to the transformation of schooling. I am particularly interested in exploring how unique contexts shape your educational leadership thinking and practice over time, and how you shape the context in which you lead. I would like to work with you during the period of your school's involvement in the Te Kotahitanga learning contract and invite you to consider joining me in a series of conversations over the next 12-15 months.

This research will form the basis of my doctoral thesis; research which I hope will not only enrich the understanding of everyone directly involved, but also provide a source of inspiration for those who follow. Ideally, it will challenge policy makers to pay real rather than nominal attention to the diverse contexts in which principals lead, and invite academics to reconsider the content and pedagogy of leadership preparation programmes.

This research is being supervised by Professor Russell Bishop and Dr David Giles. David is a colleague in the Professional Studies Department in the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato. You already know Russell.



*My background*

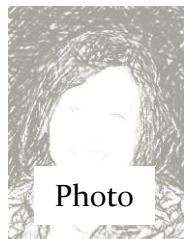
Prior to my appointment as senior lecturer at the University of Waikato in 2007, I taught for twenty two years in three secondary schools in the Manawatu, Horowhenua and Waikato. I have been a Head of Faculty, Dean, member of the senior leadership team and, most recently, Deputy Principal of Hamilton's Fraser High School from 2001-2007. I currently teach educational leadership papers at Masters' level and work with graduate students who are undertaking secondary teacher training. While I have not been a principal, I think I have some understanding of the challenges that leadership at this level involves, and I bring to this research both an empathetic and challenging ear.

I appreciate that the decision to participate in research must be a considered one. Please find enclosed an information sheet that outlines the research questions, your involvement, ethical considerations and my personal commitment to you.

If you are interested in participating in this research, and I sincerely hope that you are, I would appreciate you contacting me by email. At that point we can discuss the research further and establish a mutually convenient time for a first meeting.

Thank you for considering this invitation. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards



Michele Morrison

[contact details]

## **Appendix Two: Information sheet**

*This sheet contains information that will assist you in making an informed decision about your participation in this research. Topics covered include:*

- *Research questions,*
- *Research activities: duration and nature thereof,*
- *Your rights as participant,*
- *Ethical considerations: confidentiality, potential for harm, conflicts of interest, procedures for handling information and materials produced in the course of this research, complaints and disputes resolution,*
- *My personal commitment to you.*

*I welcome the opportunity to discuss any of these matters with you.*

*✍ ..... ✍*

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This research focuses on your experiences of principal leadership during a period in which your school is engaged in the Te Kotahitanga learning contract. I am interested in how you perceive your leadership context in general, and in the dynamic relationship between leadership and context over time.

More specifically, this study poses three broad research questions:

- How do principals describe their leadership context?
- What is the nature and significance of the relationship between context and principals' leadership thinking and practice over time?
- How does involvement in a specific educational innovation (Te Kotahitanga) impact upon context from the principal's perspective?

As you can see, I have a number of questions that I would like to explore with you. I'm also sure that other questions around context and leadership will be important to you, and that these can be included in our conversations together.

### **RESEARCH ACTIVITIES: DURATION AND NATURE THEREOF**

Over a period of 12-15 months, or until such time as they cease to be of benefit to you, I invite you to engage in a sequence of conversations with me. While I anticipate that it might be useful to meet two or three times a year, I will be guided by you regarding the frequency of communication and will make myself available accordingly. I would also welcome the opportunity to spend some time in your school, in order to gain a feel for your school context and to observe your daily leadership practice.

I anticipate that conversations will take two forms: formal semi-structured interviews of approximately 90 minutes, and informal conversations (either in

person or via telephone/email). With your permission, I would like to audiotape the former using a digital recorder, and make researcher field notes on the latter. Field observations in the school will be recorded in a notebook which I will keep with me at all times whilst in your school.

As the research progresses, you may also wish to comment on analysed data and emerging themes.

#### **YOUR RIGHTS AS PARTICIPANT**

The ball is very much in your court. The decision to participate in this research is yours alone. Should you decide to participate, you may, without explanation:

- i. decline to answer any questions at any time, and/or
- ii. withdraw any information provided at any time prior to the research findings chapter of the thesis being written, and/or
- iii. withdraw totally from the research study, at any time prior to the research findings chapter of the thesis being written. Once the thesis is completed, it will be in the public domain and it will no longer be possible to withdraw from the study.

You will have open access to your formal interview transcripts, field notes pertaining to my summaries of our informal conversations together, and the written leadership portrayal, copies of which will be provided. I accept that there might be occasions on which we will need to qualify information, and that you may wish to censor some of your responses (see ii. above). I undertake not to make any changes to transcripts/conversation field notes without your express knowledge and consent.

#### **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

##### ***i. Confidentiality***

At this point, 49 secondary schools (approximately 15% of New Zealand secondary schools) have been, or are currently involved in Te Kotahitanga. Add to this, the focus of this research on unique contexts, and the small national, regional and local professional networks in which we work, and the chances are that some New Zealand readers will be able to identify you. This makes anonymity impossible and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

It may be that you have no issue with your identity becoming known to readers and that you choose to be identified in this research by your Christian name. Conversely, you may wish to retain a degree of confidentiality and nominate a pseudonym.

I will avoid naming your current (and previous) school, and limit the use of geographic and demographic identifiers that would allow readers to establish

your current context with 100% certainty. Similarly, references to colleagues will be edited to avoid their direct identification.

### ***ii. Potential for harm***

All research poses potential benefits and risks. I hope that the opportunity to reflect on your leadership thinking and practice within unique contexts will be a welcome one for you. If you do not habitually record these reflections, I trust that the leadership portrayal that emerges from our conversations and that I commit to paper will serve as a record of your thinking during an important period of change leadership. I know that in your role as Principal, much of your thinking about leadership and context may already be in the public domain. In smaller communities in particular, it seems that there is little that Principals can keep private! However, it would be remiss of me not to alert you to the possibility that hitherto private thoughts may become known to colleagues, members of the community, and external bodies such as the Ministry of Education, Education Review Office, and news media. In addition, while deep reflection on leadership thinking and practice has the potential to be invigorating and generative, it also has the potential to be unsettling and may cause you some personal anxiety.

### ***iii. Conflicts of interest***

I acknowledge that my experiences as an educator and human being colour my perceptions and actions. Education is a relational endeavour and can never be free of bias. I will endeavour to make my own prejudices explicit and to declare my researcher subjectivity. To the best of my knowledge, I have no unfair professional or personal advantage, nor any relationships that are likely to jeopardise this research endeavour.

Should either of us become aware of a potential or perceived conflict of interest, it is important that this is declared immediately and that my supervisors are informed. If a simple ethical solution cannot be found, a member of the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee will be asked for advice. The wellbeing of any individual takes precedence over the research.

With regard to my supervisors, you will be well aware that Russell Bishop directs the Te Kotahitanga project. In my opinion, this PhD research is compatible with and complementary to the aims of Te Kotahitanga. However, should the relationship between the two pose any concerns for you at any stage, it may be important to know that David Giles is independent of Te Kotahitanga.

#### ***iv. Procedures for handling information and materials produced in the course of this research***

##### **Security**

The security of research data and personal information is of critical importance, both in terms of maintaining confidentiality and in protecting, against loss, the valuable time invested in research conversations.

Electronic data (digital interview recordings, interview transcripts and pdf scans of field notes) will be stored on my work computer, with back-up copies on my portable drive and/or home computer. Access will be, in all instances, password protected. When not on my person, field notes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office, and a photocopy kept in my locked filing cabinet at home.

In accordance with University's *Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations* (2008), all non-identifying data (transcripts, field notes) used for my doctoral thesis and published research will be archived indefinitely. Consent forms containing your personal information will be securely stored in a place separate to the research data. These will be kept for five years following the conclusion of this research and thereafter be destroyed.

##### **Access to information**

As the researcher, I will have sole access to the personal information on your consent form.

Access to your raw data (interviews, conversations, email communications, feedback on draft/final portrayals and initial data analysis) will generally be limited to you and me, although either supervisor may wish to audit aspects of the data analysis process.

You will receive copies of interview transcripts, conversation notes, draft and final versions of the written leadership portrayal, and a thesis abstract which includes a link to the Australasian Digital Thesis database that hosts all completed theses.

##### **Ownership of data or materials produced**

Your story belongs to you. This includes responses to questions in formal semi-structured interviews, the comments you make in informal conversations, and your reflections on the data as it is analysed. My field observations, research findings, resultant thesis and any subsequent sole-authored scholarly publications and presentations belong to me.

##### **Copyright**

This research will conform to the University of Waikato copyright guidelines (2008), a copy of which can be located on the University of Waikato website

[http://www.waikato.ac.nz/copyright/uow\\_copyright\\_guidelines.shtml](http://www.waikato.ac.nz/copyright/uow_copyright_guidelines.shtml).

Participant stories remain the copyright of each participant. The copyright of the doctoral thesis, sole-authored scholarly publications and presentations belongs to the researcher.

#### **v. Procedure for resolution of disputes**

This research is bound by the *Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations* (2008), a copy of which can be located on the University of Waikato website

<http://calendar.waikato.ac.nz/assessment/ethicalConduct.html>, and approved by the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee.

Should I transgress these regulations or my personal commitment to you in any way, you may wish to contact my supervisors directly and inform them of the circumstances giving rise to your concerns. They will negotiate a process for mediation and if this is not completed to your satisfaction, you may wish to pursue the matter by way of formal complaint (see *Section 24.* of the abovementioned regulations).

#### **MY PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO YOU**

I know that your decision to participate in this research will involve personal sacrifice, primarily in terms of the time required to engage in research conversations with me. The opportunity to work with you is a privilege that I will respect at all times. I will honour and suitably acknowledge your contribution to this research study, keep you fully informed, and be available throughout the duration of this research.

#### **SUPERVISORS' CONTACT INFORMATION**

Professor Russell Bishop  
[contact details]

Dr David Giles  
[contact details]

I hope this information sheet will have addressed any questions that you may have about this research. If not, let's talk!

Kind regards

**Michele Morrison**

*Mā te rongo, ka mōhio; Mā te mōhio, ka mārama; Mā te mārama, ka mātau;  
Mā te mātau, ka ora.*

*Through resonance comes cognisance; through cognisance comes understanding; through understanding comes knowledge; through knowledge comes life and well-being.*

### **Appendix Three: Participant consent form**

**Research Project Title:**

*Leading in context: Principals' experiences of leadership and context during periods of intentional educational change*

**Researcher:** Michele Morrison

.....

I have been fully informed as to the purpose, potential ethical concerns and processes involved in this research study and freely consent to participate.

My participation is entirely voluntary and I understand that any concerns or queries I may have regarding this study are able to be addressed at any stage of the research process.

I have the right to determine both the extent of my participation and the degree of confidentiality required to ensure this.

I am aware that anonymity is impossible and that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

I understand that this is a longitudinal study and that over a period of 12-15 months, or until such time as they cease to be of benefit to me, I agree to participate in 3-4 confidential semi-structured interviews of up to one and a half hours in duration and communicate on an informal basis with the researcher. I am aware that my responses to interview questions will be recorded and transcribed, and that the researcher will keep field notes of our informal conversations together. I understand that the researcher would like to spend some time in the school and that her observations will most likely include my leadership practice. This is something that I will negotiate with her.

I will receive copies of formal interview transcripts, to the field notes pertaining to the researcher's summaries of our informal conversations together, and to draft and final copies of the written leadership portrayal. I will have the opportunity to amend and make comment on this research data, before formally releasing it to the researcher for her use in writing her doctoral thesis and any subsequent scholarly publications/presentations.

I may choose to withdraw any information provided throughout the research process and to withdraw fully from the study at any time up until two weeks after the researcher informs me that she intends to begin writing the findings chapter of her doctoral thesis. After this time, I understand it will no longer be possible for me to withdraw my consent.

Should I choose to withdraw from the study, I will inform the researcher of

my intention in writing. Following receipt of this, she will destroy all records pertaining to me.

I understand that in accordance with Section 12 of the University of Waikato's *Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations* (2008), all non-identifying research data used by the researcher in the writing of her doctoral thesis and any subsequent scholarly publications/presentations will be archived indefinitely. Records containing my personal information (name, address and contact details) will remain confidential for a period of five years and thereafter be destroyed.

I understand that I will retain ownership of the raw data recorded and transcribed. At the conclusion of this research study, I will receive an abstract and electronic link to the completed thesis. Michele will also send me abstracts and links to subsequent publications and presentations.

I am aware that any time during the research process I have the right to express my concerns to the researcher and/or her supervisors and have been provided with all relevant contact details. If I do not receive a satisfactory resolution, I may make a formal complaint to the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Waikato as described in Section 24 of the *Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations* (2008).

In the thesis and any subsequent scholarly publications or presentations, I wish to be referred to:

by my Christian name

by my nominated pseudonym .....

*Printed Name:* ..... *Signature:* .....

*Address:* .....

.....

*Phone Number:* ..... *Email:* .....

*Date:* .....

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#### SUPERVISORS' CONTACT INFORMATION

Professor Russell Bishop  
[contact details]

Dr David Giles  
[contact details]