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AN APPRECIATIVE VIEW OF YEAR 9 STUDENT LEADERSHIP IN A NEW ZEALAND SECONDARY SCHOOL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Engaging students in relevant and meaningful leadership activities in schools can prove to be a challenging task. Understanding the leadership experiences and skills that students have is an important beginning step to understanding how schools can best serve their needs. This thesis shares the details of a qualitative research project, which explored year 9 students' perspectives and experiences of leadership. The study engaged a strengths-based approach to learning and, amongst other things, encouraged students to reflect upon past experiences of leadership. Central to the research design were the voices of the students as they examined these past experiences to find out what factors made leadership enjoyable, meaningful and useful to them.

The findings indicated the significant difference in opportunities students were provided in year 8 (intermediate school) as compared with year 9 (secondary school). Coming from environments where students most often had significant leadership opportunities, upon entering high school students perceived few opportunities for leadership. Students shared their views about ways they could contribute to and be involved in leadership at secondary school and suggested changes that needed to occur for this to happen. The findings also highlighted the powerful influence of the school and family on students' leadership understandings and demonstrated that leadership development for young people should not be something schools 'do' to them but something that encourages them to recognise their existing skills and future potential.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although mine is the only name on this thesis, the writing of it has been a collaborative process and should have the names of many. I have learnt that the way I learn best is through conversations *with* people, which in itself, reflects my passion for researching the voice of young people. Collaboratively my own ideas have come to life through conversations and experiences with these people.

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FIGURES

Figure 1. Adapted ‘4D’ model of the four stages of appreciative inquiry. From *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook: For leaders of change*, by D.L. Cooperrider, D. Whitney and J.M. Stavros, 2008, Brunswick, OH: Crown Custom Publishing. Reprinted with permission……2

Figure 2. Model of AI showing the ‘4D’ Cycle. From *Appreciative inquiry handbook: For leaders of change* (p. 5), by D.L. Cooperrider, D. Whitney, & J.M. Stavros, 2008, Brunswick, OH: Crown Custom Publishing. Reprinted with permission……42

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to this research

This study is the culmination of a journey for me; a journey of discovery and inquiry that has led to new knowledge and change. The transformative effects of this journey far out-weigh my initial expectations…

Discovery of 'what gives life'

This journey began five years ago when I embarked on a pathway to further my professional development at the University of Waikato. I stepped into what Senge (2012) calls a 'learning organisation'. This was within an Educational Leadership classroom. Within this learning space I experienced what it was like to be engaged with people who were passionate about making a difference as educational leaders – leaders from quite different contexts to my own. These people had complex understandings of leadership from their contexts and openly shared these through conversations. We were encouraged to explore each other's communities and contexts through 'chewing', 'connecting' and 'identifying metaphors' that enhanced our thoughts and feelings.

As we stepped outside our own organisations to explore each other's contexts, our eyes were opened to seeing a new way of 'be'ing in an organisation. This helped to shape our understanding of what it was that 'gave life' to our organisations. We had to reflect on questions asking ourselves "When we are at our best, what makes work exciting, interesting, invigorating, motivating and productive?" The term 'systems thinking' became part of our discussions as we began to see the importance of looking at our organisations as living systems made up of many interrelated and interacting parts (Nixon, 2006; Senge, 1990). We were the 'living parts' and the 'life' of our contexts. The way the parts connected

within our contexts shaped the culture of our learning organisation and influenced the shared achievement of our organisations. We were learning to see the world from an appreciative inquiry perspective. We were learning to appreciate the best of what is and to shape an effective future based on our "personal imaginative and moral purposes" (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008, p. 4).

An appreciative inquiry methodology was used to explore our contexts and moments of best leadership practice. The inquiry was based on a model best explained by Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) that used a 4-D cycle of 'discovery', 'dream', 'design' and 'destiny'. They clarify each stage as:

Discovery

Uncovering the best of what has been and what is – *appreciating*

Dream

What might be in the future – *envisioning*

Design

What should be the ideal – *co-constructing*

Destiny

How to empower, learn and adjust, improvise – *sustaining*

Figure 1. Adapted '4D' model of the four stages of appreciative inquiry. From *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook: For leaders of change*, by D.L. Cooperrider, D. Whitney and J.M. Stavros, 2008.

Dreaming of 'what might be possible'

My own personal leadership perspectives and understandings were developing through conversations, relationships and connections. I was looking for opportunities of 'what might be possible' while working with young people in the role of educational leader. I was also coming to realise my own strengths through shared personal stories. Common themes or "life-giving forces" were identified from these stories that led to the development of a number of, what Watkins and Mohr (2001) describe

as, “provocative propositions” (p. 117). The following set of positive affirmation statements were co-constructed with my lecturers from the analysis. They led to the following statements being created:

- I am sensitive to being in my ‘learners’ contexts and genuinely concerned for their wellbeing. I encourage shifting the ‘power’ dynamic to ‘empower’
- I create enabling environments that embody the valuing of others
- I enable learning in contexts that evolve with the learners
- I am constantly designing activities and environments that engage and connect others to the task at hand to encourage openness to learning
- I empower others by believing in their ability to read and feel ‘how they are’ within the learning context, to feel comfortable contributing their voice to learning.

Designing and determining the ideal

Having these powerful themes identified through an appreciative inquiry motivated me to find innovative ways to bring these to life on a daily basis. The appreciative inquiry as an intervention was an empowering and positive way of bringing the best of previous experiences into the ‘now’. It shifted my thinking, heightened my sense of inquiry and made me start taking steps towards new possibilities of working in leadership with young people.

Destiny and creating ‘what will be’

And so began another stage of my journey as I shifted my focus to how could I engage with schools in an appreciative process and bring the best of young people forward into their current contexts. In 2012 I had the opportunity to work with Dr Rachel McNae at the University of Waikato to design and implement a model of appreciative inquiry (AI) with year 13 students for their leadership development. This model involved the students reflecting on positive leadership experiences and on the strengths they have and how these can be acknowledged as key themes

for further leadership development. Using an appreciative inquiry model to gain an understanding of students' perceptions of leadership enabled student voice to play a key role in defining the process of the project. In the pilot study interviews were used to engage student voice and help create an environment that enabled the students to share and reflect on their perceptions of leadership and then co-construct future actions to enhance their leadership. The findings from this pilot study highlighted the importance of engaging students' voices in leadership development and showed that the strengths-based appreciative inquiry model provided an effective model for their leadership development. The student-centred AI approach used in the previous 2012 pilot helped inform and provide a potential framework for this research.

The voyage of discovery relies on the ways in which we view the world. I have travelled many paths to get to this story and have begun to see leadership learning with new perspectives. My life has been enriched and filled with discovery and it all started with inquiry – appreciative inquiry. As Cooperrider (2008) says, "…the most important thing we do as leaders and consultants is inquiry…the seeds of change are implicit in the very first questions we ask. Inquiry is intervention" (p. 103).

The focus of this research

My research interest for this study was exploring how appreciative inquiry could be used in the context of youth leadership development. I was also interested in exploring different ways that leadership learning opportunities could be created for youth. My prior experience in this area comes from 12 years employment in a community not-for-profit training provider where my key role was to develop and facilitate educational training programmes for primary and secondary school students in the Waikato region in New Zealand. Most recently my focus was primarily on student leadership development. Through this work I had the opportunity to see first-hand the training schools provided for developing the leadership of young people, either as part of curriculum or through extracurricular means. It became obvious that many schools expected a lot of young people as leaders

within their communities and yet gave very little support for their students' leadership development and learning, other than 'on the job learn as you go' experiences.

These experiences in schools not only heightened my awareness of gaps in leadership development for youth but also raised questions about why students were not often given the opportunity to have a voice in what or how they could contribute to leading at school and in their communities. This, along with my passion for working with youth, became drivers for me to investigate some different ways of preparing student leaders.

I was particularly interested in year 9 students who are new to the secondary school environment. These students had spent their previous two years (year 7 and 8 respectively) at intermediate schools that provided education for students aged 10 – 13 years. The intermediate schools provided opportunities for a range of learning situations that included leadership development. On entering year 9 the students have a lot to offer to leadership roles but are often not included in the big picture of leadership or given opportunities for further leadership development.

Within the vast amount of writing on leadership theory and leadership development there is a noticeable absence of theory and literature on youth leadership (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007; MacNeil, 2006; McNae, 2011). Literature in scholarly publications on educational leadership discusses adult leaders and their practices and development with minimal reference to the development of young people as leaders or any reference to youth perceptions of what leadership means to them. Some exceptions to this include the work in youth leadership research of Archard (2013), Bolstad (2011), Dempster (2011), Fielding (2004), McNae (2011), McNae and Mackay (2013) and Mitra (2008).

Klau (2006) reports that a number of studies indicate a disjuncture between what is being taught to youth about leadership and what they actually need to lead in their contexts. The literature also suggests youth leadership development programmes are often structured from adult

leadership perspectives where leadership is based on the observation and adoption of leadership qualities of previous 'great leaders' (Gosling, Jones, Sutherland & Dijkstra, 2012). When young people *are* addressed in leadership literature, it is often with the assumption that they are being up skilled for leadership in the future.

To date however there is still a dearth of literature on specific leadership development for young people and in particular a lack of evidence of leadership from a young person's point of view (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007). As adults, we may think we remember what it was like to be a teenager, however chances are these will be what we now see through adult eyes. Can adults 'interpret' what and how young people make sense of their world? (Tellet-Royce, 2008). For these reasons as well as others we really need to *listen* to young people to understand what is affecting their lives.

This thesis shares the findings of a qualitative research project, which explored a group of year 9 students perspectives and experiences of leadership. The research engaged a strengths-based appreciative inquiry approach to learning and, amongst other things encouraged students to reflect upon past experiences of leadership. I believed that with a better understanding of student leadership from their perspective, it would be possible to proceed from a more informed position towards the co-construction and implementation of a collaborative strengths-based approach to further the leadership development of year 9 students.

The research questions used to investigate year 9 leadership development and guide this research were:

- What are year 9 students' perceptions and experiences of leadership and what influences these understandings or opportunities to practise leadership?
- What might an appreciative inquiry model that aims to develop leadership for year 9 students look like and how might this assist in developing their leadership understandings and practices?

- What is the role and significance of student voice in this inquiry?

The structure of this thesis

The previous chapter provided information about myself as the researcher and explained my interest in student leadership.

The following chapter reports on literature that is relevant to this study. Highlighted in this section are some of the complexities and challenges of defining leadership within educational contexts, in particular youth leadership. The final part of the review will highlight and critique findings from studies that relate to research on the processes of student participation in the development of youth leadership programmes in schools.

Chapter three explains my theoretical positioning and includes discussions on the rationale for the research approach, an overview of the theoretical framework, research design and the methods used for data collection and analysis. This chapter situates appreciative inquiry as a positive youth development framework within the broad area of strength-based youth leadership development.

Research findings pertaining to the leadership perceptions and experiences of the participants are shared in chapter four. The findings are a synthesis of the data collected from the ten year 9 secondary school participants; from qualitative semi-structured interviews, focus group sessions, artefacts from leadership workshops, field notes from researcher observations and reflective journaling. It also reports on how the appreciative inquiry model supported the young people in bringing their leadership perspectives across the gap from intermediate school into the secondary school context.

In chapter five themes that materialised during the AI process are discussed while taking into consideration the existing literature on youth leadership development strategies. Also reported on are ideas relating

specifically to how the AI process was used as a positive youth development framework.

The final chapter draws the thesis to a close with an outline of the limitations of this research. Also highlighted are implications from this study with comments on possible areas for further research in youth leadership development.

The next chapter examines the literature on leadership, in particular youth leadership. It explores what is currently happening globally in support of youth leadership development.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter examines literature related to leadership and youth leadership development. The purpose of this research was to investigate and explore year 9 students' perceptions and experiences of leadership in a New Zealand secondary school. This research was framed on a model of appreciative inquiry that aimed to develop leadership with year 9 students. What was important in this study was to explore the role that this model might have in developing leadership amongst this group of students. What was also important was the focus on student voice that underpinned this model and played an instrumental part in the design of a strengths-based approach to leadership development with youth.

Structure of this chapter

This literature review is separated into three sections, the first of which examines key literature related to leadership in general. Highlighted in this section are some of the complexities and challenges of defining leadership within educational contexts.

The second part of the review examines literature on youth leadership and the development of youth leaders in educational contexts, in particular within New Zealand secondary schools. A key focus of this section is traditional and contemporary approaches to youth leadership development. It also acknowledges some of the challenges facing educational professionals to transform systems currently offered at schools and better address youth leadership development.

The final section of this review will present findings from research that relates to the processes of student participation in the development of youth leadership programmes in schools. It synthesises the literature on engaging youth in meaningful opportunities in schools and acknowledges

the importance of students' voice and their perspectives of leadership. It will also discuss the effects of positive youth-adult relationships that inform and support student leadership development in secondary schools. With the limited amount of literature available on New Zealand secondary school contexts, this section includes international literature on leadership studies to give a greater sample of youth leadership development in secondary school contexts.

Conceptualizing leadership

"Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth" (Burns, 1978, p. 2). Leadership is a popular but also complex concept of study drawing from a broad range of disciplines. As Burns indicates there is a vast array of literature that explains leadership but not a single definition that encapsulates exactly what it is. Scholars, researchers and organisational leaders recognise leadership as a critical factor in the success of many organisations – from formal to informal, business to public, profit to non-profit (Bryman, Collinson, Grint, Jackson & Uhl-Bien, 2011).

Leadership literature examined for this review showed a journey from a conceptualisation of leadership based on traits and characteristics of singular successful leaders in the early 1900's through to leadership based on the behaviours and relationships of leaders and followers (MacNeil, 2006). Traditionally, the most popular theories were known as "great-man" or trait theories and emphasis was on inherent qualities or the position of an individual (Bass, 1981; Bennis, 1959; Burns, 1978; Rost, 1993; Yukl, 1981).

An underlying assumption of these earlier theories was that leaders were born with these qualities rather than educated into leadership roles. These traditional theories were located within an "industrial" paradigm of leadership and were orientated to organisations being characterised by hierarchy and impersonal relationships (Rost, 1993). Trait theories promoted that personality alone guaranteed effective leadership. This idea

was challenged by a number of researchers in the latter part of the twentieth century (Bass, 1981; Rost, 1993; Stogdill, 1974). Problems they identified with the trait theories of leadership was the difficulty in getting an overall agreement on what the essential traits needed for leading were and being able to measure and define specific traits. In his reviews of numerous studies on traits focused leadership, Stogdill (1974) uncovered many inconsistencies in the theories and he proposed that situational factors also influenced leadership.

Despite a vast number of studies producing theories and approaches to leadership the term *leadership* remains difficult to define. Earlier leadership scholars such as Bass (1981), Bennis and Nanus (1985) and Stogdill (1974) analysed empirical data from many studies of leadership and all concluded that a single conceptual understanding of leadership had not been reached. They believed too much focus had been placed on observing the characteristics and personalities of *leaders* without a clear explanation of the essence of *leadership* itself. This uncertainty was highlighted in the work of Burns (1978), who stated: "We know all too much about our leaders, we know far too little about leadership. We fail to grasp the essence of leadership that is relevant to the modern age" (p. 1). The work of James MacGregor Burns (1978) had significantly influenced leadership understanding at this time and explained leadership as either *transactional* with an exchange of tangible rewards between the leaders and those being led, or *transformational* with a focus on leadership that appreciated and valued people in the leadership relationship.

As leadership research continued, new theories emerged. Towards the end of the 20th Century a number of theories evolved that shifted the focus from individual traits of great leaders towards viewing leadership behaviour as an influence over others in certain situations (Yukl, 2010). Scholars discovered that leader behaviours were not the only determinants of effective leadership. Practitioners and researchers reframed definitions of what leadership was and new ways of thinking emerged that included looking at leadership in context. These new

theories were part of a *post-industrial* paradigm approach to leadership where the focus shifted from the individual to the group or organisation (Kouzes & Posner, 2002; MacNeil, 2006; Swaffield & MacBeath, 2009; Yukl, 2010).

Swaffield and MacBeath (2009) posit that leadership is viewed as "…activity, both individual and shared, influencing and serving others, taking the initiative and making decisions for the greater good, whilst modelling learning and being sensitive to context" (p. 38). This supports the notion of leadership being able to be shaped by people and situations to suit the environment or organisation; it is not 'one size fits all'. Robinson (2009) contends there is not a 'single' model within this new education paradigm that will suit all contexts, but that it needs to be personalised to suit each school community.

Social researchers shifted the discourse about leadership from a focus on individual 'heroic' leaders to a view that is more inclusive and about relational leadership and more appropriate for educational settings (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Viewing leadership as a relational construct helped create a contemporary understanding of the complex nature of leadership and led to the introduction of a post-industrial construct that acknowledged the diversity in organisational structures and activities. The construct changed the thinking about leadership being a linear process to one that Rost and Barker (2000) describe as "a set of complex interrelationships" (p. 10). Encompassed in this new understanding were phenomena of leader, follower and the context where relationships between them are formed (MacNeil, 2006; Rost & Barker, 2000), and the establishment of language that exudes relational qualities such as enabling and empowering others to act (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

This shift to a *post-industrial* paradigm of leadership challenged those working in leadership development to rethink how leadership might be taught to incorporate more democratic practices. In particular it raised the question of how it might be taught to people that may have been marginalised in the past (for example women, minority ethic groups, youth

and children) by the traditional theories based within the industrial paradigm of leadership (Archard, 2013; Bishop, 2011; MacNeil, 2006; McNae, 2011).

Defining leadership for this research

This research acknowledges the complex nature of leadership and how traditional components for defining leadership are still drawn on to inform practice and development approaches. However this research adopts the view of leadership shared by Harris and Lambert (2003) as being about

> …learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively. It involves opportunities to surface mediate perceptions, values, beliefs, information and assumptions through continuing conversations. It means generating ideas together, to seek to reflect upon and make sense in the light of shared beliefs and new information…(p. 3).

This view fits well with the work of McGregor (2007) who promotes the notion that youth leadership development should be a process that focuses on relationships rather than on the role and hierarchical position of a single leader.

Defining Youth Leadership

The focus of this research was to gain an understanding of youth perspectives of leadership in New Zealand secondary school contexts. As indicated in the previous section there is difficulty in defining leadership and the same can be said about defining 'youth' leadership. This section examines literature on youth leadership within secondary school contexts and highlights the current views, theories and complexities related to the development of youth leaders.

Although the word 'youth' is frequently used synonymously with 'adolescent', 'teenager' or 'young person', youth are often referred to by adults as young people between childhood and adulthood. For clarity this research draws on the definition provided by the Ministry of Youth

Development (MYD) where youth is defined as "…young people, aged between 12 and 24 years old" (MYD, 2002, p. 7). The youth included in this research were year 9 students, aged 13 – 14 years old, from New Zealand secondary schools. This 'between' period of time for these young people is viewed by some researchers, for example Dempster and Lizzio (2007) and Mitra (2008), as an interesting and challenging period of social, cognitive and physical development. A significant part of this 'between' period of time is spent in the school context where they experience complexities described by Rubin and Silva (2003), as: "richly interwoven webs of friendship and romance, the heated pulls of emerging racial, ethnic and social identities, the demands and expectations of teachers and parents, and the constructions of academic competence" (p. 1).

Within this very complex environment youth face a mosaic of choices and decisions as they prepare for their future. Significant changes to the diversity of youth culture in the 21st century have placed new expectations on schools to review how they best prepare students to contribute positively to society (Bolstad, Gilbert, McDowall, Bull, Boyd & Hipkins, 2012; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Gerver, 2010).

Within the vast amount of writing on leadership theory and leadership development there is a noticeable absence of theory and literature on youth leadership (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007; MacNeil, 2006; McNae, 2011). As highlighted earlier the literature in scholarly publications on educational leadership discusses adult leaders and their practices and development with minimal reference to the development of young people as leaders or any reference to youth perceptions of leadership. From within the small pool of literature available on youth leadership development the research shows a disjuncture between what is being taught to youth about leadership and what they actually need to lead in their contexts (Klau, 2006). Youth leadership development programs tend to fall back on what adult leaders believe leadership should be. This is often based on observing and adopting leadership qualities of previous great leaders (Gosling, Jones, Sutherland & Dijkstra, 2012).

When young people *are* addressed in leadership literature, it is often with the assumption that they are being up skilled for leadership in the future. Gardner (1990) and O'Connell (1994), in their work on youth leadership development, discuss the preparation of youth now to lead later, presumably in adult life. The historical view of youth leadership development as a way of preparing young people for future roles as adults and or leaders was most commonly acknowledged and practiced in families, places of worship, clubs and other social organisations (Libby, Sedonaen & Bliss, 2006). Although these opportunities were not often labelled as leadership development specifically, they provided life skills preparation, development of personal character and contributed to building positive relationships in community groups. This type of youth leadership development was similar to what Libby et al. (2006) called an 'inside approach' and occurred within formal institutions or social mainstream organisations (p. 16). Van Linden et al. (1998) assert that youth lead daily in many ways such as volunteering, working in part time jobs and being involved in teams and organisations. However often youth see this as part of their personal development and preparation for life but not as leadership development (Libby et al. 2006; Kress, 2006; van Linden et al, 1998).

Youth Leadership Development

Dempster's (2011) special edition of the *Leading and Managing Journal* of the Australian Council for Educational Leaders was founded on the premise that little attention had been paid to youth and youth leadership development in the area of education. His work with Stevens and Keefe (2011) in an extensive literature review highlighted the fact that youth development was continually aimed at a deficit model and failed to see the strength of young people. Their work also identified that youth do not appear in much of the literature on leadership development but, when they do, they are often housed in programmes to sort out problems and change negative attitudes. MacNeil (2006) talks about this negative view of youth as 'adultism' or 'ageism' and states that the challenge for those developing youth leadership programmes is to view youth in a positive stage of life

development – not to be limited by our 'adult' views and understandings of what leadership is.

The literature also suggested that, traditionally, students were not given many opportunities to demonstrate leadership in schools. When they were given opportunities, as illustrated in the findings of MacBeath (2006) and Dempster, Stevens and Keeffe (2011), these were void of student voice. These authors concluded that, in most studies on youth leadership, it is the adult voice that dominates and that the studies are commonly for rather than with young people. Much of the recent literature on youth leadership development (examples such as the work of Bishop, 2011; Bolstad, 2011; Cook-Sather, 2002; McNae, 2011) question the assumption that using adult constructs and concepts of leadership is the best way to teach youth leadership.

In New Zealand, over the past decade, a number of key policy documents in education have been created to address the need for more engagement of youth in decision-making. One example of these is the Ministry of Youth Development's (2002) *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa.* This led to a number of regional youth advisory groups being established to support youth development programmes around New Zealand. A review of these programmes - *Structured Youth Development Programmes: A Review of Evidence* (2009), was undertaken by the MYD and highlighted the positive impacts on youth from effective youth development programmes. Knowledge on what works well has been generated. A further recommendation from the report is the necessity for programmes to cater for a diverse range of needs by youth; that a 'one size fits all' approach will never effectively work for all youth.

The revised New Zealand Curriculum document (Ministry of Education, 2007) is another strategy in response to change needed for positive youth development in schools. Introduced in 2007, its intention was to provide a foundation policy for teaching, learning and assessment for all students in New Zealand schools. The directions for learning were guided by a vision to develop young people into "confident, connected, actively involved,

lifelong learners" (p. 7). The framework of the curriculum identifies a number of principles based on the premise that the individual student is at the centre of all teaching and learning interactions. These principles outline what is important and desirable in school curriculum and underpin decision making with regard to "engaging and challenging students" and providing a curriculum that is "forward-looking and inclusive, and affirms New Zealand's unique identity" (p. 9). The curriculum encourages students to look to the future by exploring significant future-focused issues as sustainability, citizenship, enterprise, and globalisation. The challenge for educators is to provide opportunities to apply these skills to practice, to assist students to make the connection between youth development and youth leadership.

It is evident that schools are key sites for youth development given the large volume of hour's young people spend in these educational institutions. Alongside the New Zealand curriculum vision mentioned earlier, Heifetz (2006) an international expert on leadership at a global level, cites a similar vision for students to be "committed, empowered, effective and engaged citizens both willing and able to make a positive difference in their communities" (p. 2). School policies and curriculum documents acknowledge this as central to youth development and often include the notion of leadership development and citizenship as part of the documentation.

Through their work with 4-H's youth-in-governance programmes in the United States, MacNeil and McClean (2006) argue that youth leadership is "learning leadership by doing leadership" (p. 99). They posit that learning leadership happens experientially through being given opportunities to try different approaches in their current contexts. These authors use the term 'youth-in-governance' to talk about leadership development where youth are exercising leadership now, not learning about it to do in the future. Similarly, MacBeath (2006) concludes that leadership development of young people is something that needs to be learned through active participation in opportunities and real situations. These beliefs clearly

promote the idea that students learn by doing. They learn leadership by engaging in real experiences that require them to share their voice, make decisions and exercise leadership.

An increasing number of studies on youth leadership are challenging the traditional ways of developing young people's leadership. Researchers are questioning the traditional practice of using adult-focused leadership approaches to teach young people. What is becoming apparent also is a gap in relevant literature that explains how to teach student leadership with consideration for the student's point of view within the complex contexts of schools.

Complexities of youth leadership development

Due to the shifting nature and diversity of youth culture, educators involved in youth leadership development must be aware of meeting the evolving leadership needs of youth. Traditional leadership development programmes have been known to encompass a raft of biases including students being excluded from leadership development based on social class, non-athleticism, gender or ethnicity (Whitehead, 2009). Traditional discourses of young people's ability and opportunity to contribute to school decision-making and institutional structures that frequently marginalise students require attention (Bishop, 2011; Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Mitra, 2008; O'Donoghue, Kirshner & McLaughlin, 2003; White & Wyn, 2004). Large school rolls and class sizes impact on student leadership opportunities and can make students feel alienated and disenfranchised from school wide involvement and taking up new opportunities, in particular leadership. Segregation by age and ability also means students do not often get the opportunity to learn from a wide range of people and experiences within the secondary school context (Bishop, 2011; Dempster & Lizzio, 2007; McNae, 2011).

Another complexity of working with young people is the imbalance of power in the teaching and learning relationship where teachers are positioned as more senior to students. This can create an unequal

distribution of power (Dempster, 2011; Mitra, 2005). Different perspectives of power in relationships between the teacher and the student can be problematic (Cowie, Otrel-Cass & Moreland, 2010; Nieuwenhuys, 2004). An adult may bring prior knowledge of their own experiences of youth to current situations. However, due to the shifting nature of youth culture and rapid changes in society, this may be significantly different knowledge and experiences than that of young people today.

What can be lacking from school leadership programmes are the perspectives of the students themselves – how they see themselves as leaders and what strengths they bring to leading within and beyond the school context (Bolstad, 2011; Dempster & Lizzio, 2007; McNae, 2011; Mitra, 2008; Whitehead, 2009; Wood, 2010). Most current leadership programmes do not consult with students about their perspectives and often overlook the student views of leadership. Through her work with young women in a secondary school context, McNae (2011) established that when adults have a better understanding of young people's views and ideas of leadership, it is possible to provide relevant learning experiences and support to develop their leadership practice in a meaningful way.

It is often difficult in school settings for teachers and students to move beyond any already established frameworks of leadership. One example of addressing the traditional power imbalances in the teaching and learning relationships is illustrated in the Te Kotahitanga research and development project undertaken by Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai and Richardson (2003). This research team acknowledged the importance of shifting the balance of power while working with Māori students in New Zealand classrooms. In this project, the students and teacher co-created new knowledge through consultation processes that gathered the views of student experiences and the sense they made of those experiences. From the research, a successful educational model for addressing cultural diversity in the classroom and school reform was developed (Bishop, 2011). The study highlighted the need for culturally relevant pedagogy, in

this case to address the traditionally accepted relationships of teacher with power imbalances over students.

There is a call from MacNeil and McLean (2006) that contemporary leadership development needs to be more inclusive towards meeting the needs of 21st century youth and to create opportunities for all youth to engage in opportunities to practice leadership. Gilbert and Bolstad (2012), in a report to the Ministry of Education in New Zealand, reiterate this and claim the demands on educational leaders to develop appropriate experiences for 21st century learners are great. They suggest three key areas of focus for development that include "diversity, connectedness and coherence" (p. 65). The authors recommend practices of teachers and learners co-constructing curricula to meet the diverse needs of young people and to enhance relationships between teachers and learners.

Research reviewed in this section indicates youth leadership development programmes can be more successful if they create meaningful experiences that assist youth to make sense of situations and contribute in appropriate ways to lead. Kress (2006) suggests that leadership development models for youth need to be democratic and inclusive and focus on the development of personal "character, citizenship and leadership" (p. 48). She believes these are skills best learned through experiences in a variety of contexts. The experiential nature of successful youth leadership programmes shows that students must be able to apply their learning to practice to make sense of it.

Meaningful student engagement – participation by youth

This section presents examples of meaningful student engagement. Included in this section on youth leadership development are the notions of; valuing student voice and knowledge in decision making, leadership development in effective learning communities; and youth participation with adults in partnerships. It includes ideas presented from studies that explore co-constructing youth leadership programmes as a means to engage a positive youth development approach with young people.

At the turn of the century, greater demands on schools to meet the changing needs of 21st century students brought a renewed interest in youth development approaches. Debates and questions emerged with regard to how schools prepare youth while facing rapid change and shifts in the diversity of the culture of youth. Those involved in education were being challenged to rethink what is relevant to the lives of young people today and how to reform current systems and processes in teaching and learning practice to better address youth development (Gerver, 2010). It was recognised by Fullan (2007) that students were often not included in reform as active participants: "When adults think of students, they think of them as potential beneficiaries of change. They think of achievement results, skills, attitudes, and jobs. They rarely think of students as participants in a process of school change and organisational life" (p. 170).

A groundswell of interest in involving students in educational change led to researchers investigating ways to bring more student voice and involvement in decision making processes to schools and organisations (Camino & Shepherd, 2002; Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2004; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Fullan, 2007; Mitra, 2008, White & Wyn, 2004). Other researchers pointed out the importance of students not just contributing data to be used for reform and change in education, but being active participants in a shared decision making process (Fielding, 2001; Holdsworth, 2005).

In the United Kingdom, contributors to this work of student participation have included Jean Rudduck, Michael Fielding and John MacBeath, who considered the notions of student voice, consultation, students as researchers and student leadership to inform a new pedagogy of participative learning. Flutter and Rudduck (2004) in the United Kingdom involved consultative practice with students in schools that included them in decision making on curriculum, their learning, assessment and community initiatives. Their research, in two secondary schools, highlighted the importance of pupil consultation as a key to improving teaching and learning. Learning was seen as more of a holistic process as

a result of student voice being acknowledged and led to a more democratic and inclusive school ethos overall. Flutter and Rudduck (2004) believe that giving students an active role in decision making creates a positive and inclusive "learning community" where students experience responsibility and membership – two fundamental aspects of citizenship and leadership (p. 136). From their work with youth, results have shown the students to be more active partners in the learning process and to exercise leadership.

A thematic review of the 'student voice', 'students as researchers' and 'consulting pupils' movements in the United Kingdom by Noyes (2005), reiterates the voices of Rudduck and Flutter (2004) and claims it is essential for schools to break out of the old models of doing things and draw from pupil narratives to develop a better understanding of what works. Noyes suggests more collaborative models that include working with pupils will provide a way of affirming what 'might be' for the future.

Work in this area has also been carried out in *The Freechild Project* (Fletcher, 2004), which promoted the concept of meaningful student involvement of youth in education across America and Canada. Fletcher's experience in working with youth in community and education organisations led to the development and production of a new movement engaging students in change through leadership development. Through his work and research with youth in the United States, Fletcher challenged schools to not just view students as passive participants in the education process but engage them in planning and leadership as partners. In Australia, Groundwater-Smith (2011) has challenged schools, in particular school governance, to take a more authentic approach towards the inclusion of young people in decision making in schools. Her work raised the question of how schools might create the conditions to enable students to contribute in a more democratic way to school decision-making. She advocates for the creation of collaborative learning environments.

In 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child instigated change for young people's participation in decision-making.

Documentation ratified at the convention affirmed that young people be acknowledged as active participants with important views and ideas to offer society. Despite this, young people were often still only valued in 'tokenistic' gestures where their voices were sought but not necessarily acted on. In line with recommendations from the United Nations Convention, the sociologist Hart (1992) provided a model adapted from Arnstein's (1969) *"Eight rungs on the ladder of citizen participation'*. The 'ladder of participation' model designed by Hart was widely used by practitioners to view student participation levels in their organisations. It provided a practical tool with a sequence of steps to explore the different aspects of involving young people in decision-making processes. Shier (2001) further developed Hart's model and formulated a 'pathways to participation' model. His model used reflective questions to work through processes, as opposed to steps, that helped organisations to assess where they were at with youth participation. These models have provided useful tools for organisations to look at participation levels of youth in decision-making processes.

A New Zealand youth development project *Youth Participation Case Studies* undertaken by McGachie and Smith (2003) investigated six social organisations and the benefits of student consultation and inclusion in decision making processes. Findings from the study showed a number of benefits to each organisation with a greater degree of youth 'buy-in' when young people were involved in decision-making and in consultation for design of the campaigns, community activities and events for youth. The authors' findings present highlights of the positive effects on a wider audience of youth when young people's opinions were taken seriously and were *the* voice to youth audiences. Relationships between young people and adults were enhanced significantly with adults commenting on how inspired they were by young people's involvement. The inclusive democratic processes used in these organisations provided strong evidence of the value of positively engaging youth in decision making and reflected outcomes of more united stronger communities of people.

Learning communities for meaningful student engagement

Consulting with young people and involving them as active participants in making decisions are some of the first steps to developing more democratic learning environments or what a number of researchers call 'learning communities'. Senge and Scharmer (2001) believe a learning community is "a place of collaboration and joint knowledge-building" where a group of people work together to "nurture and sustain a knowledge-creating system" (p. 240). Fielding (2004) and a number of other key social researchers around the globe (for example Benard, 1997; Fielding, 2001; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Frost & Roberts, 2011; McGregor, 2007) have engaged in work that examined how schools could create more democratic learning communities where students were actively involved in decision making and leadership development.

In his book, *The Fifth Discipline,* Senge (2012) suggests schools need to work on the development of learning communities where some of the key decisions about learning are made at the coalface or by the people closest to the action – students and teachers. He argues that schools need to move away from traditional leadership approaches of top down individualistic styles and focus on leadership that is more collaborative in nature as this will nurture learning communities.

A recent research project undertaken in New Zealand by Jansen, Cammock and Conner (2010) investigated the use of an appreciative inquiry (AI) process to create an effective learning community within a school setting with teaching staff. The study highlighted a number of leadership strategies that were effective in this project, using the AI approach that could easily be used to create similar learning communities in other schools. Key strategies that helped create the successful learning environments were; the sharing of stories, negotiating the learning structures of the environments, exploring and reflecting individually and collectively to build on ideas and suggestions and allowing a significant time frame (Jansen et al, 2010). The project supported the use of an AI approach to help develop a successful learning community that was

grounded on student voice, positive student-adult partnerships which ultimately improved student success.

Engagement of student voice

The voice of the people at the core of education itself is important in the process of educational change. In recent years there has been an upsurge of interest in engaging young people's voices in decision making in schools to enhance change. However, literature in the area of youth development and youth people's voices in education, in particular the work of Bolstad (2011), Cook-Sather (2002), Jackson (2005) and Mitra (2008), suggests that youth still feel disengaged from decision making despite the interest. Findings in the literature from those working with youth say youth do not feel truly valued; their ideas may be listened to but are not acted on (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006).

Roberts and Nash (2009) point out that students have been more likely passive recipients of policy and practice as opposed to "active agents of change" (p. 174). Too often, student voices are not even heard in the debates and decision-making processes about their education and, as Fielding (2001) states, other people are quick to speak on their behalf without asking the students themselves. Wyn and Harris (2004) stressed the importance of the notion of engaging youth voice in the process of helping society to understand change and citizenship through the eyes of young people themselves.

McGregor (2007) reviewed a national project, the *Networked Learning Communities* project in the United Kingdom, and she proposed that active student involvement and participation through student voice provided catalysts for positive change in a number of schools in the project. It led to the improvement of teaching, staff-student relationships and teacher-education and suggested that where young people are involved in decision making processes the results can be far reaching.

A number of scholars have gathered empirical evidence of student voice serving as a catalyst for change in schools (Fielding & Bragg, 2003; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Lodge, 2005; MacBeath, Demetriou, Rudduck & Myers, 2003; Thomson, 2011). In acknowledging that the voice of youth is important in the process of change, the most recent literature on student voice suggests there has been a shift or as Fielding (2006) states, a "new wave" of student participation and voice in schools (p. 299). Student voice work in schools as described by Flutter and Rudduck (2004), is increasingly more about working with students to get their inside views of what is actually happening at the core of education. Similarly, Mitra (2008) draws attention to the many positives of engaging students through her extensive research in the field in secondary school contexts in America. She found that by listening to and acting on student voice led to youth, who had previously felt alienated by school, reengaged with their learning at school, exercised leadership and took more ownership of the environment.

Another project set up in the United Kingdom explored how teachers in primary and secondary schools developed their pedagogic understanding about teaching and learning through engaging students in dialogue about their learning (Lodge, 2008). The implications from the project where students were participants in a joint inquiry process proved valuable for school improvement for both the staff and students. However there were still a number of challenges that teachers faced while using this type of student inquiry process. In particular, the prescriptive policy features of the United Kingdom education system continued to focus on test scores and inspections as evaluative priority and teachers were judged on these outcomes. Teachers' fears of the unknown with regard to changing relationships of power between student and teacher also created cynicism and the prescribed curriculum did not allow or encourage innovation (Rudduck, Chaplain & Wallace, 1996).

Further to these challenges, other researchers in the field of student voice (Bolstad, 2011; Fielding, 2009; Mitra, 2007, 2008; Mitra & Gross, 2009)

raise some interesting questions about the use and interpretation of student voice. They suggest a problematic issue with the term 'student voice' is that, in some contexts, it is limited to providing a point of view but with no further action or outcome from it. This is particularly so in educational contexts where it can be difficult to break traditional ways of doing and change the 'power' imbalance of relationships between youth and adults. Bolstad (2011) argues for a shift away from the traditional discourse of student voice because of the complexities in defining what exactly it is, in favour of a discourse of "youth-adult partnership" (p. 33).

A further issue is alluded to by Groundwater-Smith (2011) around equity and the voice of young people. Through her research outlining two case studies in Australia, she raised concerns about the ethical nature of relationships in student voice situations. She suggested that for a truly ethical experience there needs to be a shift in "social pedagogy" and a change to governance procedures to encourage more harmonious inclusive environments where students are engaged in governance and decision making (p. 64). Rudduck and Fielding (2006), in their extensive studies on student voice, also raise issues around authenticity and confidence of the students in the process. They claim there needs to be a "disciplined communication of what the students have to say: it's about learning to listen, to offer feedback, to discuss what lines of action there are, to explain why certain responses are not possible" (p. 227).

An example of work where authenticity of student voice was paramount was the research on youth leadership undertaken by McNae (2011). Her research was completed out of concern that there was a notable absence of student understandings of leadership and of what it could be in both schools and communities. Her study highlighted how students can share highly complex understandings of leadership through engaging in learning conversations with adults. The students' perceptions were acknowledged and taken into account to inform further leadership development.

Dempster et al (2011) similarly examined the points of view of young people on leadership in their school. They concluded that this made a

significant contribution to the literature on youth leadership as, rather than the adult voice inferring what leadership should look like for students, the understandings and voices of the young people themselves were heard and acknowledged. Several other studies (Dempster, Lizzio, Keeffe, Skinner, & Andrews, 2010; McGregor, 2007; Whitehead, 2009) suggest that there is a lack of empirical evidence of what young people think leadership is. These studies reinforce the need to move towards more inclusive 'youth-centric views of leadership' from young people and step aside from what has been traditionally used to develop leaders from adult-centric methods and views (Dempster et al, 2011, p. 2).

A shift to youth-adult partnerships

Recent literature by Bolstad (2011) focusing on student voice in New Zealand schools highlights the idea that there are many divergent opinions on what student voice comprises. She believes that consultation with students requires consideration of the roles and responsibilities of both young people and adults to address power differentials between partners and to avoid confusion over what student voice is. Her research supported a shift in thinking from student voice to youth-adult partnerships to support positive leadership development. Camino (2000) supports these views and also contends that, for those people working with youth, it is essential to address the factors that are needed to strengthen youth-adult partnerships and get rid of factors that pose any barriers. This requires investigation into what the structures are that maintain segregation between adults and young people. Rethinking how youth-adult partnerships can be developed, as Camino (2000) and Bolstad (2011) point out is a positive strategy towards building partnerships and promoting youth development.

The research of McNae (2011) investigated the notion of youth-adult partnerships in her youth leadership development work. Key to the success of the leadership development with young women leaders in the research was the respectful relationships formed between young people and adults. The strategies used within the learning process enabled students and adults to work in a co-construction partnership. In this study,

the students acknowledged the collaborative design and inclusive process as key to the success and enjoyment of their learning, questioning why these processes were not used in their school more frequently.

The findings from a pilot study with year 13 students, in three Waikato Secondary Schools in New Zealand (McNae & Mackay, 2013), highlighted the importance of engaging students' voices in leadership development and showed that the strengths-based appreciative inquiry model provided an effective model for their leadership development. This pilot study involved using an appreciative inquiry model of action research to develop and enhance student leadership abilities and understandings and to discover what students needed for them to lead at their best. The study showed that using this model allowed young people and adults to work in partnership to co-create a leadership programme that met their needs and supported students to become effective leaders. It also supported the notion of students being given a voice in the research and most importantly that their voice gives the researcher an insight into what leadership means to them – an understanding of *their* perceptions of youth leadership.

Summary

This literature review has briefly summarised the development of leadership theories. It has illuminated the complexities around defining leadership and aligning theories that best fit youth leadership development. It also highlights the challenges people working with youth encounter as they try to "bridge the generation gap" in delivering youth leadership for youth (MacNeil, 2006, p. 27).

The review illustrates how traditional leadership development initiatives were based on adult theories and approaches to leadership where students were viewed as recipients of leadership knowledge from those who knew more than them. The more contemporary approaches to youth development and leadership introduce the notions of democratic learning

communities where students are viewed as partners in the processes of decision-making and contributions to society.

Although the literature available on youth leadership development is limited, the body of work in this area is slowly increasing. This review has highlighted a small number of positive youth development initiatives that are addressing this. It has also identified the complexities and challenges of working with youth to develop positive leadership experiences with them. The final part of the review presented evidence of studies involving a positive approach to youth leadership development using an appreciative inquiry model.

This research investigated how a specific approach to leadership development using an appreciative inquiry model may assist the transition of leadership knowledge and practice for year 9 students between intermediate and secondary schools. The next chapter presents the research design and the specific methods used to conduct this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore year 9 student perceptions and understandings of leadership within a secondary school context. I believed that gaining a better understanding of student leadership from engaging year 9 students' voices, it would be possible to proceed from a more informed perspective towards the co-construction and implementation of a collaborative strengths-based approach to further the development of year 9 leadership.

The research questions used to investigate year 9 leadership development and guide this research were:

- What are year 9 students' perceptions and experiences of leadership and what influences these understandings or opportunities to practise leadership?
- What might an appreciative inquiry model that aims to develop leadership for year 9 students look like and how might this assist in developing their leadership understandings and practices?
- What is the role and significance of student voice in this inquiry?

This chapter explains my theoretical positioning and outlines the research methodology for this study. It discusses the rationale for the research approach and provides an overview of the research design and methods used for data collection and analysis. Finally, the complexities of researching young people are acknowledged and relevant ethical considerations identified related to working with young people within the secondary school context are identified.

The theoretical framework

Research paradigm and perspectives

The following section of this chapter outlines details of the theoretical framework and design of this research based on my ontological and epistemological perspectives of working *with* young people in their world. The research questions were addressed using the theoretical underpinnings of qualitative study. Qualitative research, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2013) is "…a situated activity that locates the observer in the world" and utilises "…a set of interpretative material practices that make the world visible" (p. 6). As it was important for me to get an understanding of the students' perceptions and understandings of leadership, it was essential to use student-centred qualitative research methods that emphasised the students' subjective accounts within their context. It was also important to establish an appropriate research approach that would connect with the voices of the young people and encourage a positive adult-youth partnership to be formed. It was my intention to involve the students as active collaborators and work with them in partnership to co-create plans for further strengths-based student leadership.

Over the past few decades there has been much debate over the emerging theoretical perspectives of social research. The theories, rich with complex terminology, offer researchers many choices to design proposals and provide a framework to help understand phenomena in the social world (Creswell, 2014). As researchers in education start to inquire, they are guided by philosophical ideas on the origin and scope of their knowledge - their epistemology. Burton, Brundrett and Jones (2008) explain this epistemological perspective as the researcher's way of viewing society and social interactions that guides how knowledge is viewed and constructed. How the researcher defines reality (ontology) and how knowledge is created (epistemology) helps to reveal the personal biography and voice behind the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). These

views also provide the philosophical starting point for how to construct a methodological framework for social research.

Although researchers may have particular ontological and epistemological perspectives, this does not dictate a particular type of methodological approach, but provides a conceptual framework. However, Merriam (2002) acknowledges this and suggests the theoretical position or orientation of the researcher will guide much of the decision making for the study. To help understand the connections between philosophical thinking (or the worldview) of a researcher and the different methodologies it is important to reflect on two very broad paradigms, known as *positivist* and *interpretivist*. These two dominant research traditions or paradigms help to explain human behaviour in social research and offer alternative ways of viewing phenomena in the social world (Denscombe, 2002).

Researchers with a *positivist* perspective use natural science models of investigating social phenomena to explain behaviours and to measure outcomes. Matthews and Ross (2010) maintain that knowledge is external to the researcher and reality and people are regarded as objects of the research. The researcher has no impact on the data and is objective. The methodological approaches tend to be quantitative and focus on technical methods to gather observable and measurable facts (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

By contrast, researchers with an *interpretivist* perspective see knowledge as interpreted and constructed in the minds of both the researcher and the researched and knowledge is constructed from multiple perspectives (Burton et al., 2008). Interpretivists maintain that it is necessary to gather knowledge using qualitative methods that are grounded in a constructionist philosophical position. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) assert that the intent of a researcher using qualitative methods is to examine the context of the participants in a holistic manner, observing social interactions in situations with an emphasis on “discovery and description” and “extracting and interpreting the meaning of experience” (p. 118).

Researchers must be clear on their position of whether “the social world is regarded as something external to social actors or as something that people are in the process of fashioning” (Bryman, 2008, p. 4). These paradigmatic positions provide opposing worldviews as to the ontological and epistemological perspectives of the researcher and reflect two types of research strategy – quantitative or qualitative. The personal set of beliefs a researcher has will often lead to the use of a particular approach to research that Creswell (2014) describes as qualitative (interpretivist paradigm), quantitative (positivist paradigm) or a combination of both using mixed methods.

Quantitative research has been the traditional and very successful scientific approach to help us understand the natural world though tests and experiments for a number of years (Burton et al, 2008). It is an approach most suited to getting objective data that is not affected by the opinions or hopes of the researcher and particularly suited to research in health and natural science settings. In contrast, the qualitative approach was developed in reaction to social scientists arguing that people could not be investigated the same way as physical objects (Minichiello & Kottler, 2010). Qualitative researchers believe there is many ways to acquire knowledge and that people can experience the same phenomena but interpret it in different ways. This has led to the creation of alternative approaches to exploring the behaviour and experiences of people in social contexts and acknowledges words, images and language as opposed to data and statistical analysis to explain phenomena.

A characteristic of qualitative research is that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and this usually involves fieldwork (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Merriam, 2002). The researcher often goes to the site of the research participants in order to observe behaviour in their natural setting and attempts to understand the way they view reality. Denzin and Lincoln (2013) stress the importance of investigating the relationship between participants and their context in social research. They suggest that understanding the connections between the two helps give meaning to

what has shaped the identities of the participants. Denzin and Lincoln use the term *bricolage* to describe the research construct that encourages researchers to move beyond traditional methodologies and use multiple methods to explore and make sense of the participants "being-in-the-world" (p. 355).

Rationale for a qualitative research approach

In choosing a methodological approach for this research, it was important to acknowledge my own ontological and epistemological perspectives of reality. Based on my previous experiences of working with youth within educational settings, the framework for this research was designed with careful consideration for young people within their school context. It showed a preference for an interpretative paradigm approach to research. The central assumption of this paradigm as observed by Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) was that, because individuals socially construct reality there is the potential for multiple meanings of the same experience. Matthews and Ross (2010) explain this ontological position as social constructionism and assert that social researchers continually review and rework ideas about the phenomena being studied to gain meaning and a better understanding.

I believed my ontological and epistemological perspectives of knowledge creation were based on democratic processes of interaction between the researcher and research participants. This constructionist position served as the base for my educational practices and the reason for choosing an appreciative inquiry approach to facilitate learning with the students. Central to AI are the social interactions of the participants. As Linda Lambert (2009) purports, we enter contexts with our own perceived knowledge and ideas from previous experiences and while engaging with others we discover new ideas that can reshape our thinking. I believed there were multiple ways of viewing reality based on how an individual perceives and constructs meaning from personal experiences and interactions within different contexts.

As a researcher, my epistemological stance is one of being connected to the data, not separate from the creation of new knowledge because of my personal involvement in a 'co-construction' style of data generation in this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Matthews & Ross, 2010). By directly interacting with the participants in meaningful ways and engaging with what they said, this gave insight into the multiple meanings participants shared of their worldviews. This meant that the researcher reported a real and fair account of what was seen, not a set of results that another researcher in a similar situation would have produced. Reason and Bradbury (2001) describe this type of research as active participation where the researcher works within the research community to assist with change. Guba and Lincoln (2004) propose that this provides a fair representation of the participants' voice and also introduces the term 'authenticity' to qualitative research.

The qualitative approach used in this research with young people allowed processes that generated rich, detailed and first-hand accounts of the participants' leadership experiences. Working with young people within a secondary school context allowed me to listen to the students' voices as important sources of knowledge about leadership and inform further action for their leadership development. This qualitative methodology was a suitable approach for working with young people, actively engaging both the researcher and research participants while within the participants' school context.

Metaphorically, a *qualitative researcher* can be perceived as:

> …a traveller on a journey that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home. The (researcher) - traveller wanders the landscape and enters into conversations with people encountered. The traveller explores the many domains of the country, as unknown territory and with maps, roaming freely around the territory…(Kvale, 1996, p. 4).

This metaphor helps the social researcher understand the importance of conversation as a means to explore the life perceptions of the interviewee. This also supports my epistemological position as interpretivist, described

previously, where gaining an understanding of the social world through the eyes of the researched is critical to this research. Using this metaphor also helps, in the words of Minichielo and Kottler (2010), to “provide a mechanism to relate, compare and make meaning of new knowledge with lived experiences” (p. 40). Barnes (2002) also advocates the use of metaphor for working with young people as it provides a platform for the students to explain their understanding of concepts through their life experiences. In the case of my study, the *traveller* metaphor provided a mechanism to gain a better understanding of the students’ experiences they shared through interviews and stories. I was a ‘traveller’ entering their world, exploring their context or landscape and learning from them, through their voices. I had a ‘road map’ of interview questions to navigate my way through the student leadership landscape, to help explore student perspectives and gain new knowledge for possible new directions.

Knowledge creation for this research was interpretive and based on exploring the perspectives and meanings of leadership that young people bring to situations, in this case to secondary school contexts. It was important for me to be reflexive in practice and attempt to limit any adult bias and personal value that might shape my interpretations of student voice (Creswell, 2014). Stemming from an interest in working in partnership with young people to support their leadership development, my commitment was to them, not *on* or *about* them (Fraser, 2004; Heron & Reason, 2001). I was conscious of the way I dressed and presented as an adult in a young person’s context. By constantly referring to myself as a student and life-long learner, I tried to build a learning environment that was not a ‘me and them’, but an ‘us’ learning together.

I chose to use a qualitative research approach and elicit data through conversations and the voice of students as it allows for greater authenticity. Further more, it suits my personality. I enjoy talking to people, asking them questions and exploring their experiences. This approach provided me with the opportunity to explore the leadership perspectives and understandings of young people and gain insights into how they come to

make sense of leadership. The interpretive research approach works within a framework that is underpinned by democratic principles (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). As it was my intention to listen to the voices of the participants and welcome the diversity of perspectives they brought to situations, the interpretive paradigm acknowledged multiple voices and different perspectives.

With my intent being to examine the social situation and interactions of year 9 students within a secondary school context, choosing a qualitative methodology for the inquiry allowed me to enter the participants' world and attempt to achieve a more holistic perspective of this (Denzin & Lincoln, 2014). The research emphasis was on inquiry with the objective being to develop an understanding of the leadership perceptions and beliefs held by the students who had just entered into the secondary school context. This methodology allowed me to extract and interpret meaning of what may have influenced their understanding of, and opportunities for, leadership to this point.

Research context

This research took place over a four-month period at a co-educational decile 9 (high socio-economic community) state secondary school located in the central north island region of New Zealand. A research time line that outlines the project time frame can be found in Appendix A. The school participates in a wide network of formal and informal relationships with other agencies and groups. Through my previous employment in a not-for-profit organisation working with young people in leadership development, I had the opportunity to work with staff and students at this school and had established professional relationships with the Assistant Principal and Year 9 Dean. These members of staff played key roles in decision-making at the systems level within the school and provided a valuable connection between the students and myself for approval to access the school site and work with the participants. (Creswell, 2014; Fraser, 2004).

Recruiting participants and obtaining informed consent

Creswell (2014) discusses the notion of purposeful selection of participants as an important process in qualitative research that enables the researcher to get the participants most suited to helping answer the research questions. The participants in this research were year 9 students and were purposefully selected having just entered the secondary school environment from a number of intermediate schools. Although new to the secondary school context, the participants had been in the school for six months. The school draws from a community that thrives on agriculture and the equine industry and this has influenced the population of students who attend the school to those of mainly European descent with a few Maori and International students. Despite an appreciation for cultural differences and recognition of the need to be inclusive of all cultures the participants who volunteered to take part in this research were all of European descent. They represented a mix of gender and came from a variety of year 9 form class groups. This purposive sample called for volunteers, with an interest in student leadership, to generate qualitative in-depth data in response to the research questions (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

Initially a meeting was set up with the Principal, Assistant Principal and Year 9 Dean to outline the proposed research and gain approval for access to participants from the school for my project. This research intention was then forwarded to the Board of Trustees (Appendix B). Following this acceptance, information about the research was then shared with the students and parents via the school newsletter (Appendix C). I attended an assembly to speak with the 260 year 9 students and to invite volunteers to take part in the research.

At the assembly I invited students to indicate if they wanted to be considered for the leadership development opportunity and research. After the assembly, 45 students volunteered to take part as participants in the research. Ten students were purposefully selected from this group based on the criterion that there were five female and five male students that

were from a range of previous intermediate schools and were currently in different classes. Participants were given information about the research (Appendix D) then asked to complete a consent form (Appendix E) indicating their interest to participate in the project. Parents were also given the research information and form indicating their consent for their child to take part in the project (Appendix F). Participants and their parents had the opportunity to ask questions about the project through email. Participation in the research was completely voluntary and the school and students had the right to decline involvement in the research without any adverse repercussions.

Researcher's role and reflexivity

With the nature of the research being interpretative, it was important to acknowledge my involvement and role as an inquirer. This required a degree of reflexivity, or reflection about the implications of the data generated as a result of my selection of research methods, decisions I made during the process and my personal values (Bryman, 2008). This also required reflection on my personal background and previous experiences that could shape interpretation of data and influence my preconceived views of the research. A reflective journal was used as a tool to collect my personal reflexive thoughts prior to and during the research journey and is discussed further in this chapter. It encouraged personal reflection on experiences and learning during the study for discussions during supervisory meetings and analysis alongside the participants' data (Matthews & Ross, 2010; Ortlipp, 2008).

As this research used qualitative interpretative methods for an on-going period of time, it was important to be honest and open with the students regarding my role as researcher in this project. I shared from the onset an open and honest account of my time spent with youth in many different communities and schools and gave a little information about my background, observations and experiences as a community educator.

It was my intention for this research to be self-reflexive and young-person-centred (Pattman & Kehily, 2004). I reiterated to the participants the importance of my role as a reflexive researcher (Creswell, 2014; Matthews & Ross, 2010), where their ideas and voice were central to the study, and that the methods chosen were best suited for working with young people in *their* context to generate an understanding of *their* perspectives. This in turn generated positive discussions with the participants while co-creating data together. It was essential to be a respectful listener to build the trust of the students and create a learning environment where they felt valued and confident to share their feelings. Minichiello and Kottler (2010) reiterate the need for active listening and "communicating your intense interest in such a way to encourage deeper exploration" (p. 20).

The second aim of this research was to investigate and document how a specific approach using an appreciative inquiry model of action research might support the leadership development of these year 9 students. This model was co-created with the students and will be explained further in the method section of this chapter. The next section, based on the methodological framework above, provides details of the research design.

Research design

The appreciative inquiry process

Appreciative inquiry (AI) was selected for this research as it provided a positive strengths-based framework to support young people for leadership development. It seemed an appropriate choice to use within education because the focus of AI is about appreciating the most valuable and vibrant parts of the organisation (Barrett & Fry, 2005), in this research – the students. The underpinning assumption of appreciative inquiry is that it provides a process for change that is based on embracing strengths as opposed to solving problems. Cooperrider et al (2008) propose, "Appreciative inquiry is the cooperative co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organisations and the world around them. It involves the discovery of what gives *'life'* to a living system..." (p. 3). A model of inquiry

illustrated in the work by Cooperrider et al (2008) was used as a guide in this research.

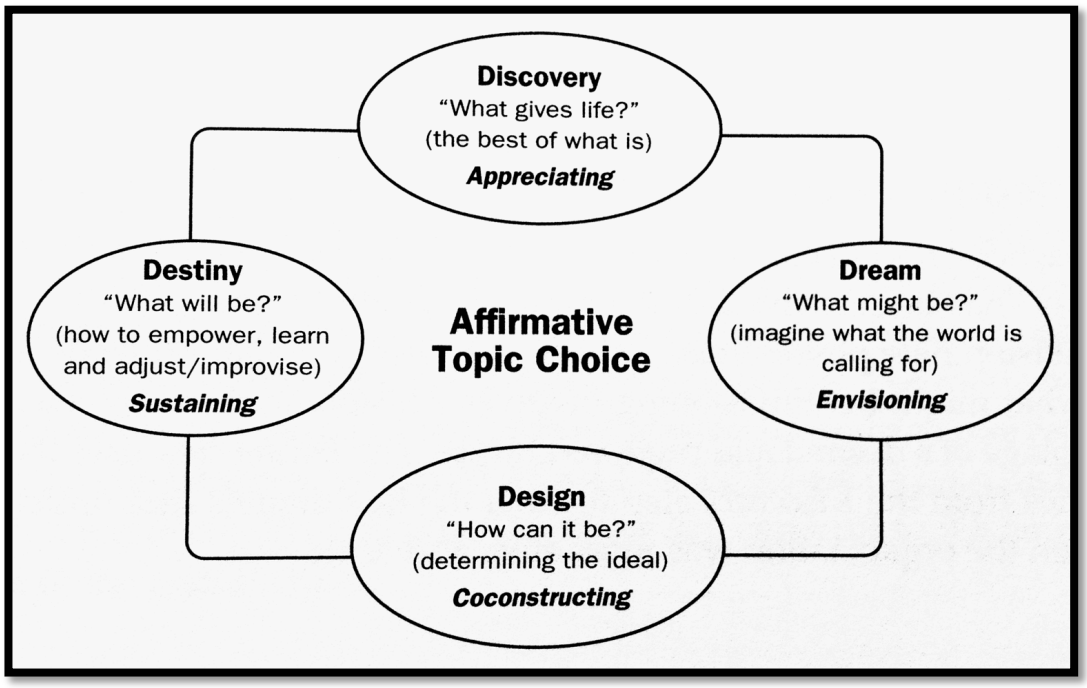

Figure 2. Model of AI showing the '4D' Cycle. From *Appreciative inquiry handbook: For leaders of change* (p. 5), by D.L. Cooperrider, D. Whitney, & J.M. Stavros, (2008).

This model depicted a cycle using four stages of inquiry. The cycle begins by deciding on the life-affirming factors as the focus of the inquiry; what gives life to the organisation? During the *discovery* stage participants are invited to share stories on their experiences and are interviewed to learn about all of their strengths and factors that contribute to success; the positive core of the organisation. Data collected from this stage serves as the basis for the *dream* stage and provides possibilities for envisioning the future of what might be. Sharing positive stories and dialogue creates energy and builds enthusiasm. Participants are encouraged to look for common themes or life-giving forces to help envision an organisation that embodies their ideal dream of the future they want. The *design* stage bridges the 'best of what is' from the discovery stage with the 'what might be' in the dream stage by crafting statements or 'provocative propositions'. These statements are co-constructed with the participants and form the

direction for action based on a shared vision of a possible future. The *destiny* stage of the inquiry represents the conclusion of the *discovery, dream* and *design* stages but, as Cooperrider et al (2008) explain, it also marks the beginning of the "…evolving creation of an appreciative learning culture" (p. 200). Although AI has no one particular formula, the 4-D cycle provides a model to create a change process that can be designed for any organisation.

The appreciative inquiry design for this research

The rationale for using AI for this research was its potential to generate positive change and possibilities of enhanced leadership practice by year 9 students. The 4-D model illustrated by Cooperrider et al. (2008) provided the framework for this inquiry and four stages supported the research. The *discovery* stage began with semi-structured interviews and conversations using a number of questions from the interview schedule (Appendix G) and focus group schedule (Appendix H). Following the first focus group session, six leadership workshops (approximately 50 minutes in duration) engaged the students in a variety of activities to explore their leadership perceptions and co-create understandings of when they were leading at their best, or what Cooperrider et al. (2008) would describe as "what gives life" to their leadership (p. 103).

A variety of experiential approaches were implemented to explore the students' ideas about leadership and how they wanted leadership to be in their schools and lives. For example in one workshop the participants using Lego to create a model of what they would like year 9 leadership practices to look like at school. In appreciative inquiry this is referred to as *dreaming* and is a phase where "all members and stakeholders of an organisation engage in processes to envision the future of the organisation, dreaming lifts up the best of what has been and invites people to imagine it even better" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 179). These sessions provided the participants with opportunities to extend their understanding of what might be possible with regard to their leadership across a number of settings.

During the *Design* phase of the AI, statements were co-created with the participants that focused on possible actions for year 9 students' leadership. The students shared stories of their 'best' leadership experiences and instances where they believed they practiced leadership that they were proud of. I worked with the participants, both as a group and individually across the leadership workshops, to examine these instances, help them identify common themes and occurences from the ideas they shared and co-construct ideals for their 'best' leadership practice. These became their 'essence statements' that would inform their future actions.

Lastly, the focus of the participants was directed towards creating their destiny. During this phase the participants created action plans to look at ways they could amplify each of their statements and work towards sustaining their dreamt possibilities or destiny (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

Research Methods

This section outlines the methods used in the design phases of this qualitative research, which included: semi-structured interviews, focus groups, reflective journals and workshop artefacts.

Semi-structured interviews

For this study, the relatively flexible nature of *semi-structured* interviews provided excellent methods to gain insight into the participants' views and perceptions of leadership. Semi-structured interviews have become an extremely prominent method of data gathering within youth development research frameworks (McNae, 2011). Many researchers advocate numerous benefits, including the perception that the interviewer and the interviewee are able to establish a high level of rapport. Interviews also allow the researcher to gather information from the perspective of the young people being interviewed within a non-hierarchical relationship (Kvale, 1996).

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) use the word 'enable' to talk about interviews as a way for interviewers and interviewees "to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view" (p. 267). Interviews provide an effective method for collecting data directly from people, an appropriate method for eliciting student voice - their voice in their words from their world. Kvale's (1996) description of interviews being literally an "*inter view*, an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest" put things into perspective for me (p. 2). Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin and Lowden (2011) support this by saying the interview process helps researchers gain a deeper insight into people's actions and thoughts and explains why people act in certain ways.

Another key element of using semi-structured interviews was the high degree of reciprocity, as these interviews provide the flexibility to clarify meaning and create further understanding of the context in which these students exercised their previous leadership. The sorts of themes that were explored through these interviews were the individual perceptions of leadership, perceived opportunities for leadership activity and how leadership skills can be best developed and used within the students' environment.

Although careful planning and thought had been given to the design of the interviews, a potential limitation of this method was the initial perceptions the students had of an 'adult' questioning 'youth'. Addressing the power differential between adults and students, which is perceived by many young people in social research, must be of paramount importance (Alderson, 2004). It required me, as researcher, to develop a trusting relationship with the participants where they actively participated as partners in the research and their views were listened to and respected (Barnes, 2002). This was in an attempt to create a level of rapport between researcher and participant that encouraged responses based on trust and confidentiality and where the power relation dynamics were

minimised. This created a number of challenges within the possible timeframe, which are reported in chapter six.

Focus groups

Focus groups are essentially group discussions with a focus on a particular theme or issue (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This research method involved a number of focus group sessions where data was generated from the voice of both individual and group opinions through a range of activities. As the voices of the students were central to the research process, the focus groups encouraged the flow of voice and the sharing of their thoughts, ideas and opinions that generated answers to the research questions. During focus group session's data was generated through discussions, which were started by the researcher sharing a group question, and collected using audio recordings on the iPad, transcripts of recordings, participant workshop artefacts and researcher notes.

It was important for the sessions to be set up in an environment that was safe and supportive and conducive to communication (Kay, Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, 2009). The Assistant Principal granted us access to a meeting room not a classroom. This room was normally reserved solely for staff and senior leaders. It was smaller than a classroom and nicely furnished with a large table in the centre and chairs all around. The room was sunny, well lit and had a small kitchenette that we were able to access. The setting provided an inclusive sharing area where we were all able to sit comfortably and converse without noise or interference from other students. The focus group sessions created an environment for the participants to establish trusting relationships with both their peers and the researcher.

A number of workshop activities were facilitated during the focus group sessions where the students worked in a variety of ways with different mediums to create artefacts of their thoughts and discussions. A treaty that the group had generated at the start of the first session guided communication during the focus groups. The treaty encouraged everyone

to get the opportunity to be heard and respected. Kay et al (2009) talk about “group agreements” being important for working with children and young people in order to create positive ideals for participation (p. 139). The agreements also reiterate the confidentiality and privacy issues of working in the research process. Using this method for qualitative research was advantageous for generating lots of information at one time and allowed the use of different formats and techniques to keep the learning environment exciting for the participants (Matthews & Ross, 2010). The treaty agreements generated in this research were also used as a tool to manage the group sessions and were particularly useful when one participant tended to dominate conversations and attempt to take over the group discussions. This issue was addressed quickly at the beginning of the next focus group session. They were reminded of the treaty agreement and the expectations they had designed themselves. As the group became more familiar with one another and the participants were engaged in the co-construction process the issue disappeared completely.

Reflective journals

The researcher is the main instrument of data collection and analysis in a qualitative research process and therefore it is important to share “what you bring to the inquiry and what you discover as you live with your project” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 16). Although much of the data generated with the participants is able to be captured and recorded in various ways the thoughts and reasoning of the researcher, although not easily captured, is critical to the overall project. A research journal is one way of documenting the researcher’s thoughts and ideas. Throughout this research process a reflective journal was used to record the experiences, opinions and thoughts of the researcher. This strategy was used to give transparency, in the findings, of any researcher bias or assumptions made during the process (Ortlipp, 2008). It also provided what Lincoln and Guba (1985) call an audit trail of material that was used to give validity to the research process.

Workshop artefacts

Kay et al (2009) propose a number of advantages to using a variety of data collection methods when working with young people and trying to accommodate for their diverse interests and needs. To cater for such diversity, it is important to use a range of activities to generate data and accumulate artefacts to use in the analysis stage of the research. During each of the focus group sessions in this research, the participants were involved in a variety of interactive tasks where they generated artefacts depicting their ideas and learning from each of the sessions. Creative methods were used to get a wider range of data that was then triangulated to get a more accurate informed picture of the participants' voice on leadership.

Examples of the artefacts that the participants generated included; large pages of post-it-notes where the students presented their thoughts and ideas on leadership; poster pages of words and comments and reflection sheets from story-telling activities. Continuums were organised using their notes to show the value and importance of their leadership words and collected on poster pages. The participants created physical models made out of Lego representing year 9 leadership ideas during a *dream* stage workshop and photos were taken of these. Photos were also taken to record their initial ideas in each workshop as, in a number of instances, the earlier artefacts were revisited to see if there were any changes or new ways of looking at leadership occurring. Throughout the workshops the voice of the students were recorded on iPads as they analysed, debated and created works showing their learning. All of these artefacts provided valuable data for analysis.

Research Process

There were three phases to this research process. In phase one, the students were engaged in leadership conversations using semi-structured interviews to explore and document their individual perceptions and

experiences of leadership as a year 9 student, new to the secondary school environment.

The interviews were set up in a small intimate room, normally used for personal meetings by staff and school leaders. Large couches framed the area and provided a comfortable and homely setting for the interviews. I offered some light food snacks and juice for the participants while we chatted and I believed this might illustrate to them the value I was placing on their time and commitment to the interview. This also assisted the development of respectful relationships that are very important when working with younger people (Kay et al, 2009).

An interview schedule (Appendix G) was used to explore and document their perceptions and experiences of leadership. The semi-structured interview process encouraged the participants to share very rich and real stories of their personal leadership perspectives without interruptions from other people. A list of open-ended questions was used as a semi-structured guide for the interviews. The types of questions I used were modelled on the work of Kvale (1996) who suggested the following nine types of questions were most often used in interviews and could include "Introducing questions, follow-up questions, probing questions, specifying questions, direct questions, indirect questions, structuring questions, silence and interpreting questions" (p. 447). I had prepared a variety of prompts and questions to use as a guide while with the participants to encourage them to share their personal views and perceptions in a non-threatening manner. I had the flexibility of asking for more information from the participants and to expand on their thoughts.

During the interviews I was able to observe participant body language and facial expressions, both adding richness to their voice and stories. I also had the advantage of hearing first-hand the specific uses of words and slang by each participant and to ask for clarity. Bryman (2008) proposes that interviews create opportunities for an interviewer to "learn the native language" of the participants, in this case to understand what language youth are choosing to describe leadership (p. 465).

Although interviews (Appendix G) were the preferred method of data collection at the beginning of the research process, they proved to be very time consuming. The time with each of the participants was kept to 30 minutes in order to work around their class timetables and refrain from keeping students from their curriculum work. This proved manageable with each student (although the evaluations indicated the participants would have enjoyed longer for this process). The transcribing afterwards proved time consuming with a number of hours used in preparation of individual transcripts to be returned to each participant for member checking. This provided authenticity and ensured validity, as the participants were involved in cross checking my interpretations of their views. Encouraging them to review the data and ensure it was a true and accurate reflection of what had been covered provided data for further reflection and analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2014).

Following the initial interviews, the participants were invited to the first focus group session with a shared lunch to discuss the whole group's perceptions and understandings of leadership. In preparation for this and further focus group sessions, we generated a group treaty that highlighted guidelines to maintain a safe learning environment and ensure all voices were heard. This included guidelines that stated the need to respect information shared and that people's contributions are not shared beyond the group (Kay et al, 2009). Questions and prompts from the workshop inquiry guidelines (Appendix I) were selected randomly during focus group sessions. The students were informed of my intention to digitally record some of our sessions, using Notability on iPad, which was password protected. Photos were also taken of artefacts of students' work and of workshop activities. Students' identities were not revealed in these instances by means of photo editing or camera positioning.

The second phase of the research involved the ten students participating in an appreciative inquiry (AI) into their leadership. The participants were invited to six further leadership workshops (Appendix L) and were given the opportunity to reflect upon their own leadership, investigate their

leadership practices across a range of contexts and to create action plans for leadership opportunities within these contexts. The workshops were approximately 50 minutes in duration to work within the limitations of the school timetable structure, and engaged the participants in carefully constructed appreciative inquiries. Van Linden and Fertman (1998) emphasise the importance of using a variety of techniques to present information on leadership development to young people in order to assist their understanding of the information and acknowledge their diverse learning styles. The AI process engaged the participants in a variety of co-operative learning techniques in each workshop that created opportunities for them to share information, participate in new ways of learning and grow more confident in themselves.

The inquiry process used in this research began by inviting the participants to share stories and participate in dialogue about high point moments where had felt successful and really positive. These shared stories were used to discover strengths and to appreciate and value these young people. Consequently, this research design embraced forming a research relationship *with* the participants based on an appreciative inquiry process. The stories started to unpack the 'best of what is', the moments when the participants recognised their own potential and strengths in different situations (Cooperrider et al; 2008). As themes started to emerge from the leadership development group discussions, they were analysed with the students to provide further conversations about the essences of what 'gives life' to their leadership. A number of activities were co-created with the students during the leadership workshops that challenged and extended their leadership understandings and developed **their** ideas as strengths statements. These strength or *design* statements focused on possible actions for student leadership. The students then discussed action plans to 'realise' these statements and work towards sustaining their dreamt possibilities or *destiny* (Cooperrider et al, 2008).

The final phase of the project involved the participants in a focus group session for 60 minutes using the interview schedule (Appendix J) and an individual semi-structured interview (Appendix K) of 30 minutes duration. The purpose of this session was to gain an insight into how the AI experience had assisted in developing and enhancing their leadership practice. The participants had the opportunity once again to share their individual perspectives on student leadership in a relaxed informal setting. The final part of this phase involved all of the students in a focus group session to reflect on their experiences of the appreciative inquiry process.

Cook-Sather (2006), who advocates for the rights and voice of students to be heard, argues that student voice offers unique perspectives on schooling and learning and that educators should engage with students and be open to what they suggest for change. She states the "voice of students and their insights warrant not only the attention but also the responses of adults and should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 383). In order for the findings from student voice in this research to be valued and listened to, it was important they were shared with the school. The Assistant Principal and Year 9 Dean were able to support the students and listen to their voice and views of school leadership structures and processes. The students met for a last time to share their plans and the strategies they had developed throughout the project. This final leadership focus group session involved the students co-constructing action plans to allow them to lead at their best. A summary of the findings was recorded on large sheets of paper by the participants and presented to the Assistant Principal and Dean in a meeting instigated by the student participants.

Data analysis strategies - 'interpreting' the collected information

Creswell (2014) describes the analysis of data as segmenting it like "peeling back the layers" of an onion and then putting it back together in thematic ways (p. 195). An important part of making sense of each of the layers was looking for all of the possible reasons for the findings and asking a lot of questions. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) suggest starting

with brainstorming questions to critically look at what the data suggests, keeping in mind the focus of the research questions.

A large volume of data was generated and collected from interviews, focus groups and the AI leadership development workshops to be used in the analysis stage. A thematic approach was used in the data analysis stage to work with the participant words, stories and artefacts. This involved the process of selecting words and sentences from each source that were colour-coded and charted in themes. These were put onto large sheets of paper and taped on the wall. This process was on-going and evolving with sheets being added to and re-coloured as new themes emerged. Further interpretation involved looking for relationships in the key themes and exploring differences and similarities between them across the sheets of paper. Samples of the coded work were also shared with the research supervisors to help with crosschecking and for further “secondary analysis” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 124).

Issues of trustworthiness

In qualitative research, there is a degree of interpretative selection happening, where the researcher is involved in working with non-numeric information and expected to reach an understanding based on an interpretative philosophy. As Menter et al. (2011) explain this consequently requires very systematic and transparent processes in the analysis stage to increase the rigour of the study. The social researcher is expected to control biases present during the interpretative processes of qualitative research and establish trustworthy methods for analysing data. At the data analysis stage in this research, interpretation of the findings involved making sense of what the data revealed by considering different meanings, explanations and conclusions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012) and building an argument about what was learnt in the field. This part of the research process challenged the researcher to go beyond assumptions and prior beliefs and ask questions about the lessons learnt from the process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Being aware of the importance of reflexivity and

clarifying potential biases while interpreting the data is shared in the discussion chapter.

The use of triangulation of data where I compared and contrasted the information generated from the initial interviews with the artefacts and data generated in the workshops gave strength and validity to the findings. This meant the data generated from different sources to answer the research questions could be compared and analysed in more depth from the voice of all of the participants. This gave a range of student perspectives to clarify meaning and as Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) claim a more "in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study" (p. 108). Throughout the research process the participants were involved in crosschecking and peer debriefing processes to confirm validity of the findings and reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation (Bryman, 2008; Matthews & Ross, 2010). This is discussed further in the following chapter, which focuses on the analysis, interpretation and synthesis of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent

As the aim of qualitative research is to collect data from people and about people, there are a number of ethical considerations to be made in order to protect the participants from any potential harm and respect their individuality and rights. France (2004) and Fraser (2004) argue that two critical factors need to be considered by researchers working with youth that include gaining informed consent and the protection of the participant from harm. Steps were taken at all stages of the research to protect the rights of the participants. A formal written letter (Appendix B) explicitly outlining these steps was submitted to the Principal and School Board of Trustees in order to begin the informed consent process.

Prior to the study, informed consent was sought via personal letters (Appendix D & E) to the participants and to the parents of the participants (Appendix F). A letter of introduction to the project outlined the participants'

right to decline and that participation was requested on a volunteer basis. The participants were advised that if they chose to be involved they had the right to withdraw up until they had checked their transcripts. This was advised through the consent protocol and in all communications with participants. The contact details for the supervisors of the researcher were made available to the students and parents if they had any concerns that they felt uncomfortable expressing to the researcher directly.

Confidentiality

The principles of confidentiality with regard social research is that the identity of participants must wherever possible remain anonymous or, in the instance where they can be identified, this must be with consent from the participants (Kay et al., 2009). In this research participants' confidentiality was respected with all data reported using pseudonyms. The purpose of this was to limit any possible direct link to their identity or the school involved. In the case of two participants, they asked to remain known by their own names in all data, as there were a number of people who shared the same name at the school.

All correspondence regarding the project was filed in a sealed box in the student office to keep the students' participation as confidential as possible. As the school knew the students who were involved in the programme complete anonymity was unrealistic, however complete confidentiality with regard to students' contributions to the research was maintained.

Minimising potential harm to participants

Every effort was made to reduce the likelihood of any potential physical, psychological, social, economic or cultural harm to the students. Clear behavioural expectations of the students were negotiated prior to beginning the research and a group treaty co-constructed with the students. This provided appropriate protocol for avoiding harm to participants within the group sessions. This was an important role for the

researcher and participants as the students took an active participatory role in decision making from the onset of the study in setting up this treaty. It was the beginning of a positive research relationship being established where it was made quite clear that I believed every young person had the potential and strength to positively inform leadership practice in schools.

Matthews and Ross (2010) discuss how the relationship of the researcher and participants can be observed quite differently with regard to power. Being older than the participants, and an adult, can have implications and limitations on the research process to the point that the participants may not feel safe and that they are in a less powerful position. Time was spent breaking down barriers and ill-informed preconceptions during the individual interviews. The researcher's previous experience of work with youth was shared in honest and open conversations with the opportunity for the participants to ask questions. Of paramount importance at the first focus group session was the need to create a safe learning environment where the group co-created the treaty and recognised every voice, and valued every opinion. It also served the purpose of sharing power and decision making from the onset of the study (Bryman, 2008).

Participants' right to decline to participate and right to withdraw

This research was consultative in approach and promoted a shift away from viewing young people's status as "dependent and objective" as described by Kay et al. (2009). As a key focus of this project was to encourage youth to share their ideas on leadership, all participants were encouraged to be active contributors of knowledge not passive recipients of adults' or teachers' knowledge. The participants were given equal rights and access to all information throughout the project following the University of Waikato *Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations* (2008) guidelines and principles.

A letter of introduction outlined the project to the participants (Appendix D) giving them the right to decline to take part in the project and to emphasise that participation was requested on a volunteer basis. Once they chose to

be involved, the students were again reminded that they had the right to withdraw up until they had checked their final transcripts. This was built into the consent protocol and all communications with participants. The rights of the participants were stated and reiterated at the beginning and throughout the research project. They were able to withdraw from the project by contacting me via email or phone or the Assistant Principal at school who would then inform me. The process for withdrawing was clearly outlined on all information sheets given to the participants (Appendix D) and their parents (Appendix F). It was also made clear to the students the amount of time that would be required of them to take part in the project. The participants were also informed that there would be no advantages, disadvantages or ill effect placed on individuals for taking part or choosing not to. Group confidentiality was a stated guideline.

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed description of this study's research methodology. A qualitative research methodology was used to investigate students' perceptions and understandings of leadership and the influences on these. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were used to get the students' voice on their personal perceptions. An action research model of appreciative inquiry was co-created with the students during leadership workshop focus group sessions. This generated a collectively desired future using a strengths-based approach to leadership (Cooperrider et al, 2008) with action plans to assist these year 9 students to create a desired leadership culture for their year group.

The following chapter presents an analysis and summary of the data collected from multiple sources. It focuses on the interpretation and synthesis of the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

'Be'ing in leadership

Introduction

The first part of this chapter presents the findings pertaining to the leadership perceptions and experiences of the research participants and what influenced these. The second part shares the findings on the use of a strengths-based appreciative inquiry model that was co-constructed with the participants.

Participant perceptions and understanding of leadership

It was important to determine the participants' preconceived ideas and understanding of leadership at the beginning of the research in order to ascertain whether these changed following their participation in the AI process. During the initial interviews and focus groups, the participants offered a variety of responses on what they perceived leadership to be and what it meant to 'be' a leader. They brought with them a diverse range of ideas on what leadership was and these are presented through the following themes that emerged from the data.

Leadership was personal qualities and skills

From the outset of the research the participants identified their very clear understanding of leadership being demonstrated through a leader's personal qualities and their skills. The participants all said that a good leader was someone who was kind and caring and a good role model. Having a passion for something and having courage to take risks or try something new were also attributes of a good leader.

During the whole group focus sessions the participants collaboratively deemed good personal communication skills to be an essential leadership quality. According to the participants, leaders were required to be approachable, have good people skills and be able to talk with and listen to others. A leader needed to be inclusive in their approach, committed to a task and get people motivated. Belle's comments were underpinned by a strong ethic of commitment and she described a leader as:

> …somebody who does everything in the best ideas of somebody else and helps others out to get things done. Somebody who gets out there and is not afraid to stand up and say "right we are going to get this done!"

Personal qualities of a good leader were also emphasised during group discussions. These included someone having strong ethical beliefs and respecting others. Fraser expected a good leader would be: "…someone who is not shy and they will make sure everything is like right and is really responsible, just good people who are always being honest, having lots of respect for other people…"

These qualities show respect and valuing others and contribute to a service ethic. Carla's view was:

> People who do the right thing and motivate and help others are good examples of leaders. They actually listen to the people in order to get things to happen. Like my brother, he always listens to me rave but then he makes sense with what he says next - he is a great leader who learnt how to be a leader by rising above people who were being bullies to him. That taught him a lot and me too, I learnt from him.

Carla felt that this involved a person being able to listen well, which showed they valued and respected other people. Self-respect and respect for others were important qualities highlighted by the participants constantly throughout the focus group discussions.

The findings revealed a consistency from all of the participants of a sense of moral purpose to their leadership beliefs. They all constantly made reference to a good leader having personal qualities of showing right from

wrong and acting with moral purpose. Belle's perception of leadership supported this idea:

> Leadership is knowing right from wrong and encouraging people rather than pushing them. People with good morals and ethics come into play a lot in leadership. Those with bad morals do not have as much respect from others and do not respect people either.

While discussing the importance of being able to *show* moral leadership the group also reiterated the concept of a good leader having the courage to *act* with moral purpose and to *speak up* as an essential leadership quality. When asked to explain this further, Belle stated:

> …leadership requires you to be quite confident people, people who are able to speak well and are able to communicate with people well. You need to be able to speak up and have some say with confidence to get your points of view across.

Similarly Heath commented on a situation where moral action was evident. He claimed: "…it is easy to stand up to a bully and do the right thing when you believe in what you are doing, when you know helping someone else is the right thing to do."

This supported the notion of having a voice in leadership to speak up about ideas that mattered and reiterated their feelings of effective communication skills being an essential leadership quality.

Leadership was leading by example

All but one of the participants understood leadership as influencing and inspiring others to get something done. An example of inspirational leadership was shared by Baylee, who suggested Laura Langman [New Zealand Silver Fern Netball representative] inspired others to be great Netballers through leading by "working hard, guiding others in her team, modelling a fit healthy lifestyle to others and leading by example".

Heath believed his cousin was also someone who modelled leadership by example and said he is "not a leader in a formal position but a leader all the same". He explained:

> My cousin [Name] shows leadership in his job, although he doesn't have a badge to say he is a leader, he just does it all the time because he can lead a group of his peers really well and with a friendly and nice tone to it and lead them - inspire them to do like stuff that they would never do. He leads by example to others I reckon.

Such good role modelling earned respect and inspires others, a quality Heath recognised as exemplifying a good leader. Lochie reiterated the importance of leadership being about acting in an ethical way, often meaning standing up for what is good for others even though it might be difficult or 'going against the norm'. His comments indicate leadership involved setting an example by not being intimidated by others. He stated:

> Leadership is having the ability to actually be nice no matter what other people are like, you have to listen to them and be nice. Like if there's a weak kid being bullied and stuff by your friends you can actually have the guts to step up and say "nah, don't be a dick".

He believed leadership was about inspiring others and taking leadership into all parts of his life. When asked what she thought about leadership Taylah responded with very strong opinions of the authenticity required to show leadership. She said:

> Ummm someone who is not just a leader in front of everyone, someone who doesn't just put on this "I'll do this because it makes me look good" and someone who is actually nice and but they don't just put on a happy face for the teachers and get the role as a leader at school and then go home and destroy their family life. Someone who is consistent all the way through.

She believed leadership was not just for show in public but in all contexts. It appeared that the notion of leadership being more authentic if it transcended contexts was a common theme across many of the participants' contributions. They suggested that it was not something to do in one context and then not be able to transfer it to others; a leader was required to be consistent.

The one participant who did not share the same views as the rest of the group described leadership as a job for someone in a "suit and tie". His

view was that only important people such as John Key was a leader because he had a job to do. Louie claimed: "…he has a job to lead people and he just does it."

Leadership was service to others

Although one of the participants believed leadership was about one person making decisions for everyone and showing people what to do, the others saw leadership as aligned with service to others or underpinned by a desire to serve others. Lara shared a specific example of an inspirational senior dance leader who shared a passion for dance with her and who was committed to the growth of others and building a community of dancers. She stated:

> …she still does her sport and her work and even though she says she is really tired, she is truly a role model because she still has time for other people to teach us dance and she just has the right attitude and is always helping and always there for you…

This emphasis on service was reiterated in the discussions of participants who saw successful leaders as those who served by motivating others and guiding them to achieve. Most of the examples the participants provided were leaders identified from sport or leisure contexts. These people were successful leaders, motivating others and modelling leadership by coaching and guiding others to achieve. The participants identified the leadership in these situations as an outcome of the leader *showing* people how to do things, providing a service for others by passing on skills and knowledge. They believed sharing was an important part of leading. For example, Baylee shared:

> My coach doesn't kinda tell you what to do; he kind of….I guess it's like you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink. He tells you all you need to know but then he makes you want to be good. He shows you how and he inspires you in a way that makes you want to be good. He used to be a good cyclist himself and now he is helping out by being a coach.

Belle acknowledged that leadership was helping others out and often going beyond what might normally be expected. She recognised leaders as those people who helped others and gave back to the community and she believed she could do this herself by helping out younger dancers.

Leadership was a shared endeavour

The participants' views of leadership reflected their strong opinions that it required the efforts of many to make leadership happen, a shared endeavour. The group agreed in the focus group discussions that teamwork and sharing ideas were important in leadership practice. The participants' views tended to reflect that leadership was about the collective (we) rather than the individual (me). This theme of leadership being a shared endeavour rather than one person acting alone was shared by all except for Louie, who was clear that leadership was a sole job for one leader. In contrast to this view, the others identified the importance of communal leadership. Baylee summarised her feelings about the collaborative nature of leadership from her sports background by stating: "Leadership is not about one person necessarily. It is more about everybody being supportive and if one person is falling back then the whole team supports that person to get back in the group again".

Taylah who believed the co-operative efforts of many made leadership most effective shared her view. She commented:

> In a group I generally find that if one person does something everyone kind of follows on and so by them showing leadership in any way everyone kind of follows on even if not in the same way, everyone learns from it, like chain reaction sorta…

These comments indicate that leadership development was happening naturally as people worked together. Everyone participated and learnt from the example in the group.

Leadership was developing and sustaining meaningful relationships

The importance of relationships in connection with leadership was evident in comments from individual interviews and whole group discussions. A common theme that emerged across the contributions of all the participants was that leadership was dependent on the ability of a leader to create positive respectful relationships. They all recalled a number of situations where leadership by teachers had been effective due to the efforts they made to establish strong connections between people in the class. Baylee shared an experience from intermediate school where a teacher made huge efforts to establish positive relationships with students in the class, and stated:

> Our teacher bonded with our class really well. She understood us and listened to us. She knew all the gossip and didn't judge anyone. It was like a massive family. We were very close and still are here at high school this year even. We still keep in touch.

It appeared from Baylee's comment that the teacher's value of and respect for the students had created an environment where there was reciprocity of trust between the teacher and students. The example that Baylee provided indicated that the teacher was modelling how to form good relationships and, at the same time empowering the students through positive interactions and encouraging a feeling of belonging.

Lara had also reflected on a similar experience where the relational elements of leadership, such as caring and listening to others, were the key to how she felt about and responded to the leader. Lara acknowledged the caring nature of a teacher who established positive relationships with all his pupils as a core leadership practice, which had positive effects on their learning:

> The teacher was just really cool and he had a cool personality that made you want to be in his class and learn stuff. Because he listened to what you said you felt like he cared. He did that with everyone and he did it all the time. We had the best year in his class.

Her comment also reflects the view that consistency is important for leaders in their actions. The students in this teacher's class said they felt a strong sense of belonging, of being connected with and accepted by others. Quality relationships where they felt valued had positive impacts on their self-esteem and attitude towards the connections they had as part of that community, of belonging to something of value to them.

All of the participants made it clear that when relationships with leaders such as their teachers were close and trust was reciprocated then they felt valued. They believed strong relationships made the leadership effective and the leader credible.

In summary, it became apparent that the perceptions and understandings of leadership that the participants held were based on their leadership prior to entering year 9. Their collective notions of leadership were strongly focused on; a leaders personal qualities of a having a voice and effective communication skills, leading by example, having a positive service ethic to encourage and motivate others, an understanding of leadership as a shared endeavour, and most importantly meaningful relationships were paramount to successful leadership. However, on entering the secondary school context, these perceptions were challenged.

Entering the gap - challenged perceptions and understandings

Entering into secondary school as a year 9 student exposed all of the participants to new leadership structures within a completely new context. Their ideals and notions of leadership were challenged and they perceived limited opportunities to practise leadership were limited. This had an impact on the way they viewed themselves as leaders. Taylah's comments reflect her feelings, she stated: "…ummm all our leadership has been thrown away cause we are the little babies and now no-one wants us to lead them. So we were the leaders and now we kind of don't get the option to lead".

Since leaving intermediate school the participants' had been introduced to the notion that leadership was about formalised positions within a very hierarchical structure. They claimed that it also appeared to be exclusive to senior students who had to earn the right to hold positions such as prefects, senior student councillors, head students and class leaders. They understood they could aspire to be leaders but could not actively lead at present. They had to wait their turn when they were older. Heath stated:

> …year 9's don't get any opportunity, like they get opportunity to lead …ummm…with their classmates but it's more on a friend relationship not like as a leader. There's not a lot of leading opportunities for us. It's more for the head students who are in year 13.

A theme that emerged was the participants' belief that leadership at secondary school was perceived as a 'position' or role to play. Louie defined leadership as: "People who have badges on and get to sit at the front in assembly, they have a different uniform on so you know they are a leader".

Taylah's view, also shared by others, was that leadership positions were for high achievers and for those with skills in public speaking as she had seen demonstrated by the year 13 leaders at school. She understood leadership was for those who met certain criteria to fit into a role. She did not perceive it as an inclusive option for all students and remarked:

> I have realised that school kind of sees it as someone who is an academic achiever and can stand up and speak in front of everyone and I find that there are quite a few leaders out there who don't even know that they are actually leaders because the school doesn't recognise them as leaders. They don't get any opportunities and so just sit there and don't even get involved.

Over half of the participants indicated that leadership was not something that could be accessed by everyone but could be earned through a person's abilities, personal qualities and effort. A common understanding shared by all participants was that the senior Head Students *became* leaders. They had to work their way into the position and earn the right to

be a leader – usually later on in the senior years. One of the participants acknowledged that she aspired to get the top leadership position but would have to follow a process to be head student when she reached year 13. Belle stated quite emphatically: “I really would love to be on the senior exec and even as a year 9. I have got my sights set on like getting head girl or deputy head girl – like that would be so fun…”.

However, Lochie did not aspire to this role after observing the amount of responsibility placed on his sister who had been in a senior leadership role and commented:

> My sister was on that Senior Leader exec thing. Apparently it’s a lot of work; it’s worth it in ways and not in others. My sister and I are not as bright as my brothers so when she got the leader job it was a kind of reward for her. But she had so much to do and got really stressed out.

This kind of leadership, was seen by Lochie, as way too structured with too much responsibility on one person and not shared amongst many people. The group indicated they were critical of the leadership selection processes at secondary school. This became evident during a focus group discussion when four of the participants pointed out that the secondary school selection processes for leaders did not recognise all year 9 students as potential leaders or give them appropriate opportunities to develop and demonstrate this. Further to this discussion, at least half of the group was able to recollect a number of times where they felt they had the potential to lead in a situation at secondary school but had not been selected or given the chance. This included being overlooked for selection of class representative, leading an activity or event for year 9’s, captaining a team of year 9 students in a sport or being involved in whole school events in a leadership role.

Throughout the year, they had observed student leaders being selected by teachers and senior management staff or peers for certain leadership roles. However the participants commented that rather than being selected on their leadership ability these students were often chosen because of their “loudness” and “heroic” antics. Belle stated that:

> Our class leader was chosen based on what the school had been told by her previous school because she was good at lots of stuff. But she can be a bit silly and out there at times and there are other people who would love to be that leader and get their opinion heard and listened to.

From their observations of the leadership practise of the head students, all of the participants agreed that the senior leaders often exercised influence over others using extrinsic motivation. They had observed that the seniors' leadership was based on offering rewards for accomplishing something, most often for winning a competition. For example, students were led by the head students to get involved in the school swimming sports at school in order to be known as the best house group in school. Although participants acknowledged this style of leadership was necessary to get people involved in activities around the school, it was limited to sporting activities so not everyone could contribute. Their comments revealed they wanted to be included and to be able to suggest other activities such as drama, theatre sport, dance and music but their voices were not heard. Carla, particularly passionate about drama, shared:

> Yeah I definitely see it [leadership] at especially like at the house meetings and stuff where the house leaders and teachers are organising things. Like people really look up to them like they're Head Girls and Head Boys and stuff and like they are like…I forget what you call them. But we don't get to say what the house competitions are though…like there is no drama group or anything.

What was becoming apparent was that the current leadership practices in their secondary school context were challenging the participants' initial understandings of leadership. Where previously they had many opportunities to practice and demonstrate leadership, they now identified few opportunities. This frustrated the participants who had previously been afforded opportunities to lead at intermediate school and outside of the secondary school context. This was a perception shared by the majority of the participants and had underpinned their conceptual understanding of leadership but it was not *fitting* into the secondary schools' more formal, hierarchical student leadership structures. The new experiences in year 9

were very different to their year 8 experiences and challenged their existing understandings of leadership.

Opportunities for learning and practicing leadership

It was evident that the participants' understandings of leadership had been formed through opportunities to lead and from role models in the home, community and school. Predominantly, the family and community provided contexts for learning and practicing leadership, for example through being associated with sport and extra-curricular clubs and activities.

Family and community contexts for learning about leadership

The home was an important place to develop understandings of leadership through the actions of role models. Parents were identified as significant people who provided examples of leadership by modelling appropriate qualities and skills at home, in the workplace and community beyond the home. From these experiences many of the participants had learnt new skills and ways of thinking. As Carla stated:

> I predominantly think my family are the most important leaders in my life. They have taught me a lot of stuff about choices and decision making through what they do every day, not just at home but at Dad's work.

Likewise, Taylah spoke of the role her mother played in modelling leadership to her and acknowledged that this had enabled her to recognise leadership in other people even though they might not have been in positions of power. She claimed:

> …I can tell straight away if something is happening in a leadership kind of way cause I have been bought up knowing what leadership is. I haven't been just told to go and do it, my Mum has explained why – she talks through things and shows me the right ways.

Siblings, in particular older brothers or sister, also played an important role in influencing leadership perceptions at home for all but two of the participants. One of the two had no siblings and the other participant did not see his older brother as being a leader in any form. Older siblings

provided guidance and inspiration through their modelling of leadership in many situations. These siblings demonstrated leadership qualities of decision-making, positive attitudes and good communication skills. For example, Carla described her older brother as an:

> …excellent leader and I think about that a lot, cause he was bullied at school and he taught me a lot from that, just how he dealt with it. He kind of teaches me…he kind of leads me by what he does and how he talks me through things. He says it like it is and is sometimes even being more strict on what I do than my Dad. But I respect him and I think he is a real leader.

The participants emphasised that the inspirational actions of their siblings had encouraged them to follow in their footsteps and had provided opportunities for learning about and experiencing leadership.

Another opportunity for learning leadership outside of home was in the community. This was mainly through involvement in sports teams and clubs. Brogan learned about leadership through the actions of her coach and commented:

> …I find leadership with La Cross is more about coaching. Leadership shouldn't be about telling people what to do – it should be more about pointing them in the right direction. And so I find with La Cross when I am leading people to do the drills you kinda just show them what to do, but you don't just tell them to do it!

Leadership shown by coaches and community leaders in sport, as described by the nine participants who played sport, was mentoring and guiding. These participants perceived that they were given opportunities to apply these leadership principles themselves by leading their peers in a variety of ways. They highlighted that this was a very important opportunity to develop and practise their leadership. Baylee claimed she learnt about leadership through participation in sport and from the leadership of her coach, stating:

> Sport personally taught me about leadership – yeah, cause we have like a captain on our sports teams but we all get the chance to share the decision making and supporting each other. Our coach makes sure that we take on a leadership role

> so it's not just the captain or left to one person. I have learnt a lot from having to do it with my cycling team while we are biking, kind leading on the spot!

The school as a context for learning about leadership

All but one of the students also indicated that the school context was an influential context for learning leadership, in particular their intermediate or previous school. The student who indicated otherwise had very narrow views of leadership and rarely looked for it or acknowledged leadership in action around him. He stated: "…nah there isn't much leadership here except the teachers, I spose…oh and those students with badges. But that's about it really."

The school context was cited by the other participants as influential on their understanding of leadership. The majority related their leadership learning to positive experiences from previous intermediate school contexts. These ranged from having leadership roles with specific jobs to do through to volunteering for event management or running assemblies. Louie recounted his experience during a focus group session:

> I had the role of the school (my Intermediate School) PE/Sports equipment monitor leader. We all got a badge and I felt like I belonged in a group. We had to look after all the equipment and make sure it all got put back. There were a lot of things we could do to be a leader.

Half of the participants talked about how one particular intermediate school offered specialist form classes for students who were talented in the Performing Arts (music, dance or drama). These participants commented on how they felt this was possibly the best leadership opportunity of all as it allowed these students to excel in their strengths and observe good leadership role models. Taylah was very passionate about the opportunities the class had provided, in particular for learning about leadership. She stated:

> I was in the Arts Academy class, which was the most amazing experience. I had the best teacher ever who just bonded with us and made school such a fantastic time. We all knew each other and our strengths and we treated everyone like we were

> family. I didn't get a leadership job at school that year but being in the Arts class, you were a leader anyway 'cause we were expected to do a lot in that.

The five participants who had experienced belonging to the arts academy class at intermediate explained how the class had had a significant impact on shaping their leadership perspectives. Themes that emerged were learning about leadership through the choices they made, the performances they had to deliver and the composure they had to keep while dealing with pressure situations. This classroom context had had a major effect on the students' views of leadership as learning about leadership by doing it.

In contrast to the positive leadership learning experiences at intermediate school contexts, the participants' opportunities to learn about and practice leadership generally diminished as they moved into their first year of secondary school. Their experiences were limited to observing the actions of senior student leaders and teachers in formal positions of leading and they were rarely offered opportunities to lead themselves. During discussions the group all agreed that leadership was learnt by 'doing it' and they emphasised the importance of being given opportunities to lead. Lara talked about getting involved in the action rather than sitting back and watching it happen. She felt she learnt more when she was actually given the opportunity to lead. She said:

> Leadership is like in camps, you see leadership like we did at Primary School – like you have more experience when you take action, you can't have experience when you sit there and do it in your head, because you have to try it or get involved in doing it.

Concern was expressed by almost the entire group over the lack of opportunities to be involved in the leadership structure as a year 9 student. Two participants, however, felt that there were too many students at the school and that this would mean less chance of them being leaders anyway. Heath was one, who commented:

> Well there's no formal leadership for year 9's but there are some casual things. So like the formal stuff is like a head boy

> or a leader of a specific group or something that's been…it has to have organisation to it but that's not for year 9's.

Brogan expressed her concern about this by saying:

> I 'spose like at this school it's just like the Year 13's like Head Girl and Head Boy that lead some assemblies. Some students with the year 10 junior forum, they come round and have like different activities going on at different times. But mainly the people that hold positions are the recognised leaders but there's probably others that go unnoticed – like us, we don't get the chance to show any leadership or not get any positions anyway.

Similarly, Carla highlighted the lack of opportunity and stated: "We don't get the chance to show what a good leader is really…like we are younger and everyone else is older at school, so I don't think year 9 get the opportunity to lead at all…other than in sport".

Carla indicated that opportunities were very limited and offered only to students who were senior students or those involved in sport which excluded her completely. This reinforced the notion that leadership opportunities were restricted to a few. The participants appeared to be disheartened about not having their leadership potential recognised and that this was impacting on further leadership learning within the secondary school context.

Silenced – with no voice

The students expressed their concern that they perceived few opportunities to share their ideas or be heard. In their focus group conversations they demonstrated a strong desire to be valued and respected as a 'year 9' student. Baylee expressed her desire for an opportunity to be heard, to have a voice in things that mattered to her. This was reflected in her comment:

> I think just being able to kind of have a voice I guess, cause as year 9 you're kind of really small in this school. People don't really take your voice strongly, when you say something they're just like "oh alright", but if year 9's said something and

> people actually took what we said into account that would be really cool.

Adding to the notion of a lack of opportunity to be recognised or heard, there was an acknowledgement of informal leadership practice that was apparent everywhere but was not being recognised as actual leadership. At least half of the participants talked about "unnoticed leadership" happening without being recognised as such. Taylah commented on this, saying:

> I really like the stories that you see on Country Calendar and stuff where you see a leader helping others and stuff but no-one knows about that person and also I see lots of people at school who are a leader but who may not know they are leading because the school doesn't recognise them and tell them that.

In order to grow as leaders, the group discussed the need to be given opportunities to lead and through this to feel valued. In particular, two participants went as far as to say that they saw numerous examples of students leading in the playground in a variety of situations but it is often not acknowledged as leadership. This again highlighted the conflicting views of the participants recognising leadership as more informal and inclusive and the school portraying it as formal and exclusive. This, they felt, limited their opportunities to lead. Heath commented on how the secondary school offered only *formal* leadership positions, not *informal* ones where he felt he could have contributed. He stated:

> Well there isn't a lot, there's no formal leadership for year 9's but there are a lot of casual things. Like in a team or like in a club with your peers is what I would call casual. I did that at my old school and ran games and stuff. It wasn't formal, it was just fun and it didn't have a badge. But it doesn't happen here. There's no like games at lunchtimes at all.

It was clear that there were significant differences in opportunities to demonstrate and learn leadership between the intermediate and secondary school. The participants' responses identified a significant difference in entering into secondary school. Leadership culture between

these two contexts, resulting in impoverished leadership experiences for year nine students entering into secondary school.

Mindful of the gap

It became apparent through the focus group discussions that they were frustrated and feeling like 'powerless' young leaders. Fraser was adamant that they needed to do something now rather than wait for someone else to do it, and stated:

> Year 9's need to be able to stand up and say this is what needs to happen and stuff. We need to be learning how to do the decision-making stuff cause if there were no year 10 or 11 or 12 or 13's then what? If we aren't given the opportunity to be leaders or learn how to do it by doing it then we would be like chucked into cold water when we actually need to do it!

One of the participants acknowledged that she wanted the opportunity to do something and be proactive as a year 9 student. She alluded to the fact she felt she could lead now, whatever the structure, if she was given the opportunity. She remarked:

> …I haven't been given as many opportunities as I would like because I am year 9 and I am not bragging or anything but I am a smart kid and I could do a lot to help people and with my peers we could do a lot to get our points across. Like I personally would love the opportunity to get some of my ideas across and the opportunity to lead. There's heaps of things that we could do to make it better for the year 9's because nobody thinks like a year 9 like a year 9 does!

Her determination and positivity inspired the group. However they all felt that because they were given few opportunities to be included in the formal structure currently in place, they were no longer valued or recognised for having any leadership potential. These participants also believed their age kept them at the bottom of the leadership structure and played a large role in preventing their inclusion in leadership around the school. Belle stated:

> But you know certainly I think it is degrading that we are not seen as valid or old enough to lead and also seen as we don't

> have as much to say because we are kids and all we think about is “rainbows and unicorns” and things like that…

When given the opportunity to lead in the right environment and to have positive people around who recognised their potential, the participants acknowledged it had been a very supportive leadership experience. However this supportive leadership environment was not nurtured at the secondary school level. For example, Taylah stated:

> I can understand that it is like we’re year 9 so we are new to the school and they want us to get like used to it and stuff but I think in term 2 we are used to the school, we know what sort of morals we have and things like that. I think they should be able to speak to us openly about attending junior forum or maybe a different form of it like a year 9 junior forum. We need to be included.

Addressing the gap

The participants acknowledged that the school did provide some programmes to help them become acculturated into the school and to get a sense of belonging. However few of these related to leadership. One example was a formal structured peer support programme at the beginning of their entry to secondary school that had been organised to help them fit into life at school. It was a leadership exercise where year 12 students provided leadership guidance and support for the year 9 students. However, Heath commented on this being a brief experience and not something of great value for him personally as it provided leadership opportunities for the year 12 students only. He stated:

> You don’t know who to go to and what to do for help really. I mean the year 13 mentors we had at the start, they just played games with you and stuff with you, they didn’t get you to think. They showed you around but it was only for one term when you really needed them for the whole year.

Taylah recalled her experience of the peer support leaders as being of benefit to her learning about the school. She stated:

> Yeah on our first day of school, they [the year 13’s], well a few of them were in a group called peer support and every class got 2 or 3 of them and they kind of broke us into the school

> system and stuff and they kind of came every Friday just for the first term and just chatted with you. It was kinda cool.

Clearly Taylah had enjoyed the mentoring relationship and the opportunity to speak with student leaders about issues that were important to year 9 students.

Some students felt many of the leadership opportunities were 'hidden'. Two participants mentioned one other leadership forum available to the year 9 students organised by a school staff member. This was where year 9 students could get the opportunity to experience a leadership forum and share their student views. Although it was exclusively for year 9 students, only three of the participants knew about it. Belle commented on being unsure of how to get involved or what purpose the group served. She reported:

> They seem to be a secret which I think is a bit strange really cause its…to be honest I don't understand the point of having a secret leadership group if they are not coming out and talking with us about what they do, like I think it's a bit silly because by keeping it to themselves they are talking but they are not acting!

The findings from the study indicated that the participants held a wide range of perceptions and understandings of leadership and on what made a *good* leader. They were able to identify a number of key contexts that influenced their leadership understanding. The participants' perceptions of what they understood leadership to be encompassed a variety of ideas from traditional and current leadership discourses. Their contributions to discussions highlighted that they desired to be given leadership opportunities as they had when they were at intermediate school. The findings indicated an apparent 'gap' between leadership opportunities provided for participants at intermediate to those afforded to them moving into secondary school. The majority of the participants expressed an obvious frustration, as they perceived that their leadership potential was not recognised. They believed that secondary school did not value them as potential leaders at year 9, despite the strengths and skills they had

developed from their previous intermediate school and community contexts.

'Be'ing a leader across the gap

The second purpose of this study was to investigate and document how an appreciative inquiry (AI) model might assist in developing the year 9 students' leadership understandings and practices. This next section presents the findings in the form of themes.

The key findings were that the learning opportunities created by the appreciative inquiry (AI) not only supported but also enhanced the development of the participant's understandings and perspectives of leadership. Also illustrated was how the AI model focused on developing positive relationships in a learning environment that was collaborative and inclusive. Student voice was central to the strengths-based AI approach. The AI approach provided a strategy to validate previous leadership experiences and bring the best of these forward to 'bridge the gap' between intermediate and secondary school leadership opportunities and learning.

AI and the development of a new leadership understanding

All of the participants expressed how rewarding and positive the experience of working within this AI project had been, in particular for enhancing and developing their leadership understandings and perspectives. A comment from Lochie reflected his leadership development. He stated quite emphatically:

> …yeah my ideas have definitely changed cause I remember at the start I said that umm leadership was a person who was well dressed and had a high up role and was mature and was like quite old-ish and wasn't young but now anyone could be a leader and you can look as shabby as you want really…

Belle also shared her views on how her ideas on leadership had developed. She believed:

> I don't really think they [my leadership ideas] have changed as such but they have become more enhanced or maybe more specific or even wider so that you envelop a lot more and you exclude less things but all the stuff right here [pointing to the final leadership post-it-note poster] is like incredible and it is us!

The participants were encouraged to listen to each other and genuinely appreciate the knowledge of those they worked with. It became clear that over time they developed an appreciation of their own strengths through participating in these consultative processes. Brogan shared:

> I have learnt a lot of things about myself during this process. These were things that I guess were always there that I never picked up on or noticed until now. It has also sharpened my thoughts on what leadership is, so now when I think about it I have a good idea of what it is.

They all talked about how the collaborative nature of the AI process assisted the growth of their ideas about leadership. Their leadership perspectives and understandings were expanding and for Lochie in particular this had given him an appreciation of many perspectives of leadership. During an interview with Lochie, he shared:

> My ideas on leadership haven't really changed - just expanded, my understanding has gotten bigger and this is because this project made me stop and think about the ability to understand how others think and to be able to communicate to them in an appropriate way. I have learnt from others ideas about leadership.

The focus group sessions gave all the participants the opportunity to share dialogue and engage in conversations to help the development of their leadership understandings. It was evident from their comments that the atmosphere created by AI process enabled them to comfortably share ideas. The learning environment established with them created a forum that was inclusive and based on collaborative processes of listening to each other and giving and receiving positive feedback.

The AI process provided opportunities for leadership practice and provided an opportunity to volunteer and trial their ideas of leadership. The co-construction of the content in the sessions also helped students and they

actively sought leadership opportunities by having a say in planning what was to happen. They willingly embraced opportunities to negotiate how the activities would happen and on many occasions they would change the course of a session with their suggestions so that it better met their needs. For example, the group chose to share stories as a whole group rather than in pairs, which meant they got to hear a wider range of stories and develop a greater appreciation for each other's strengths. This created a greater awareness of the many perspectives participants brought to the group and it assisted in shared, co-created ways of learning about leadership. Fraser noted that, although everybody learnt in different ways and had different ideas, the AI process provided an environment different to that of previous learning places for him. He stated:

> Things have changed in a way for me in that I've got new things to think about, like I haven't lost my old ideas but…from the people in our group I have learnt some stuff 'cause everyone has…different qualities…and might see things in a different way to me. I like what I am learning about leadership being so many things to different people and I like how I am learning it – it is actually fun. It is not like class where the curriculum is already in place.

Carla described how valued she felt throughout the process particularly because this group of students had been chosen rather than marginalised from a leadership development opportunity. She said:

> I loved it I thought it was really good because the fact that you picked us when no one else does. I kind of felt really special the fact that you're actually taking the time. Most of the time, even though adults are nice, they still have this mind-set where kids are just kids and their voices aren't really needed to be heard. Just because of their age or that they're not really mature enough but really you are! It's just no-one takes notice of you.

The students enjoyed the opportunity to negotiate and be involved in designing the learning practice within the AI environment. The participants were showing growth as learners and opening up to new ways of doing things through reflecting upon new ideas.

Everybody was encouraged to listen to and respect people's contributions and, through this, to develop a broader understanding of what leadership could be. This was particularly so for Louie, who had shared very limited personal ideas on leadership in the beginning of the leadership programme. He used the metaphor of a pigeon to help him share his understanding of leading with the group. Initially the group questioned him, asking: "what have pigeons got to do with this?" He explained, linking the constant 'busy' ness of pigeons with leadership action and the notion of them providing an example of stepping up and doing what they wanted. He also mentioned how pigeons were always visual – you can see leadership. He further commented during a focus group session adding:

> …pigeons are still important in leadership because they were always there for us to see. They weren't scared to do what they wanted and they were just always busy fossicking around on a mission doing stuff in the trees out the window…

His view of leadership was 'action' and he was seeing this by looking out the window at pigeons beyond the room. The AI process seemed to encourage Louie to share *his* views and supported him to explain using his *voice*, not sharing a definition from someone else's thoughts. He exposed others in the group to a new way of looking at leadership. This was acknowledged by the group as "really amazing" and with comments such as "wow I hadn't thought of that". They acknowledged the importance of the freedom that the AI model provided allowing each individual to share and contribute information. Lara's comments indicated how the process actually helped her open up possibilities for further leadership development. She said:

> Wow…I have like learnt to be kind of a better person cause like sometimes you just don't notice stuff and then you like don't think of it the same as how we have thought and talked about things in this group. Like there are so many things I have been thinking about now and it is just so cool to see it from other people's way of thinking.

This is also reiterated in Taylahs comments. The positive nature of the AI process had given her increased confidence in herself. She claimed:

"…Because the activities were getting us to look at positive things all the time you always left feeling really good about yourself…"

AI and the relational learning environment

The AI process focused on generating positive relationships, rather than assuming they would just exist. The learning environment, fashioned by the strengths-based development activities used in the AI approach, appeared to create an atmosphere that the students described as supportive and caring. All of the participants noted how the research process had provided an opportunity for them to build relationships and to share ideas. They commented on the positive relationships that had been formed between peers and with the researcher, which were founded on trust and established through the AI process. They expressed a sense of belonging to something quite special and that this was something they had rarely experienced in other learning environments at this stage in their secondary education. What was highlighted here was that, despite feeling valued in this research context, this was not the case outside of the AI context. The AI provided a safe and supportive environment where the participants were encouraged to share their previous leadership experiences and ideas from intermediate school through their personal stories. This part of the process provided a framework that celebrated what the students did well and further built their confidence and self-esteem.

Carla's views of the process reflected a sense of comfort from being with the group in this type of learning environment and she stated:

> I loved doing the post-it-notes with each of us able to put in a little bit and then getting the chance to discuss it. Like everyone wrote different bits about it and they all come in and everyone helps out and gets to see different ways of seeing things. I like how we got to get to know each other in fun ways at the start that was great because I didn't really know any of these people to start with so that was a great thing to help me. Usually, in a classroom you just delve into it straight away and you don't know each other, then you don't want to put your views forward

All of the participants commented on how, while sharing stories, the process of answering questions and giving feedback encouraged them to look at themselves and reflect on what they already knew. Heath used a mirror as a metaphor to talk about his learning experiences and said:

> Yeah I've learnt more about myself cause this leadership thing has been more like a mirror doing like what 'you' [talking about himself] think leadership is which I thought it would be more like a workshop about 'how' to lead and you teaching us what leadership is. I got to reflect on my own leadership not yours…

His comment acknowledged that the leadership perspectives and understandings were from his ideas, not from adults. Similarly Taylah agreed on this sharing her feelings of how she felt valued and had a sense of belonging to a positive leadership context where they were able to work together and focus on the positive. She enjoyed the opportunity to create positive quotations from their voices and felt these were inspirational and motivational for everyone. She stated:

> I really liked writing quotes and felt really comfortable writing them with this group, cause we all got to create stuff together that was inspirational for each other. But what was best was that it was our words. I felt that was really motivating.

AI and engagement in meaningful learning tasks for enhanced leadership awareness

It appeared that within the AI context they were able to explore how it might be possible to include *their* leadership ideas within the current school structure. One of the most tangible ways in which they expressed this possibility was when they were invited to create a leadership model, using Lego blocks, for their secondary school. They physically planned and created models of new leadership environments where year 9's were included. Their models recognised year 9 strengths and aspirations within school wide student leadership.

Although the models were very different visually and physically, all of the participants' voices clearly expressed the same idea about year 9 students having something of value to contribute to school leadership. Lara's model

represented different parts interconnected with joiners that she explained were people connected together. It showed a circular but connected physical space for leadership in the school and she described it stating: “This school [her model] is made up of abstract parts – we are an important part!” During this focus group session the participants shifted their understanding of leadership outside of the current formal structures. They developed new ways to exercise their leadership.

Fraser described his creation as:

> A leadership machine. The reason this machine works so well is because everyone represents one part in the machine. A machine can only work well if all the parts of the machine work together. If this is the whole school and everyone works well together then the whole school will run smoothly. Year 9’s could steer the machine to show others our perspectives.

Carla and Baylee chose to create a one-dimensional model that was made up of many parts representing a smiling face. They explained how the blocks in their model represented a place: “…where everyone helps and is a different part to the bigger picture. Every bit is different – on its own, it is odd, but together it is wonderful and happy”.

Louie created a machine model of his own and conversed with two other participants while working on it. They discussed the number of people needed in each model and the importance of more people needed to make the machines work – similar to “school needing more leaders” was one of their comments. Louie had three people at one stage at each end of his model of which he turned one around to face the others, explaining that: “I think it would work better if they could all see each other and know what was going on to make it all work better”. Louie’s comment generated further discussion within the group. They expressed their concerns at hardly being seen in any way at school or included in leadership.

During this stage of the inquiry, the participants presented models illustrating their perceptions of leadership being less about hierarchy and more about circular and connected inclusive models with lots of people. The models, although diverse structurally from circular connected models

through to abstract one-dimensional styles, they were based on similar ideas of what leadership could be – more inclusive, more about opportunities for everyone and more connected models of leadership.

During the final stages in the AI process, the participants shared their voices and ideas on a vision of a different world within the school context for leadership for year 9. They were involved in the co-construction of statements that reaffirmed their strengths. These statements included:

- I am most successful when…
- I am motivated by…
- I lead…

The participants claimed they struggled with this task at first as it was like putting a 'skite' sheet together, which they felt uncomfortable about. However, they were encouraged through reading the reflections in front of them that had been co-created as a group from each session. They acknowledged their strengths and ideas and soon realised that it was energising and enjoyable. Some of the strength statements shared were:

- I am most successful when I make rational decisions (Louie)
- I lead best with a focus on we not me (Heath)
- I am most successful when I am able to use my voice and stand up for what I believe in (Belle)
- I lead best when I am under pressure and get the opportunity to make positive things happen (Fraser)
- I am motivated by the thought of leadership happening everywhere – in the front, from behind and in the middle of a team (Baylee).

The sheets that the strength statements were recorded on provided positive affirmations for the participants. They expressed how their initial anxiety disappeared and how reassured they felt from reading them in print. It became apparent from their comments that their sense of self-worth and confidence was changing all the time and in a positive way. Belle, who was a confident young person to begin with, commented on

how the AI process had further developed her sense of self-worth. She said:

> I have always liked getting up on stage and like be able to inspire people to want to do things like dancing cause that's just what we did at intermediate and stuff – but I think through this process I am a lot more confident now in who I am and what I am doing. I think I put a lot more respect into myself now. I think I am lot braver now to take risks because I believe I can.

They recognised that all of the stories, posters and artefacts collected were from *their voice*. They commented on how much they had achieved in such a short time and how meaningful it was to see it altogether in one space. As a result of the process, the participants expressed how keen they were for all year 9 students to be given this opportunity also. The participants shared their thoughts on what they wanted to happen and expressed a desire to have their voices heard beyond the AI context. They were excited about what might be now and how they could plan ahead. Belle commented: "We want our part in the big picture of leadership. We want to be connected to others. It's about equality; we don't want to be at the bottom of a pyramid".

AI and the importance of student voice

During the AI focus group sessions all of the participants commented on how the experiences of sharing their voice through stories and conversations encouraged them to reflect on how often their student voice was not listened to. Fraser commented:

> Yeah it's good to actually get our voice out, like as we have already talked about the fact that adults have a say but we are younger and like they don't know what we are thinking about, especially about leadership stuff.

The students perceived that they were not really encouraged to have a say about leadership and issues that mattered to them within the school context. Six participants voiced strong desires for more opportunities to be listened to. For example, Brogan stated:

> It felt really great to have a say. It makes you feel like your opinion actually does matter, and you see that a lot of people are thinking similar things to you. A lot of the time you don't say what you think because in your mind no one really cares what you have to say. So it felt great to say how I saw things to people who were actually listening.

All of the participants expressed favourable comments on the opportunity to have a say about things that mattered to them, but most importantly they appreciated being listened to. They noted that on entering the secondary school context changes had occurred, in particular with regard how little they were listened to and felt this undervalued their potential as leaders. They expressed concern that they were not being given opportunities to lead or being acknowledged as having any leadership understanding that could contribute to the current leadership structure.

During a number of focus group discussions, about three quarters of the participants identified that context played an important part in shaping their leadership understanding and learning. Although they had been apprehensive of the unknown to begin with, this apprehension changed when they discovered that the context generated by the AI approach engaged them in different ways of learning about leadership. Brogan said that the approach of telling stories had supported her personal development and gave her the confidence to talk about herself with others stating:

> It wasn’t very easy to share my voice at the start because I didn’t know really what I thought, my ideas were quite vague and I couldn’t really put them together. But telling stories was awesome. It made it easier to share things about yourself and helped you get to know other people. I have learnt a lot of things about myself and it has sharpened my thoughts on what leadership is.

All of the participants commented on their increased confidence to talk about leadership and how much they learnt through sharing stories about where they felt they were most successful. This process encouraged them to acknowledge their strengths from their previous positive experiences. They all believed that the stories they shared had helped them to learn more about each other and to develop self-belief. Some participants said

they felt inspired by these and saw the value in envisioning how these could assist their future leadership practice. Taylah discussed her personal leadership development during the AI process stating:

> I can really tell if someone is being a leader and it stands out even more now because we focused on people's strengths. It boosted my self-confidence a bit and made me feel like I had a part in something – that I was meant to be here. It made me think about what we could do if we tried…

This opportunity to reflect was cited by Carla as bit of a scary thing to start with, but talking further, she felt reflection was a way of reaffirming people's strengths, reaffirming what one knows. She shared:

> I was like… this story is my personal thing, do I want to say it and talk about it and kind of let people pick it apart? But then after I did it I thought no this is a really good thing, like people need to do this more often, cause sometimes I think people forget what they are good at, they forget their skills and when someone actually tells them they don't believe it. I learnt a lot about myself from that. I learnt a lot about others ideas as well…

The participants acknowledged that having their stories appreciated at all times by their peers and the researcher confirmed that their previous leadership experiences were of value and worth sharing. They voiced their opinions more readily and shared ideas spontaneously as their confidence continued to grow. The more they shared their individual stories the more they discussed the value of the opportunity to reflect on their strengths.

The dialogue between and within the group was identified as an important process of learning for the participants. They seemed to discover more about themselves and about each other and they commented that as this knowledge base grew, so did their ideas and perceptions about leadership and of what it could be. Lochie reported:

> For good leadership to actually happen, I believe leaders need to be people-persons. They have to know people and be able to communicate well - that's listening too! They have to show an understanding of people who may even frustrate or annoy them.

During the focus groups all of the participants mentioned that being invited to share their voice and to give and receive feedback to each other had been a valued experience. They had engaged in processes of active listening - an important part of leadership itself. The participants jotted notes as they listened to stories and then identified strengths to share with the group on reflection sheets. They suggested this had provided them the opportunity to practice leadership in a safe and supportive environment. Brogan felt that it had been a very rewarding process for her and listening to others and sharing had encouraged her to speak up more about her views. She acknowledged:

> I learnt a lot from sharing the stories and even more from the reflection sheets where we gave feedback to each other. Usually I focus on the things that I need to improve rather than looking back and seeing the things I can already do well.

As participants identified strengths in each story, they noticed some common themes emerged from their leadership practice and this helped to craft new ideas on leadership. The strengths reiterated their sense of concern for others – the moral leadership they were passionate about. The participants believed that increased levels of confidence in themselves and in each other encouraged them to voice stronger ideals of what might be. Lara expressed her positive feelings about the experience, stating:

> …like it's just really cool just to share our ideas and hear other people's strengths and like see how similar or different we are and um getting feedback and like compliments on ourselves and everything and it makes you realise what other people think of you and like how they look and like it's just really cool to like boost yourself up.

Belle expressed her frustration that the group were being overlooked as potential leaders despite the personal strengths that were being revealed in the AI context. She explained:

> Leadership should be about equality, everyone should be able to show leadership in some way. At the moment it is based on age with a lot of people not thinking we can make important decisions about life, that younger leaders aren't as good at leading.

During a focus group session Belle commented on this stating:

> We recognised Lochie as a leader and recommended he join this group in the start. He didn't have a position as a leader but we knew he was a leader, a really good person. He's just modest and needs to be reminded of his strengths.

AI encouraged future action and commitment

The AI approach provided positive experiences for participants to unpack their ideas and knowledge about leadership and assisted them to come to new understandings of leadership. They began to notice new and exciting ways of leading that were not hierarchical leadership structures that they had observed at secondary school. What was highlighted during this part of the process was that the participants included themselves in the leadership model. This was in contrast to their initial views of not having the opportunity to be included in the secondary school leadership structure. Lara stated:

> Like it can't be like a whole school with only one person - leadership can't be whole without all the people, year 9 included. I really liked Fraser's model with like year 13's supporting the steering wheel and the wings were helping the direction and putting us at the wheel would bring a year 9 way of looking at leadership too - that was so cool.

No longer were they excluded, but more an integral part of the bigger leadership picture. The participants experienced an increased confidence to talk about leadership and what it might look like with year 9 students included. The process seemed to have not only enhanced their leadership understanding but had also given the participants the confidence to discuss leaders and leadership and the implications of this from their perspectives within the school context. Where the participants had previously acknowledged that the secondary school context was focused on leadership positions rather than on the actual leadership of people and their strengths, they believed the AI process had shifted their understanding of leadership from positional leadership to enacting leadership.

The participants talked about how the AI process had engaged them in leadership actions that were focused on making a difference in the future. They started to share innovative ways of making positive changes for year 9 students. They reasoned that the process had encouraged them to focus on what worked well before and how it could work well again. Brogan stated:

> I really liked telling the stories of things we have done well because it made us look at positive things and remember the good things we were actually able to do and made you feel good about yourself. It made me start to think about the things we could do even better together now.

For most of the participants, the AI process had increased their ability to recognise leadership in themselves and to look at applying it in different contexts. They saw the value of sharing past experiences to assist them in identifying their strengths and bringing the best aspects forward. They started to realise it could provide new ways of looking at year 9 leadership within the secondary school context. However, for two of the participants, there was still some self-doubt because of their young age and because of the structure of hierarchical leadership structure presented to them at secondary school. Carla was hesitant but shared: "…you kind of feel like I don't know why others should listen to me…then you doubt yourself, you are only year 9 and think there are older people that might be better!" Similarly Heath showed anxiety about change saying: "…well I really want to get into leading debating but I have to wait another year for that because it is only for year 10's…because that's the way its done here."

'Be'ing challenged across the gap

All of the participants acknowledged how positive the whole AI experience had been for them and how it had encouraged them to look at leadership at school through a new set of eyes – their own. However, although the AI appeared to be enhancing the leadership understandings of individual participants it seemed it had limited change potential, as it was not being applied to school. At least half of the group expressed their concern of the challenge of going on alone, of 'be'ing the leader they knew they could be.

Lochie was clearly concerned about the challenges of leaving the positive environment and relationships that had been established through the AI process and facing his peers who had different ideas on leadership. He said:

> It was cool here how we got to speak our mind, like you know we can't just randomly speak our mind in class or with our friends about leadership and stuff. They would just like look at you weird… like I would probably never have joined this group if I hadn't been asked to join because none of my friends would do something like this.

Carla also had some self-doubt around the challenge of changing the traditional structure of leadership with particular reference to age. She shared:

> …like when you kind of think about someone younger than you leading everyone else, there might be people that are kind of like 'why should I listen to you?' and then you kind of feel like 'Well I don't know why you should listen to me!' And then you think that you can't do it – you doubt yourself, you are only year 9 and think there are older people that might be better!

It appeared the participants were motivated to apply their leadership knowledge and strengths to the secondary school context, however they were faced with challenges of having their voices heard and responded to. They had the desire to carry on but felt the school structure would again place barriers in front of them unless they had the support of a staff member to assist them with further planning. The participants identified that a challenge associated with keeping up the momentum would be finding an adult who respected the students in order for their voice to be heard and actioned. Heath said:

> With the ideas that we are coming up with it would be good if you stay and help us and support us making those happen, because even though you are a leader [talking about himself] you still need help and I reckon that would have finished it off if we went on and actually changed something.

One proactive participant offered to organise a meeting in the following term with the teacher in charge of pastoral care to create some action. Belle stated:

> We need to catch up with Mr [deputy principal] and talk with him about what we have discussed here and what we want to do now. Cause they won't let us do anything unless they understand why we want to make some changes.

Creating further action

One month after the last focus group session, the participants invited me back to the school. This was an unplanned encounter but I saw it as an excellent opportunity to catch up with them before they finished school for the year. Since our last time together their secondary school junior forum had been selected for the following year. Three of the participants from the AI research project had applied and had been accepted into the group. This acceptance action reinforced the school's leadership culture of processes about positional and formal leadership practice.

Belle, one of the selected few, commented that a focus for the junior forum was to raise the profile of student leaders around the school. She explained to us that she assumed this meant working really hard, doing lots of different activities together and including many people. However, she felt disillusioned when it was explained to her that the forum group would be required to sit on stage during assemblies as this would be seen to raise their profile and they would be seen more as leaders. She commented:

> That is like so pointless us like sitting up there on stage, it simply makes us seem better than them and yes it does get us out there but if we are not actually participating in leading in some way or bringing any content to them or anything it is just pointless…

Belle and the two other participants had challenged this idea at the forum meeting and had made some suggestions for further action. Taylah, another one of the students selected for the junior forum stated: "Somehow we have to *be* approachable, not just look it. We need to get to know students like what we did here and actually do something…like run the assemblies, not just look good on a stage!"

During this last contact session with the AI participants, Belle appealed to the group for their contributions and thoughts on creating further action. This supported the notion of the importance the participants placed on meaningful partnerships enabling successful leadership to happen.

Summary of findings

The AI process provided a collaborative forum for the participants to share their personal ideas and understandings of leadership and had supported them to further enhance these understandings. During this forum the participants were encouraged to draw positive views of leadership from past experiences into their current context. This process encouraged them to share their voices and celebrate their ability to plan for and create new possibilities for their inclusion in secondary school leadership practice. By doing so, the AI model had created opportunities for 'bridging the gap' between intermediate and secondary school leadership experiences.

The next part of this chapter discusses these findings in relation to the literature on current youth leadership development and with regard to the research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has"

(Margaret Mead, n.d.).

Introduction

One of the purposes of this research was to discover what the leadership perceptions and beliefs were of year 9 students who have just entered the secondary school context and to examine what may have influenced their understanding of and opportunities to practice leadership. It was hoped that with a better understanding of the leadership perceptions of the students it would be possible to proceed towards the co-construction and implementation of a collaborative strengths-based approach to further the development of year 9 leadership.

Although the group of 10 students who took part in this research did not represent the full range of opinions about leadership development of all year 9 students, the findings have provided some considerable insights into how an AI approach could be used as a way of creating an environment for developing students' understandings and abilities to practise leadership. It has also provided strategies for assisting them to engage in leadership actions upon entering the high school context. Initial interviews and focus group discussions showed that the majority of the participants viewed leadership as a concept that was manifested in actions rather than positions. Leadership was about leading by example and service to others. Furthermore, leadership required moral purpose and collaborative practices and was about developing and sustaining meaningful relationships. Their views were varied, with most reflecting in-

depth understandings about leadership. They showed an ability to comprehend leadership as a complex concept.

This was a significant finding to the research as, from my experiences of working with young leaders in schools and from synthesising key themes in literature on youth leadership (for example Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Holdsworth, 2005; McNae, 2011; Mitra, 2005, 2008; Wood, 2010), it is clear that the views of leadership from the perspective of young people are rarely considered because adults may not believe young people can comprehend, yet alone articulate the complexities of leadership. Gaining insight into the year 9 perspectives of leadership for this research was of great significance as it revealed a more 'youth-centric' view of leadership, one not based solely on adult views of leadership being imposed on them (Dempster, Stevens and Keefe, 2011).

Further to this, in seeking to address the invisibility of student voice on leadership, this research has provided those working with young people within the secondary school context an understanding of the meanings youth attach to leadership. Listening to the voices of young people is, as Czerniawski and Kidd (2011) state, "a valuable and powerful mechanism for educational change" (p. xxxv1). The students' views reflected quite complex and holistic perspectives of leadership. Many adults would not be aware of the complex understanding young people have of leadership. By listening to students voice and gaining their views, this could help inform staff in secondary schools and assist in the development of programmes for leadership learning which best meets student needs.

The empirical work of researchers of student voice, for example Cook-Sather (2002), Fielding (2001), Flutter and Rudduck (2004), MacBeath et al. (2003), Mitra (2008) and Woods (2004), all demonstrate the importance of consultation with students about their views and understandings of learning. Their studies reported noticeable differences in the relationships between staff and students where adults engaged with and consulted students about their learning, the ways they wanted to learn and how they learnt best. A more trusting environment that encompassed greater

reciprocity of respect between adults and students was established. As Bolstad (2011) states, from her studies on student voice associated with their learning within New Zealand educational contexts, consultation with young people requires consideration of the roles and responsibilities of both young people and adults to address “power differentials between partners” (p. 32). The findings from this research provided further evidence of the importance of consulting with young people and listening to their views on leadership from their previous experiences to inform current practice. This can also validate the previous experiences and knowledge young people have from other contexts.

The AI process provided an approach that was based on adults and young people working together as partners in learning. This challenged the current feeling the students perceived that the school rarely consulted with year 9 students on ways they could contribute to year 9 leadership. However, the study also draws attention to the issue of the importance of understanding what the students would be bringing to the partnership, that is, their preconceived ideas and experiences of leadership. The work of researchers Flutter and Rudduck (2004), in the United Kingdom, investigated schools that were using a number of different strategies to consult *with* students as “expert witnesses” (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004, p. 105). Their study presented success stories of new ways of viewing student leadership development where students and teachers worked together to restructure student leadership models. Their research has led to redefining leadership roles for students and giving young people the opportunity to represent their views in the wider school community. This current study *has* listened to the voices of the participants and has considered their prior knowledge and understanding of leadership as key to the success of the programme. This offers the possibility for encouraging schools to explore new approaches to youth leadership development, not only limited to school contexts but which also extend to contexts beyond the school gates.

The comments shared by the participants on their perspectives and understandings of leadership showed that they understood leadership not only as 'doing' tasks and standing up in front of people, but also as actions of 'being' involved in leadership and making change happen. These views of leadership were a combination of transactional and transformational leadership characteristics (Bass & Avolio; 1990; Burns, 1978; van Linden & Fertman, 1998). Van Linden and Fertman (1998) suggest that drawing from both models shows an understanding of 'doing' leadership and also 'being' a leader. They add that having a balance from both models is necessary for effective leadership. The implications of this are for schools to reflect upon the expectations that staff and students have about leadership and how this matches [or not] the current leadership culture within the school. This may include developing processes to expand leadership development models and include both transactional and transformational leadership practices. By doing so, it will raise awareness of the leadership strengths and potential of young people that previously may not have been recognised as leadership.

The students believed that everyone had the potential to be a leader. This was reflected in the narratives they shared about their different actions across different leadership contexts. However, on entering the secondary school context, they identified an environment that operated with a more transactional approach. This exposed a gap between their views of leadership and the rigid structures of the secondary school that provided diminished opportunities for leadership. With this in mind, it would be useful for schools to provide opportunities for task-orientated leadership to simply experience being in leadership. Furthermore, the AI process uncovered young people's strengths related to their leadership as they experience leading in different situations. Students coming to know their strengths, through a formal discovery process such as AI, could be better positioned to identify opportunities for contributing to the school leadership culture and taking responsibility for identifying areas where change can occur.

The influence of context on leadership

It is evident from examining some of the literature available on youth leadership development that student leadership learning opportunities in secondary schools are highly contextual, frequently adult designed and generally age specific (Dempster, Stevens & Keefe, 2011; Kress, 2006; McNae, 2011; Mitra, 2008; Woods, 2004, 2005). Opportunities to learn about leadership are more often than not designed for a particular cohort of students (generally a year level) and infrequently span across different ages. This can restrict young people's understanding about leadership, as they are only exposed to what they see around them. Attention to cross pollination of leadership ideas across year levels and the sharing of leadership experiences between students is a concept that schools could include in their student leadership development frameworks. AI could provide a model to enable this to happen within educational contexts.

Interestingly, the literature highlights that youth development initiatives, in most secondary school contexts, are infrequently sustained over long periods of time (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007; McNae, 2011; Mitra, 2008). The findings in this study illustrated that sustained and regular periods of time were required to establish and maintain a positive environment based on trust and collaboration. Consequently, the students were motivated and willing to be engaged in creating change.

The findings in this study also illustrated that contexts outside of the secondary school had been influential in shaping the participants' leadership understandings. On shifting from the intermediate to secondary school context, the participants' perspectives and understandings of leadership were challenged and influenced significantly by the secondary school structure. The participants perceived a more hierarchical and structured leadership system that challenged their previous understandings. With few perceived leadership opportunities, the students did not want to be passive and only observe leadership but wanted to be active leaders and engage the skills they already had. They also believed the traditional 'teacher-led' and hierarchical leadership methods for

identifying and selecting leaders were not very appropriate. This perceived difference between the leadership practise in the two contexts was compounded by the fact that the students felt they were excluded because of age and were not given opportunities to develop their leadership or given the chance to lead. They believed these practices marginalised students and created an elitist leadership structure.

This evidence illustrates how important it is for schools to reflect upon their current leadership structures with regard to offering leadership opportunities across all year levels. It also highlights the significance of knowing the backgrounds of individuals entering their schools. This point is highlighted by McGee, Ward, Gibbons and Harlow (2003), whose research into the transition of students to secondary school in New Zealand, raised concerns about previous experiences and achievements being disregarded by the secondary schools. This research proposes that the same could also be said for leadership skills, abilities and learning needs.

Attention needs to be given by both the intermediate and secondary school to show responsiveness to the leadership skills these young people have and how they are acknowledged or utilised. McGee et al. (2003) also suggest that there is a period of adjustment after the student's transition to secondary school for the student to settle in and make responses to the demands of a new environment and achieve well. The students in the research acknowledged this 'adjustment' period but felt their leadership abilities were still not acknowledged beyond this. They identified a significant gap in the transfer of their leadership knowledge from one context to another. This study has identified an even greater need for interventions such as the AI model used in this research to help bridge the gap and provide opportunities for young people to apply their leadership knowledge through planned and sustained action.

An interesting finding was the effect of the gap on the students' motivation to be included in leadership opportunities. Literature on young peoples' motivation, with particular relevance to youth engagement in learning, calls

attention to the importance of caring relationships with adults and the provision of opportunities for students to participate and contribute in engaging activities (Benard, 1997). Without consideration of relational concepts and opportunities to actively apply their learning, this can lead to high levels of frustration, low motivation and disengagement of students from school. This is often for students who are looking for engagement in and opportunities to participate in leadership within schools. This raises the question as to 'why these students had not been given the opportunity to contribute to school leadership?' It also identifies a need for staff and administrators in schools to reconsider student contributions to leadership and look at different ways to involve young people in leadership practice in the secondary school environment.

Relational leadership within context

Positive relationships in the leadership-learning context were a key feature of providing an environment where leadership could thrive. All students recognised the importance of a caring teacher-student relationship. The reciprocity within this relationship provided opportunities for leadership learning and leadership practice to flourish. The students highlighted how their previous intermediate school contexts were environments where collaborative and trusting relationships were easily established and maintained. They felt a sense of connectedness to their school and believed teachers cared about them and their learning. With an enhanced sense of belonging they believed they were more likely to take up opportunities for leadership.

The students' comments intimated they enjoyed learning environments that emphasised collaborative processes where young people and adults worked in partnership. This was reinforced during the students' participation in this research, which was founded on the notion of working in partnership. However, findings in this study indicated a perceived gap between the participants' perceptions of collaborative leadership practice that included strong relationships with their teachers and other leaders, to what was presented to them by the secondary school context. As they

stepped across into the secondary school context they encountered an environment where relationships with teachers were more formal due to the significant specialist focus on curriculum and achievement areas with few opportunities to develop sustained relationships with adults.

Harris and Lambert (2003) contend that leadership learning should be a shared process and one that focuses on relationships at the core. They describe leadership as: "…learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively…" (p. 90). Unfortunately, in the case of many secondary schools, the increased nature of accountability and achievement-focused teaching and learning has let to the development of systems, which can restrict opportunities for collaboration to take place. Large class sizes, pressured time frames and restricted resources provide many challenges for teachers. Furthermore, some teachers are hesitant to share power within the learning relationship (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007). This makes planning for and enacting collaboration challenging.

Fielding (2004) suggests this is a common challenge within school contexts where the "largely anachronistic structures and cultures" of schools separate teachers and students into two unequal arenas (p. 309). Such a notion is very significant as it illustrates how influential school structures can be in influencing the ways in which relationships are formed and sustained between the teacher and the students. The students commented on the nature of the relationships they had with teachers in the secondary school and expressed how they sometimes felt isolated with little connection to their teacher. Given that the classroom is an important context for leadership learning, the students shared that this created an imbalance of power in the adult-student relationships and a reduced sense of agency on the part of the students.

The work of Mitra (2008) in a number of schools in the United States highlighted the essential role relationships play in creating positive learning environments where students feel comfortable and confident to express their opinions and involve themselves in new opportunities. Her

work reinforced the importance of strengthening relationships with students by creating learning communities where both teachers and students could participate in and contribute their expertise and are considered “members of school-based learning communities” (p. 9). This raises the issue of how schools can provide opportunities and experiences to work in a more collaborative ways. It also highlights the importance of teachers reflecting on the learning environments that are created in their classrooms that allow for the exchange of ideas and a sharing of expertise.

This research reinforces Mitra’s (2008) work and suggests that teachers in secondary schools should be encouraged to examine their role in pastoral care and be supported to develop ways of working with students to strengthen relationships. The AI model in this research provided a framework that could be used to create successful learning communities and strengthen student-teacher relationships.

Leadership learning environments that support student engagement

A number of contemporary approaches to youth leadership development (Lizzio, Andrews & Skinner, 2011; Frost & Roberts, 2011; MacBeath, Swaffield & Frost, 2009; McNae & Mackay, 2013; Rudduck, 2004) focus on consulting students and involving them as active participants in making decisions. A key theme across each of these approaches illustrated that successful learning communities for young people are those where young people are viewed as partners and engage with teachers and learners in a collaborative learning environment. In this sense they are learning together and co-constructing new meanings about leadership. Lizzio et al (2011) believe that when methods are used in leadership learning environments that actively engage students there is “greater authentic disclosure” of their perspectives and ideas (p. 86). Frost (2008) adds to the literature on developing learning environments where students are valued as partners within her research on the HCD (Highest Common Denominator) Student Partnership in England. Her research provides further evidence of the benefits of engaging students more fully in the life of their schools. However, she claims the challenge is to disseminate

these ideas and lessons more widely in order to build a network of new practice for more collaborative student engagement in schools and communities.

Being involved in decision-making processes that impact on the culture of a school is an important part of school leadership (Dempster, 2011). A key finding in this study was that the secondary school context provided *some* opportunities for year 9 students to be involved in school decision-making processes. However, these were few and often related to superficial areas of school life and decisions on cafeteria food and uniform changes but very infrequently on matters that focused on learning. This finding is congruent with the work of Frost and Roberts (2011) who, in their review of a number of studies on student participation and learning communities in schools found that schools often present rigid structures that dictate what student participation should look like. Frost and Roberts (2011) argue for more democratic initiatives to be set up where school structures support and encourage participation by involving all students in decision making processes, where the relationships with teachers are seen as partnerships and most importantly that "the experiences and expertise of pupils are drawn upon as resources for learning and school improvement" (p. 81). The implications of this are great. This research has shown that where students are given opportunities to work with adults and create learning foci informed by their ideas and perspectives, they are motivated, engaged and want to learn. This supports the principles outlined in the New Zealand curriculum documents and in the Ministry youth development strategies calling for attention to provide learning opportunities for young people that develop their self-confidence, self-worth, innovative thinking and creativity.

The gaps presented in this research are of concern. It would appear that while the Ministry of Youth Development is pushing for a more proactive stance towards youth development in New Zealand, there are gaps in what is actually happening in schools. In 2009 a review of the *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa* (2002) by the Ministry showed that,

although there were positive outcomes from some youth development programmes, there is still a gap between what is best practice and what is currently practiced by the youth development sector. The review suggested a number of recommendations for providers working with youth. One of the recommendations was encouraging the use of a wide range of activities that appeal to young people and create needed experiences. The AI approach developed in this research with young people could provide a useful way to pull together the threads outlined by the *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa* (New Zealand Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). This research provides evidence of a successful positive youth development initiative for youth that appealed to young people and created experiences to enhance and develop their leadership. Although this AI approach has been used in a secondary school context, the framework is not necessarily limited to work with youth in school contexts. People working with youth within many organisations could use it.

This discussion has highlighted the importance of considering the existing leadership understandings and practices of young people who are entering the secondary school environment. It has illustrated the significant role context plays in provided opportunities for year 9 students to lead and contribute to the broader school community. This has implications for students' desire to be involved in leadership in the future. The importance of relationships between the students and the teacher cannot be overstated. Central to the students' ideals about leadership learning was the desire for collaborative learning opportunities and partnerships. Reflecting upon how opportunities for leadership learning are structured and created should be an important consideration for all those involved in working with youth. By addressing the gap which students perceive between their experiences in intermediate school and secondary schools, there is further opportunity to ensure students remain engaged and motivated leaders making meaningful contributions to the school environment and beyond.

The next section of this chapter discusses the application of the AI intervention as a strategy to 'mind the gap'. It discusses the findings presented on the use of a strengths-based appreciative inquiry (AI) model as a youth leadership development framework within a secondary school context. The discussion examines the themes that materialised during the AI process and the leadership learning created through meaningful student engagement in an appreciative leadership community. The discussion takes into consideration the existing literature on youth leadership development strategies and positive youth development.

An appreciative framework to bridge the gap

The AI for this study served two purposes. The first was to engage an AI that could serve as a potential research tool to explore student leadership understandings that are brought from the intermediate school to the secondary school context. Secondly, the AI was used to create a learning community with the aim to enhance the leadership understandings and practice of the year 9 students.

The AI process and enhancing leadership learning

The AI process was different to what the students had previously experienced in terms of leadership learning. They perceived that the approach helped to create an open, caring and positive environment. This environment challenged the participants to identify approaches towards building agency by focusing on their strengths and how they could contribute these. In addition to this, the students' responses to the AI practice indicated the environment had encouraged and enabled them to share *their* voice, and positively influenced *their* engagement and *their* feelings of empowerment as student leaders. The findings resonate with the work of Giles and Alderson (2008) in their literature on the power of the AI approach to create an environment that can "enable a renewed sense of purpose" and lead to a shared understanding of future possibilities (p. 469).

Similarly, McNae and Mackay (2013) purport that AI "is a process that can be used to engage learners in a reflective and action informed process of learning" (p. 33). The experiential nature of the inquiry supported the students' diverse learning needs and highlighted their strengths as both leaders and learners. What became clear was the importance of generating a learning environment that addressed current learning preferences and also extended young people's understandings about what it means to be a learner in the 21st century (Bolstad et al, 2012). John Hattie's (2009) *Visible Learning* literature supports the notion of 'personalised learning' to create modern learning environments that acknowledge individual learning styles and previous knowledge bought to different contexts by both the teacher and learner. The AI in this research not only assisted in the students' leadership development, but also enhanced their personal understandings about how they learn best. The inquiry drew from adult and student knowledge and collaboratively designed a strengths-based programme.

The useful nature of AI in this research highlights the significance of the 21st century learning principles and the importance of embedding these not only in curriculum subjects but also in leadership learning and development opportunities for young people in secondary schools. This will require teachers to understand and enact dialogic processes within their classroom environment and within the broader school community so that further gaps are not created between formal and informal learning environments.

The AI model promoted these concepts and created a team environment with a strong sense of community and collective spirit and one that enabled everyone to contribute to achieving shared goals. The participants indicated that they preferred to learn leadership collaboratively within an environment that was built on trust and strong relationships. They believed such an environment helped to transform their shared visions into real actions and possibilities. As Kouzes and Posner (2012) claim "leadership is a team effort, not a solo expedition" (p. 5). This supports the AI model of

appreciating individual strengths to help foster a community of people based on trust, strong relationships and shared visions.

An interesting observation about the AI approach highlighted by Jansen et al (2010) is the existence of a congruency between the content being explored (collaborative, inclusive, informal leadership) with the characteristics of the AI approach (collaborative activities, valuing everybody's voice, co-creating different ways of learning). This highlights that when the process of inquiry is in synergy with the content being explored then the learning outcomes are likely to be more successful. In this research, the leadership development of the participants as a group was enhanced because of the process of appreciative inquiry. As such, AI is not only useful as a strategy for individual development but as Barrett and Fry (2005) claim, it could be "an over-arching organisational approach" to developing an appreciative culture throughout the school while enhancing leadership learning for all.

This could have a significant influence on the way students engage in learning. In his literature on learning organisations, Senge (2012) proposed that learning communities are like interconnected systems where "people at all levels are collectively, continually, enhancing their capacity to create things they really want to create" (as cited in O'Neil, 1995, p. 20). He challenges those working in education to look at organisations as living systems, to look at the bigger picture of the organisation and the many parts that make up the system. Barrett (2005) suggests a shift in thinking is needed to move the current focus away from problems to creating learning environments based on "imagining possibilities and generating new ways of looking at the world" (p. 36). In order for this to happen there is a requirement for teachers and students alike to be responsive to new ideas, imaginative and open to trying new ways of envisioning organisational and individual change.

The AI learning community created with the students in this research was one based on exploring leadership as a collective and focusing on what each part, in this case the *people* parts, could contribute. The appreciative

nature of the approach encouraged the group to value the collaborative community and to construct multiple positive realities of what leadership could possibly mean for them. The findings highlighted that supportive relationships were critical in maintaining the participants' motivation and engagement. Barrett and Fry (2005) suggest that the AI practice is very relevant in education settings for its value in creating "learning relationships that are generative" and values based (p. 95). This study could provide schools with a successful strategy to work on generating a leadership structure that offers a more inclusive school wide practice of leadership, one that focuses on the development of strong relationships between teachers and students.

The basic principle of AI states that what we focus on, we become, what we pay attention to, we move towards (Cooperrider et al, 2008). The process of focusing on situations where the students had been successful in previous leadership practise rather than looking at problems or issues affirmed and validated their previous experiences. As Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) state this focus on the positives and identifying capabilities "excites, energises and inspires" people and motivates them to want to change (p. 68). AI is about attunement to 'personal bests', which is a foundational part of positive youth development. In every organisation or group everyone has something good to offer and can bring something positive to a situation (Cooperrider et al, 2008). In this research, previous leadership experiences of the participants were sought and young people were encouraged to focus on their individual strengths exploring possibilities of 'what could be', rather than 'what's not right'. When situations are created for people to collectively share their strengths there are further opportunities generated to enhance the leadership capability and capacity of both individuals and groups. Cooperrider et al (2008) and Stavros and Torres (2005) contend that AI is a relational process that can effectively help to shape and build an organisation.

The processes of the AI approach have the potential to build leadership capacity within schools by challenging the traditional boundaries of

leadership structures and strengthening the position of young people and their relationships with others within these structures. This may allow students greater representation of their perspectives in leadership development within schools and a greater presence of students within leadership structures. Consequently, teachers could consider how the use of strengths-based approaches such as AI can help develop their own adult-student relationships in their classroom.

AI challenged the traditional boundaries of teaching and learning and was central to the development of a productive learning community that valued individual perspectives. The participants showed enhanced motivation and a willingness to contribute to the project because it was their ideas, created with them. It provided new ways of learning and encouraged different ways of enhancing their leadership capabilities. The students enjoyed the opportunity for working collaboratively and bringing together a lot of different ideas to generate something new. Jansen et al (2010) recommend this method in their AI literature suggesting that flexibility and negotiated structures achieve more 'buy-in' from the participants. Bolstad et al (2012) recommend teachers and students work in more collaborative ways and share knowledge to generate new ways of learning together. By teachers considering and planning for different approaches to teaching and learning, they may find they gain a deeper insight into their students' lives and what they bring in terms of experiences and knowledge.

This was evident with the participants in this research which again suggests the appropriateness of AI as a collaborative practice to enhance learning and leadership practise while working 'with' students (Kelly, 2000; McNae & Mackay, 2013). Schools could consider AI as a way of developing positive learning environments that engage students in more collaborative practices. This would likely require professional learning and development for teachers on how a co-constructed model could be developed with their students. It may also require working with students to support them in the development of co-constructing programmes of leadership learning within school and community contexts.

This study revealed an imbalance of power in the leadership systems within the secondary school community that were, in this case, aligned with the more traditional adult models of leadership structures. It was more of a top-down leadership structure. The research provided evidence that this strengths-based inquiry supported what McGregor (2007) describes as a 'bottom-up' change to the leadership structure in secondary schools. Critical to this was the collaborative style leadership development approach where students and adults worked as partners. One of the most interesting aspects of the research was the shift in power between adult and student and the effect this had on the students' perceptions of their abilities and potential to lead in the future. The trusting relationships formed between the researcher and the participants allowed a shift from the traditional perspective of an adult with power-over the students to a situation of power-with.

For successful educational leadership development in schools Gunter (2005) insists that changing the traditional power structures and cultures is essential to break down common barriers to democratic development. Senge (2012) similarly draws attention to power structures in schools and challenges those working in schools to ask what if education was "viewed as leadership development laboratories where students learn what it takes to bring about the sorts of changes that need to occur, within the school and beyond?" (p. 558). In order for this to happen, schools must be prepared to reflect on current leadership structures and discourses, which permeate the school context. By reviewing and being prepared to change these structures there may be enhanced opportunities for students to access and engage in leadership practices. This research highlighted the need for staff within the school to be involved as partners with students in creating more sustainable 'bottom-up' approaches to leadership development as described by McGregor (2007).

An appreciation of student voice

This research has illustrated that student voice is integral to the development of an inclusive leadership-learning context with youth. Cook-

Sather (2006) supports this notion of including student voice in transforming leadership models as their voice has a legitimate perspective, presence and active role to play. As suggested in further literature on youth leadership development in educational contexts (for example, Dempster, Stevens & Keefe, 2011; Groundwater-Smith, 2011), some students are marginalised and not given the opportunity to share their voice. The AI approach implemented in this research gave young people the opportunity to share their voices in an environment that was based on trust, openness and collaboration. It would appear that the appreciative inquiry approach which was underpinned by engaging students' voices provided a legitimate forum for sharing ideas, participating in decision making processes and having opportunities to see these decisions enacted.

Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) assert, an AI approach supports people to be "connected in full voice, to create not just new worlds but better worlds" (p. 61). Within the AI leadership context the participants were motivated and positive about future possibilities for them to apply their leadership learning to the secondary school context. The participants all agreed that the process encouraged the sharing of voice through meaningful conversations. Yoder (2005) proposes that inviting people into dialogue gives them the opportunity to share ideas and to collaboratively create new meaning. This could lead to new ways of doing; to creating change in the current ways student voices are heard. However the challenges associated with planning to engage student voice in formal classroom situations are immense and require a considerable shift in the way they are received in the teaching learning relationship.

Researchers in the area of 'student voice' also alert us to being wary of how student voice is defined and used (Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2004; Holdsworth, 2005). How voice is defined depends on the context and the relationships between those in the context. The AI process supported the idea that working with student voice requires special attention to who is being listened to and how they are being listened to. Equally important is

that the voices are acted on and not just listened to and then ignored. Lodge (2005) and Groundwater-Smith (2011) cite that this requires a shift in the way teachers and students engage in dialogue with one another. Bolstad (2011) and MacNeil (2006) also agree with this and suggest this shift will depend on a school's ability to review its current culture that defines what an approach to developing student-teacher relationships looks like. In this study the participant engagement in the process of sharing their voices led to innovative ideas being created and a strong community of young people with an increased sense of self-worth. As Robinson and Taylor (2007) advise through their work with student voice, that it is one thing to acknowledge voice but it is critical what happens with their voice and how their ideas are further acted upon.

AI as a positive youth development framework

The AI process provided an opportunity for the participants to develop positive affirmation statements to support their leadership in the future. These statements provided ideas about enacting leadership in the future based on the best of their shared ideas and experiences. However, the most important outcome of the AI was not so much the leadership performance of the group looking forward but the personal leadership development of each of the individual participants. The findings highlighted that the views that the participants held about leadership, although quite in-depth and complex to begin with, were enhanced further by participation in the AI. The AI process encouraged students to become more aware of their individual strengths through sharing stories of their past experiences of leadership and drawing out the positives aspects of those experiences. McCashen (2005) points out that the "connection between people's strengths represented through real stories of lived experience and their aspiration for something better is the key to every successful action for change" (p. 5). As the participants were made more aware of their strengths through sharing stories about past leadership they were encouraged to imagine how things might be for them in their future

leadership. They were getting a sense of the capacity to use their strengths and to transform their current leadership practice.

The findings from the AI also highlighted that strengths-based practice was more than just focusing on strengths. It requires what McCashen (2005) describes as “socially-just practice” (p. 14). The process of AI creates an environment that integrates the principles of inclusion, collaboration, respect and a special regard for human rights. This strengths-based approach to leadership learning engaged students in positive relationships where power was shared between student and adult. It acknowledged, through student voice, their perspectives and understandings of leadership as important and core to future leadership development. This research supports the notion that using an appreciative inquiry process ‘with’ students to seek and amplify their voice can lead to a better understanding of, and respect for, their experiences in their worlds (Cooperrider et al, 2008: Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). By using a co-constructed model of leadership development, generated ‘with’ the students, it was possible to create a learning community that enhanced leadership understanding of both the students and the researcher. As Lambert (2009) claims, the co-construction of knowledge supports the ‘building up’ or constructionist approach to leadership development. It is not merely passing on ideas from those who claim to know about leadership but collaboratively constructing knowledge with both teacher and learner.

The AI process used in this research highlighted the benefits of sharing power with students in order to create change. Working with the participants, not for them, built the participants self-belief about their capacity and potential to transform their current leadership practice. The findings suggest this approach validated the students’ previous experiences of leadership from the intermediate and community contexts that were not being acknowledged in their current school context. This celebration of their strengths and leadership practice contributed to the participants having an enhanced understanding and perception of

leadership and a desire to create change. A gap was bridged. The application of AI to the youth leadership development context has illustrated an effective framework that can be used to develop and enhance young peoples' leadership understanding and practice in many contexts. It can also support the development of their understandings about their personal leadership learning preferences.

Summary of discussion

In conclusion, while this discussion has affirmed much of the current discourse on youth perceptions of leadership within educational contexts, a number of findings draw attention to the impact of context on young people's understandings and perspectives of leadership. This research has also discovered a dissonance between student perceptions of their opportunities at intermediate schools and the opportunities that prevail in the secondary school through the critical reflection on the school leadership structures and leadership culture. This research has highlighted the importance of knowing students and discovering their previous leadership experiences. More so, it has drawn attention to the need for schools to reflect upon leadership opportunities they provide for year 9 students entering the secondary school. Also highlighted is the value of AI as a positive model for empowering young people to enhance their leadership practice. It also contributes to theoretical knowledge of a potential framework for positive youth development within school and community contexts. This research is significant because it validates the generative use and implementation of AI in schools and its usefulness within youth development contexts.

The next chapter presents conclusions and recommendations for future youth leadership development and further research.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated how the use of appreciative inquiry assisted in developing the leadership understandings and practices of a group of ten year 9 students. The focus was centred on leadership learning and provided a unique approach that challenged traditional youth development approaches. This approach was sustained over a five-month period of time. It was not just a 'one-off' or 'one-size-fits-all' approach as it engaged students in the evolving design and co-construction of the appreciative inquiry process.

The findings provided insightful answers to the questions outlined in chapter one. Firstly through exploring the question "What are year 9 students' perceptions and experiences of leadership and what influences these understandings or opportunities to practise leadership?" it became apparent that this group of participants shared views that were varied and in-depth. Their understandings about leadership revealed their ability to comprehend leadership as a complex concept. These were linked to previous experiences and opportunities within intermediate and community contexts.

The findings in this study also illustrated how influential context had been in shaping the participants' leadership understandings. On shifting from the intermediate to secondary school context, the participants' perspectives and understandings of leadership were challenged and influenced significantly by the secondary school structure. They identified diminished opportunities to learn about and practice their leadership as they moved into secondary school. This study has identified an even greater need for interventions such as the AI model used in this research to help bridge the gap and provide opportunities for young people to apply

their knowledge of leadership to their current secondary school context and bring their positive experiences of leadership forward.

The participants highlighted the importance of positive and inclusive relationships. These were essential in order to effectively enact leadership across a range of contexts. All students recognised the influence of caring teacher-student relationships and how reciprocity within relationships provided opportunities for leadership learning and leadership practice to flourish. The findings suggested that student-researcher relationships were strong when both adult and students could participate in partnership and contribute their expertise to the learning process. This required time and an ethic of care toward establishing meaningful relationships to ensure a positive learning environment was established within the school context.

The research illustrated that successful learning communities for young people are those where young people are viewed as partners and engage with teachers and learners in a collaborative way. In this sense they are learning together and constructing meaning about leadership. The AI process provided a learning community that supported the participants' needs for an inclusive, collaborative trust environment. This helped to enhance and strengthen their previous understandings of leadership by creating an environment they felt comfortable in to craft potential new ways of practicing leadership within the year 9 secondary contexts. The AI approach enabled this group of year 9 students, through positive affirmations and the engagement of a strengths-based approach to learning, to bridge a gap. They were able to close the gap between the best of what is and the best of what might be (Whitney et al, 2003).

However, this was an appreciative process that focused on strengths and possibilities. Rather than suggesting that year 8 students need to 'mind their step' as they move between the two different contexts to fit into an existing and in some cases restricted leadership context, it is proposed that the AI model developed in this research can assist in making this transition more seamless. The process not only supports the students but

could enable teachers to be involved in seeing and bringing the best parts of the students forward, celebrating what their students do well. The AI process in this study has provided a successful strategy to connect the student leadership from intermediate contexts with secondary school leadership contexts - bridging the gap. The positive outcome achieved from using an appreciative inquiry model to work with students celebrates their voice and builds from this. The AI process acknowledged the socially constructed ideas the participants had of leadership from previous contexts such as home, community and the intermediate school. These were brought to a new context and combined with other ideas and perspectives to co-construct a new understanding of leadership and possibilities for future leadership action. Cook-Sather (2006) argues that for student voice to be truly acknowledged it requires those working with young people to “letting go of what we think we know and entertaining the possibility of profoundly repositioning students in educational research and reform” (p. 381).

What has been significant throughout this study is the understanding that everyone brings their own ideas and different ways of seeing the world to situations. Interestingly, within school contexts students bring with them their own ideas and views of the whole school picture but are the ones, as Senge (2012) claims, with no voice and often no power to affect any change in educational organisations. This study has held student voice central to the inquiry process and has presented a new way of thinking about and enacting a strengths-based approach to influence youth leadership development. The findings provide evidence for the use of this strengths-based inquiry approach in schools and other contexts to enhance leadership perceptions, understandings and practice. The positive focus and successful outcomes of the AI approach through this research has provided an appreciative youth development framework that could be applied to bridge the research-practice gap in student leadership.

The purpose of bridging the gap is to value what young people bring with them to the high school context. Bridging the gap prevents the ideas

perspectives and students' planning from becoming nothing more than *just a plan* and student voice nothing more than *just voice*. The process helps to span the gap between the 'what is known' and 'what is now', the 'old and the new', the design of year 9 interaction and the implementation of year 9 leadership action.

Limitations to the research

As with any research, there can be factors that influence the way the research was carried out. Although they may not in any way limit the quality of the research, it is important to acknowledge these limitations.

A pragmatic challenge encountered during the AI within the secondary school context was the issue of time. The AI approach required sustained periods of time and this was not always possible in the busy school day. Having enough time with the participants during the day proved quite a challenge and often this was impacted on by bells cutting sessions short, rooms being double booked, access only to participants during a lunch hour or limited access to an environment for the experiential activities. The participants also felt the limited time together could challenge the impact they could have long term. The participants' ability to put their desired leadership into practice within the time frame of the research was not achieved. With more time within the AI context they felt they would have formulated a more solid action plan and kept the momentum and energy of the group going. Unfortunately the time staff had available to commit to this had been limited. If a commitment of partnership from adults within the school context had been possible, this may have also kept up the momentum of the participants' leadership actions.

Another limitation of this study is the nature and size of the sample. The research focused on the leadership perspectives and understandings of a small sample group of year 9 students from a decile 9, state, co-educational secondary school, which is not representative of all year 9 students. On reflection, this was relying on a small number of individuals to be "sole leadership champions and advocates" (vanLinden & Fertman,

1998, p. 157) of the AI leadership approach. It became clear also that because there were no staff members from the school available to be involved, the project was isolated in its ability to generate change in the wider school context. This problematic notion of how to share findings needs careful consideration (Cowie, Otrel-Cass & Moreland, 2010), as often schools and people responsible for decision-making for students are not prepared to listen to student ideas, particularly if they are at all critical of current practice. However the participants acknowledged this limitation but were still determined to take little steps forward and to build a larger support network of people by sharing their knowledge of AI and inspiring others to get involved.

The methods used to set up the sample group of participants were aimed at attracting year 9 students interested in leadership. This may have limited the number of students taking up the opportunity as the participants could have assumed this was for people who believed they were leaders already and excluded those who did not see themselves as such. This method of generating the sample may also have restricted the cultural make-up of the group as mentioned below. In some cultures, for example Pacific Island, it may be considered rude to put oneself forward for opportunities over others. What became apparent after selection of the sample group was that due to the nature of year 9 leadership structures in place for students within the secondary context, students that had applied were those that did not generally get leadership roles. This again may have limited the sample of students, as it was not representative of the diverse nature of all year 9 cohorts.

As mentioned earlier the school draws from a high socio-economic community that does not include a diverse population of mixed ethnicities. This meant the students who volunteered to take part in this study, all of whom identified as New Zealand European, were representative of just one cultural group. This may have contributed to a largely euro-centric view of what leadership is and what it could be. Having a more diverse

range of cultures to draw from might have offered broader responses in relation to leadership experiences and opportunities.

Possibilities for further research

Despite the limitations of this research, the findings have provided an insight into an apparent gap in leadership learning and practice for year 9 students who have recently transitioned from intermediate schools to secondary schools. Whatever the gap, these findings have provided a strong basis for both teachers and students in schools to take responsibility to close the gap. This opens up the possibility for further research on how this could happen to suit school contexts.

The group of students in this research arrived at the secondary school context with quite a deep understanding of leadership as a concept. However, other students may not have had the opportunity to be exposed to the same possibilities for leadership development and have a narrower conception of leadership on arriving at secondary school. The experience of the one student within this small group, who made a radical shift in his views of leadership to reflect an in-depth contextual understanding through the metaphor of the pigeon, does show the possibilities of students engaging AI to other areas of their life. Further research could involve following the participants in this AI process to explore whether they engaged this approach in the future and in other contexts.

As mentioned in the limitations section, the sample of participants was drawn from a narrow representation of the many cultures within New Zealand. As schools are becoming more multi-cultural there is an increased importance being placed on diversity and inclusion within educational contexts. As such, further research on student leadership could be undertaken using this model of AI with a broader range of cultural groups. By listening to the diverse perspectives of leadership from students across a broader range of cultures, this would add further authenticity and a greater understanding of leadership for a more inclusive framework of positive youth development.

Further research in youth leadership development could also be extended to include a wider group of students' representative of the year 9 age group or across cohorts of age groups. The AI process could also provide a platform for building leadership development programmes to work 'with' not 'on' students across the cohorts. As the process was designed in partnership with the participants, in this case a small group of year 9 students, the potential to design further AI models and research the voices of a diverse range of ages would bring further academic rigor to this framework of youth leadership development.

The findings from this research indicated that AI was one strategy that worked well to support the students to bring their best leadership and strengths-based practice forward, across the gap, into their new school context. The same could be said for other leadership environments where the students may experience a narrow or impoverished view of leadership and have not had opportunities to develop their leadership potential. The AI model could provide an approach to support young people to bring the best of themselves forward into any environment and apply it to that context. This could be, for example, a primary school context to intermediate contexts or secondary school to tertiary institutions or community contexts. Possible further research is required into the actions needed to help bridge the gaps and to support and encourage schools to be cognizant of what leadership perceptions and understandings students are bringing across the gap from their contexts.

In conclusion, what I believe this research has highlighted is that adults often 'do' leadership to young people based on what we know and have experienced ourselves. What is needed now is innovative, creative and new ways of doing leadership 'with' young people that resource them to be prepared for 21st century life. This research has provided an example of participatory democracy for young people, where year 9 students were embraced as true partners in leadership. They were given opportunities to learn and to lead. This research has shown that when students are engaged in meaningful opportunities to contribute to their leadership

development they have an increased sense of self worth and agency. They realise they can have an impact on things that matter to them and create change. The strengths-based AI approach “brings hope by making explicit connections between stories of strengths, growth and change and aspirations for a brighter future” (McCashen, 2005, p. 31).

There is a paucity of literature on youth leadership development and on appreciative inquiry as a method for positive youth leadership development. I believe this research has made a contribution to changing this situation and has provided a potential youth leadership development framework that is positioned from an appreciative stance. It is an appropriate transformative process that can enable educational leaders to support and resource students to better prepare them for 21st century leadership.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – The Research Timeline

Research administration process

April 29	University of Waikato Ethical Consideration approval
May 13	Contact the potential school to organise a meeting with Principal and Deputy Principal to explain my intentions of the research and seek permission to involve the school and participants.
May 17	Information and approval letter to Board of Trustees (Appendix B)
May 27	Contact school office and Deputy Principal to plan for year 9 assembly presentation, with information for the parent newsletter and letters ready to go to students who are interested in being considered for the project.
May	Year 9 assembly presentation.
June 7	Consent forms collected, selection of students and email successful and unsuccessful students

Research Inquiry process

June 10	Initial focus group meeting – information sharing and meet 'n' greet session 60 minutes
June 17	Individual interviews to happen - 30 minutes
June 24	Leadership workshop 1 - 60 minute Complete any remaining interviews
July 1	Leadership workshop 2 - 60 minutes

(Term 2 school holiday break: 15th July - 28th July)

July 29	Leadership workshop 3 - 60 minutes
Aug 5	Leadership workshop 4 - 60 minutes
Aug 12	Leadership workshop 5 - 60 minutes
Aug 19	Leadership workshop 6 - 60 minutes
Aug 26	Focus group reflections - 60 minutes Individual interviews – 30 minutes.
Sep 2	Complete data collection and email out transcripts for review to be returned by the 13th September by email to me.

(Term 3 Holiday break 27th September 2013)

Appendix B – Letter to Board of Trustees

17th April 2013

The Chairperson
Board of Trustees
Address

Dear Board of Trustee Members and Chairperson

My name is Janine Mackay and I am currently completing my Masters of Educational Leadership at the University of Waikato. Having worked in the education sector for the past 12 years with young people in secondary schools, I am very passionate about supporting and working with youth. I am most interested in researching the leadership development of year 9 students.

Being new to the secondary school environment, these students will have their own ideas of leadership from their schools and communities. The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of these leadership beliefs and perceptions as they enter your school environment so that their leadership needs can best be served and developed. I would like to invite ten students to be part of my research, which would involve working with me to co-design a leadership development programme.

My previous experience in this area comes from my work for the Waikato Institute of Leisure and Sports Studies (WILSS) developing student leadership programmes for year 9 – 13 students around the Waikato. In 2012 I worked collaboratively with Dr Rachel McNae at the University of Waikato on a pilot research project involving a number of year 13 student leaders from three Waikato Secondary Schools. This pilot study involved using an appreciative inquiry model of action research to develop and enhance student leadership abilities and understandings and to discover what students needed for them to lead at their best. By listening to the voices of students a strengths-based model was generated. I believe that with this model young people and adults can work in partnership to create leadership programmes that meet their needs and support students to lead at their best.

Following are the details of my proposed research highlighting the key areas of the proposed research and the benefits for you and the school. If you have any questions or concerns about the project, either now or in the

future, please feel free to contact either myself or my supervisor with the details below.

An appreciative view of Year 9 student leadership in a New Zealand secondary school context.

This proposed research specifically aims to:

- Use a strengths-based model to develop a leadership programme with ten year 9 students
- Explore the leadership beliefs and understandings of year 9's and examine what influences these

Who is involved in this project?

Five male and five female year 9 students who are prepared to volunteer their time to be a part of the research.

How will students and staff be involved?

This research will follow the steps as outlined below to ensure the participants are informed of all expectations of taking part in the study prior to accepting the invitation. Informed consent will be obtained through the following means;
Following an initial meeting with the Principal and Deputy Principal of the school the research will be outlined (Appendix B), the participants (Appendix D & E) and parents (Appendix F) before the research begins.
Parents and students will also be informed by the school newsletter (Appendix C) and will be given the opportunity to ask questions of me by email or phone.

I will speak for five minutes at a planned Year 9 Assembly in June. This will be an opportunity to share information with the students and to request the students' voluntary participation in the research. I will be available at the end of the assembly to hand-out the information sheets for students (Appendix D) and explain the consent forms (Appendix E). I will have available information and consent forms for their parents (Appendix F) and will be there for further questions.

Those students who show an interest will be given the forms to take home and explained the procedure for returning the signed forms to the staff liaison person listed above. The students will have the right to decline or not to be involved in the research without any adverse repercussions.
From those students who consent to the research, five males and five females will be randomly selected and will receive notification via email. Those who have not been selected will be emailed to let them know that

they have not been selected. The Deputy Principal will be informed via email of the students who have volunteered and will confirm the meeting times proposed with the students.

The research process

Semi-structured individual interviews will be used as a key part of the project. Students will be able to share their ideas about leadership; their beliefs and understandings, aspects that impact on their leadership practices and learning through story telling. These interviews will be digitally recorded using Notability on iPad, transcribed, and transcripts will be emailed to the students for review and approval. Photos may be taken of artefacts of student's work and of workshop activities. Student identity will not be revealed in these instances by means of photo editing or camera positioning.

The sorts of themes that will be explored are:

- Individual perceptions of effective leadership skills
- Perceived opportunities for leadership activity
- How leadership skills can be best developed and used within the students' environment.

A number of activities will be led during the sessions to challenge and extend the students leadership understandings and develop their ideas further. The students will work with me to develop action plans for leadership opportunities within their school context.

Students will be involved in:

Phase one and two-

- An individual leadership conversation using a semi-structured interview procedure (30 minutes). They will be required to review the transcripts of interviews they are involved in.
- A focus group with all ten students (60 minutes)
- Six leadership development workshops. These will be approximately 60 minutes in duration and held after school at a time to suit the students

Phase three - The final phase of the process will have two parts:

- All ten students in a focus group session (60 minutes) on their experiences of the AI process (Appendix J)
- A semi-structured interview (30 minute session) for each student to evaluate how effective this approach was in developing and enhancing their leadership practice (Appendix K)

In order for findings to be meaningful and implemented if necessary into school, it is vital that a staff member is able to support the students to make any necessary changes to school leadership structures and processes. This will be done through email. I would like to suggest that the Deputy Principal be this person due to his existing pastoral care relationship with the students. The students will be able to inform staff of their plans and the strategies they have developed through conversations and visual presentations of their work if they wish. This could be negotiated in the final leadership workshop, so the ideas reflect year 9 students sharing their voices and being part of decision making processes, co-constructing innovative and creative plans to lead confidently in the school context. A summary of the findings will be shared with the students and also given to the Deputy Principal.

Ethical considerations of the project

This research has ethical approval from the University of Waikato as per the *Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations 2008*. I will take full responsibility for securing all data and all information gathered in the research. Data entry and analysis will be conducted with pseudonyms only – at all times names of the students and school will not be able to be identified.

Use of the information

The information obtained for this research will be

- Used to generate a thesis for my Masters of Educational Leadership Used for the purposes of publishing scholarly material for conference papers/presentations, book chapters and other presentations in the public arena (e.g. Faculty of Education Seminars, School Board of Trustees and staff meetings).
- The findings will be analysed to ascertain whether the programme meets the needs for the students it aims to serve. It is hoped it will form a model for new ways of thinking about youth leadership within secondary schools and identify factors that can enhance leadership

development and practice, specifically within a New Zealand secondary school contexts.

- This information will be used in the development of an alternative approach to youth leadership learning that will be shared with the school involved.

Declaration to participants

Students who take part in the study have the right to:

- Refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw from the study before analysis will commence on the data
- Ask any further questions about the study during participation
- Be given access to a summary of findings from the study when it is concluded.

The proposed dates are open to negotiation in order to fit within your busy school environment. With an increasing focus on young people in the community, this may be a prime opportunity for your year 9 students to gain a progressive insight into leadership, in order to successfully work together and contribute to the wider school community over the years ahead. Thank you for your consideration of this request, I await your reply.

Kind regards

Janine Mackay
Researcher

Appendix C– Newsletter Information

XXXXXXXXXX School Newsletter – May 2013

An ‘appreciation’ of student leaders – an opportunity for year 9 students

An invitation is extended to year 9 students’ at XXXXXXXXXXX School to be part of a research project with the University of Waikato. Students who choose to take part in this project (the first ever of its kind exclusively for year 9’s) will be involved in a variety of leadership development opportunities over term 2 and 3. After participating in the programme, the students will evaluate it with the view to designing the next potential programme for future year 9’s.

Students will be given more information to follow at the Year 9 assembly in week five of term two. Parents are welcome to make contact with the researcher Janine Mackay if they have any questions about this project and their son/daughter’s involvement.

Come on year 9’s – have a voice, have a say in how you can lead at XXXXXXXXXXX School.

Janine Mackay
Researcher

Appendix D – Participant Information Letter

17th April 2013

Dear Year 9 Student,

My name is Janine Mackay and I am completing my Masters in Educational Leadership at the University of Waikato. I am interested in researching young people's perspectives of leadership and creating exciting programmes to develop young leaders in schools. I am inviting you to be part of some research I am leading.

This project is trialling a new leadership programme. It will involve us working together as a group to explore your ideas, views, beliefs and perceptions of your own leadership abilities. Then you will be involved in six workshops to develop your leadership further.

If you choose to volunteer to be a part of this project you will become a member of a focus group with nine other Year 9 students. We will meet together in a designated classroom at Xxxxxxxxxx School where you will be involved in:

- Two interview sessions where we will have conversations about your leadership beliefs and perceptions – 30 minutes each, one at the beginning of the project and one at the end
- A focus group interview where we get to talk about the exciting stuff that lies ahead for you - 60 minutes
- Six leadership workshops involving lots of fun activities to explore your thoughts and feelings about leadership and develop understandings of when you are leading at your best - 60 minutes per session**.** These sessions will help you with leadership development and some action plans for your future leadership.
- A final focus group chat to get your voice on how you felt about the project and a chance for you to say, "If I could do it all again I would…"

Potential dates for our time together in term 2 and 3:

Term 2

June 10	Initial focus group meeting - 60 minutes
June 17	Individual interviews to happen – 30 minutes
June 24	Leadership workshop 1 - 60 minutes
July 1	Leadership workshop 2 – 60 minutes

(Second term school holiday break: 15th July – 28th July)

Term 3

July 29	Leadership workshop 3 - 60 minutes
Aug 5	Leadership workshop 4 - 60 minutes
Aug 12	Leadership workshop 5 – 60 minutes
Aug 19	Leadership workshop 6 – 60 minutes

Aug 26 Focus group reflections – 60 minutes
Sep 2 Complete data collection and email out transcripts for you to review and return to me by 13th September by email.

Every effort will be made to maintain your confidentiality throughout the research by assigning you a different name, chosen by you. I will collect the information and your confidentiality respected according to the following conditions -

- You will be known by a different name to hide your identity in all data analysis, in the report and in any presentation or publication of the research. The researcher, Janine Mackay, is the only person who will know your identity, your school and your different name.
- You have the opportunity to withdraw from this study any time up until you have emailed your reviews of your personal transcripts. You can withdraw by phoning me or sending an email. Another option would be to contact my supervisor – her details are below.

The findings of this research will be written up in a report for the University of Waikato in fulfilment of my Masters and may also be presented at education conferences and submitted to professional education journals and books for publication. If this happens your confidentiality will be maintained. If you choose to be involved in the research you will be asked to sign the consent form (enclosed) and return it to the school office. You will also need to take information home for your parents. If you have any questions, please contact me at any time on either of the numbers below. I will be pleased to answer any questions that you might have and look forward to the possibility of 'appreciating' you for your contribution to year 9 leadership at Xxxxxxxxxx School.

Kind regards

Janine Mackay
Researcher

Principal Supervisor
Dr Rachel McNae
Faculty of Education, University of Waikato

Second Supervisor
Nadine Ballam
Faculty of Education, University of Waikato, Tauranga

Appendix E– Participant Consent Form

An appreciative view of Year 9 student leadership in a New Zealand Secondary School context.

I, _____ (print full name), agree to participate in the research project - *An appreciative view of Year 9 student leadership in a New Zealand secondary school context*.
I understand that my participation in this project will require me to be involved in the following sessions. I agree to these:

- Two interview sessions where we will have conversations about my leadership beliefs and perceptions – 30 minutes each, one at the beginning of the project and one at the end
- Two focus group sessions where we will have conversations about our group leadership beliefs and perceptions – 60 minutes each, one at the beginning of the project and one at the end
- Six leadership workshops involving different activities to explore my thoughts and feelings about leadership and develop understandings of when I am leading at my best - 60 minutes per session**.** These will be like interviews but not formal and a lot of fun.

I understand that the purpose of the research is to explore my perceptions and beliefs of leadership and to participate in a leadership development programme. I understand I will be asked to share my views on leadership, stating my leadership beliefs and understandings, and reflect on things that may have influenced these.
I have read the information sheet for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. Any questions I have about the study have been answered and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

- I acknowledge the research will take place at Xxxxxxxxxx School during terms 2 and 3. The specific location of these workshops will be negotiated closer to the time
- I understand that I will be involved in a range of activities including interviews and workshops
- Photos may be taken of me and or my work but my identity will be concealed
- Interviews will be recorded and I will have the opportunity to amend and approve the transcripts of these
- I have the opportunity to withdraw from this study up until I have approved my transcripts

My confidentiality will be maintained in this research and I will be known by a different name to hide my identity in all data analysis, in the report and in any presentation, photo or publication of this research. The researcher, Janine Mackay, is the only person who will know my identity and my assumed name.

If I have any queries or concerns regarding my rights in this study and would like to be informed of the research findings I can contact the researcher Janine Mackay or her supervisor – their details are below.

Janine Mackay
Researcher

Principal Supervisor
Dr Rachel McNae
Faculty of Education, University of Waikato

Second Supervisor
Nadine Ballam
Faculty of Education, University of Waikato, Tauranga

My signature below indicates that I have agreed to participate in this research, that I have received a copy of this consent form and an information letter about the research.

Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Email of Participant _____

Date _____

I agree / do not agree to my responses being digitally recorded.

I agree / do not agree to my images being used

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F – Parent Information Letter and Consent Form

27th May 2013

Dear Parent of Year 9 Student,

My name is Janine Mackay and I am currently completing my Masters of Educational Leadership at the University of Waikato. Having worked in the education sector for the past 12 years with young people in secondary schools, I am very passionate about supporting and working with youth. I am most interested in researching the leadership development of year 9 students.

Being new to the secondary school environment, these students will have their own ideas of leadership from their schools and communities. The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of these leadership beliefs and perceptions as they enter the secondary school environment so that their leadership needs can be best served and developed.

I would like to invite your son/daughter to be part of my research, which would involve working with me to co-design a leadership development programme. The inquiry will involve informal interviews and focus group meetings where I will work with the students as a group to explore their ideas, views, beliefs and perceptions of leadership.

If your son/daughter volunteers to be one of ten students invited to take part in the appreciative inquiry research I would require him/her to join me in:

- Two interview sessions for 30 minutes – one at the start of the inquiry and another at the completion of the project to get an understanding of their individual perceptions and understandings of leadership
- Two focus group sessions for 60 minutes – one to begin the inquiry and one at the conclusion of the inquiry
- Six leadership workshops at school during term 2 and 3 this year for approximately 60 minutes per session

The leadership workshop sessions will follow an appreciative inquiry approach that has been piloted in 2012 in a Waikato Secondary School with successful outcomes. Using this model, the project focus group sessions will involve the students sharing stories of their 'best' leadership, establishing ideals for their ideal leadership practice and designing possible actions for future leadership. I will support the students to develop strategies and help fulfil their leadership action plans. These sessions will be digitally recorded using Notability on iPad and the students will review

all data collected at each session. All group notes, images of work, workshop activities and recordings will be collected by me and stored safely. Further details of the types of activities used in the inquiry will be provided at a Year 9 assembly to your son/daughter to be able to make an informed decision on his/her availability to take part.

The project will not impact on your son/daughter's current workload or curriculum studies and is aimed to enhance their leadership ability. The sessions will be held in a classroom at Xxxxxxxxxx School after school or at a time negotiated with the student. At no time will your son/daughter's name be revealed or the name of the school identified in any publication from the project. Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality is maintained throughout the research using a pseudonym for your son/daughter. However due to the nature of some group workshops this cannot be guaranteed.

The findings of this research will be written up in a thesis for the University of Waikato in fulfilment of my Masters and may also be presented at education conferences and submitted to professional education journals and books for publication. Your son/daughters confidentiality will be maintained.

Your son/daughter may choose not to be involved in this research and can withdraw at any time up until 27th September 2013. It is after this time that the data will begin to be analysed. If you have any questions, please contact me at any time as per the below details. I will be pleased to answer any questions that you have.

Secondary schools are unique environments that are ever changing and dynamic in their entity. With an increasing focus on young people in the community, this may be a prime opportunity for your Year 9 son/daughter to gain a progressive insight into leadership to lead confidently at school and in the wider school community over the years ahead.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you are in agreement for your son/daughter to be involved in the project, should they choose to do so, please fill in the attached consent form and return to the Xxxxxxxxxx School office for the attention of Janine Mackay.

Kind regards

Janine Mackay
Researcher

Parent Consent

An appreciative view of Year 9 student leadership in a New Zealand Secondary School context.

I have read the information sheet above and agree that my son/daughter can participate in the research project as outlined.

- Photos may be taken of my son/daughter and of his/her work but with the identity will be concealed
- Interviews will be recorded and my son/daughter will have the opportunity to amend and approve the transcripts of these

I understand and acknowledge that my son/daughter can withdraw from this project any time up until they have read and approved their transcripts.

Name of Parent _____

Signature of parent _____

Date _____

Name of son/daughter _____

Appendix G – Initial individual interviews

Coming to understand what I know

Introduction

As I explained to you through the information sheet, I am interested in studying year 9 Leadership and how you can play a part in shaping what that looks like this year and in the future. I am currently completing my Masters at the University of Waikato and would like to include your voice in my study as evidence of student constructed leadership development. I am particularly interested in your year group as you have just arrived at secondary school and I am keen to find out what your leadership experiences have been.
Thanks so much for agreeing to work with me over the next 6 months. We will be working together for group discussions, interviews and conversations that will enhance your leadership. From these sessions we will make action plans for you to apply year 9 leadership ideas to the big leadership picture at Xxxxxxxxxx School.

Individual Interviews – schedule of questions

I would like to explain a little bit about what we are going to do because as I explained in the Year 9 assembly to you this may be a little bit different to what you are used to in school time. This project is an appreciative inquiry where I am trying to find out where you see leadership at its best.
In school we often interviews set out to solve and fix problems. However with an appreciative inquiry process, I am interested in exploring the good stuff, when things are working well, and how we can create more! I want to find out from you what works well when you are leading successfully and how you think we can infuse more of this into Xxxxxxxxxx School. Imagine the possibilities!
This time together today is going to be an informal interview. I am going to ask you questions about 'what leadership is to you' to gather your personal perceptions and views on leadership. I will be recording your answers on my iPad. The session will be like an informal conversation where there is no right or wrong answer it is merely an opportunity for us to meet, get to know each other and to find out about you and your views on leadership.
I will go away to reflect on what you have told me. I will type this up like a script and email it back to you for you to see what we talked about. You can check to make sure what interpreted/heard you correctly and suggest changes if you want.
Any questions?

The first individual interviews will focus on research question 1 -

What are year 9 students' perceptions and experiences of leadership and what influences these understandings or opportunities to practice leadership?

Key themes

- Perceptions of leadership
- Experiences of leadership
- Influences on your leadership understanding
- Opportunities to show leadership

Possible questions that may be asked

Can you share with me a few great memories you have about the school you have just come from before Xxxxxxxxxx School?

How would you describe the school to me?

What changes have occurred in the role you played as a student at your previous school to here?

How would you describe a leader?

What sorts of skills and abilities do you believe are important for a good leader to have?

Is your view of leadership the same or different to what your school sees as leadership here?

In what ways do you show leadership in your life?

What opportunities did you have for leadership at your previous school?

What opportunities for leadership are available here?

Are there any you would like to be involved in but haven't been given the opportunity?
Where do you see leadership happening?

Who are your leadership role models?

How important are your friends and family in helping your understanding of leadership?
How do they provide examples of leadership/leading?
What opportunities did you have to show leadership in your last school?
How did your previous school encourage students to take on leadership roles?

How does school create conditions for leadership to happen?
Do you think every student gets the opportunity to be leaders here at school?
Why/Why not?
What opportunities would you like to be given to show leadership here at Xxxxxxxxxx School?
What preparation do you think you might need to make this happen?

Prompts that may be included

Can you tell me more about that?

I am not sure I understand, can you explain that again for me?

Can you explain why you chose to do that?

Where else do you see that occurring/being used?

Are there any other times that happens?

That is something we should talk about, how would you like to do that?

Appendix H – Initial focus group perceptions

Coming to understand what WE know

Introduction

As I explained to you through the information sheet, I am interested in studying year 9 Leadership and how you can play a part in shaping what that looks like this year and in the future. I am currently completing my Masters at the University of Waikato and would like to include your voice in my study as evidence of student constructed leadership development. I am particularly interested in your year group as you have just arrived at secondary school and I am keen to find out what your leadership experiences have been.

Thanks so much for agreeing to work with me over the next 6 months. We will be working together for group discussions, interviews and conversations that will enhance your leadership. From these sessions we will make action plans for you to apply year 9 leadership ideas to the big leadership picture at Xxxxxxxxxx School.
It is my hope that from these conversations and sessions together using your ideas and views on leadership, we will be able to construct a leadership programme that supports you this year and into the future. The focus group sessions are to discuss as a group the picture of leadership we have, to gather student personal perceptions and views on leadership and put them together.

I will be recording your answers in a variety of ways – with voice record on an iPad, written words on large sheets of paper or photos of you connecting with others in the group sharing your voice. The session will be like an informal conversation where there is no right or wrong answer or competition on sharing your voice.

I will collect this data from our session and go away to reflect on what you have told me. I will be looking for themes, differences, similarities in ideas. I will bring these themes back to you for our next discussion where you will be able to view, change, add to or correct what I have interpreted. The important thing is this information will only be shared with our group and for any of my final writing for my University research you will have a pseudonym, so you will be completely anonymous (invite students to choose a pseudonym).

Examples of questions for first focus group

When the word leader is mentioned – who do you think about? Why?
What is leadership to you?
Where do you learn leadership?
Who are people you look to for leadership?
What qualities do you believe they need to be an effective leader?

What are some ways you showed leadership at your previous school?
What opportunities were you given to learn leadership? How?
What opportunities are you given here at school to lead?
What are the benefits of being a leader?
What is the role of a leader here?

Prompts that may be included

Tell me more about that?
I am not sure I understand, can you explain that again for me?
Can you explain why you chose to do that?
Where else do you see that occurring/being used?
Are there any other times that happens?

Appendix I – Leadership workshop inquiry questions

Examples of questions that might be used

Can you share a story of a time when you were leading at your best?
What were the key things that helped you in that situation for it to be such a successful moment?
Behaviour – what did you do?
Values – what did you think or feel?
Core strengths/values/ways of working?
Where are you leading at your best? (context)
How much importance does where you lead have on your leading well?
What have we learnt about this person as a leader as they share their story?

- Their personal values

- Their 'way' of being

What gives life to his/her leadership?
(Reflection sheets for each participant invited to note what they coming to know about the story teller, qualities, strengths, values
I am most successful when…..
I am leading at my best when I……
Fast forward and imagine you have gone to sleep and woken to find 5 years have passed. XXXXXXXXXXXXX school is a different place for year 9's – what might that look like? How could you use the Lego to show that new space?
What gives life to us leading at our best – highlight strength 'within' the dream models.

Appendix J – Final whole group focus session

What WE have come to know

Introduction

It is my hope that from the conversations and sessions we have had together using your ideas and views on leadership; we have constructed a leadership programme that supports you this year and into the future. This focus group session is an opportunity for us as a group to reflect on the picture of leadership we have. It is an opportunity for us to share perceptions and views on leadership and your feelings about the AI process as a group.
Again I will be recording your answers in a variety of ways – with voice record on an iPad, written words on large sheets of paper or photos of you connecting with others in the group sharing your voice. The session will be like an informal conversation where there is no right or wrong answer or competition on sharing your voice.

Schedule of possible questions -

Leadership perceptions and understandings

Take time to reflect and look around you – how do you feel?
(All workshop artefacts around walls to reflect upon, chat about, 'chew')
Can you share with me some of your ideas on leadership?
Asked to describe a leader, what would you say?
What skills and abilities do you think a leader needs to have?
Can you share with me about the opportunity to lead at this school?
Who leads?
Have you had the opportunity to show leadership?
How do you know it was leadership?
Where?
Have you had the opportunity to be involved in any new leadership roles?
How did this happen?

Appreciative inquiry process

How did you find the AI process for exploring leadership?
Are there any activities you enjoyed in particular? Can you tell me why?
How did you feel when you had to share stories about yourself?
What made it easy?
What made if difficult?

Has the AI process helped your understanding of leadership? Why or why not?

Student voice

How did it feel to be able to share your voice?
Was it easy? Why/why not?
What conditions were needed to support you sharing your voice?
What advice would you give to other year 9 students wanting to be leaders?

Further action

Is there anything you would like me to do differently for other year 9's to experience in a similar process?
What would you like to share with school now about leadership?
To staff?
To students?
Are there any parts of the appreciative inquiry you have used anywhere else in your life? Tell me more…

Collectively we have strengths…
How can we do what we have dreamed/created with our models and through our conversations?

What actions can 'we' [students] take from here?

How can we make this action happen? (strategies)

Who will help us?

What is our timeline to take us forward?

Appendix K – Final individual interviews

The ME as part of the WE

Introduction

Congratulations on completing this project on leadership development for year 9's. As you know from our focus group sessions together, a key part of the success of this project has been due to your voice and contributions.

This interview is going to look at the appreciative inquiry process and how effective you felt it was. I would like to hear your ideas about leadership now, how they might or might not have changed and how the programme went.

As with our first interview, the plan is to spend about 30 minutes together to share your thoughts, views and beliefs on leadership. I will guide you with questions for an informal discussion and record this on iPad again. Please remember there is no right or wrong answer as it is your voice I am wanting and your assumed name will keep you from being identified. We can stop recording at any time and can erase anything you do not want to be included.

As a result of all of the data I have gathered from our time together and from these final interviews, some themes will emerge that will help me to see whether the processes that I used in this leadership development programme were worthwhile.

Leadership perceptions and understandings

Schedule of possible questions

Can you share with me some of your ideas on leadership now?
Have they changed at all over the past six months? In what way?
How would you describe a leader?
How do people lead at this school?
Where do they lead?
What about your self – have you had the opportunity to show leadership?
How do you know it was leadership?
Where?
Have you had the opportunity to be involved in any new leadership roles?
How did this happen?

Appreciative inquiry process

How did you find the AI process?
Are there any activities you enjoyed in particular? Can you tell me why?

How did you feel when you had to share stories about yourself?
What made it easy?
What made if difficult?
What personal learning did you have through this AI process?
Reflecting on your essence statements – what have you learnt about yourself?
What have you learnt about others?
What have you learnt about learning? (Was AI an effective way to learn?)

Student voice

How did it feel to be able to share your voice?
Was it easy? Why/why not?

Further action

Is there anything you would like me to do differently for other year 9's to experience?
What would you like to share with school now about leadership?
To staff?
To students?
Are there any parts of the appreciative inquiry you have used anywhere else in your life? Tell me more…

Appendix L – Workshop outlines

Session 1 - Initial focus group session

Theme

DISCOVERY - coming to know each other

Outline

Names – choosing pseudonyms for self, your own 'aka'

VAK – learning and remembering information with and from others

VALUES and CHOICES – decisions are some times hard to make, leaders deal with the tough stuff. What would you choose?

TALK over shared lunch – get to know each other.

SHARE - Conversations about who we are, what makes us who we are.

'TREATY - ALL voices will be heard; all information will be respected and kept confidential – between yourselves and I. Your thoughts on how you would like to be 'treated?

Housekeeping

- Conversations – talk honestly and openly and sincerely – this is not the stuff you think I want to hear, it is what you want to say because it IS what YOU think
- Stories to share – tell stories we might record some, write some, speak some. How else could we share?
- Treaty for our group
- Photos may be taken – your identity will not be revealed
- Our time together is valued and precious. Discuss how our time fits the current school timetable.

Session 2 - Initial Individual semi-structured interviews

Theme

DISCOVERY - coming to understand what 'I' know

Outline

Introduction and setting the scene

Perceptions plus on 'post-it's and paper'

Appendix G - outline and questions

Housekeeping

- Conversations – talk honestly and openly and sincerely – this is not the stuff you think I want to hear, it is what you want to say because it IS what YOU think
- Reminder of treaty formed with our group
- Photos may be taken – your identity will not be revealed
- Session will be recorded on this IPAD and I will transcribe it and return it to you for you to read over what we discussed
- Our time together is valued and precious.

Session 3 - Group perspectives of leadership

Theme

DISCOVERY - appreciating what we know

Understandings and beliefs about leadership
- values important for good leadership
- leadership skills and abilities important for leadership

Outline

Introduction and setting the scene
Revisit last week's post-it notes on leadership
You are now researchers - groups of 2 or 3 move around each sheet, reflect on what you notice, how are things grouped, themes?
What do they tell you about leadership? 'Post-it' key words that come up as you analyse the sheets. One researcher per group to report back on your findings.
On smaller 'post-it' notes select 10 key words from your research sheets – shift to A4. What do you notice…
Where do you experience leadership?
See it – yellow stars. Do it – orange stars. Leaders – pink stars.
Research eyes – what can you tell me from your research here today?
Share a leadership story with the group – comments?
For next session I want you to think about a time where you showed leadership/were a leader in some way. Write it down or remember it to be able to share with someone in the room
.
Housekeeping

- Conversations – talk honestly and openly and sincerely – this is not the stuff you think I want to hear, it is what you want to say because it IS what YOU think
- Reminder of treaty formed with our group
- Photos may be taken – your identity will not be revealed
- Session will be recorded on this IPAD
- Our time together is valued and precious, how is it working for you?

Session 4 - Group perspectives of influences on leadership

Theme

DISCOVERY - appreciating what gives life

Influences of leadership
- context
- people

Outline

Introduction and setting the scene
What are the types of things that influence leadership?
Scaffolding activity with 1 pen for 3 people, scaffold thoughts to paper

Human continuum to begin on a line across floor
'Post-it' perspectives - on a paper continuum on table top, sort and sift most influential to least influential where would you place things? Least influence v most influence

The focus of this project is to acknowledge the potential you young people have to show leadership. I believe you are often not recognised for this or when you have a voice to share it is often not listened to - would you agree with this statement or not? Discuss

Student stories
Your story of leadership to share with a partner – how would you like to do this?
I invite you to listen to the story and see what you can pull out of that story about the story teller - what do you learn about that person? Strengths? Values? New things you didn't know? What else…

Housekeeping

- Conversations – talk honestly and openly and sincerely – this is not the stuff you think I want to hear, it is what you want to say because it IS what YOU think
- Reminder of treaty formed with our group
- Photos may be taken – your identity will not be revealed
- Session will be recorded on this IPAD
- Our time together is valued and precious, how is it working for you?

Session 5 - Focus group

Theme

DREAMING - of what might be

Outline

Introduction and setting the scene
Sharing stories of when we are at our best to find themes for what might be.

Share leadership story – reflections in partners/group? Share reflections

What are we learning about others and ourselves? Whiteboard and pens
Drilling down and picking out themes from our stories …themes…best's …strengths…

Metaphors – are there any emerging from our stories – what do they mean?
Individual interviews – back for reviewing by participants

Housekeeping

- Conversations – talk honestly and openly and sincerely – this is not the stuff you think I want to hear, it is what you want to say because it IS what YOU think
- Reminder of treaty formed with our group
- Photos may be taken – your identity will not be revealed
- Session will be recorded on this IPAD
- Our time together is valued and precious, how is it working for you?

Session 6 - Focus group

Theme

DISCOVERY - with stories DREAMING' of what might be

Outline

Introduction and setting the scene
Sharing new stories of when we are at our best to find themes for what might be. What were the key things that helped you in that situation for it to be such a successful moment? Behaviour – what did you do? Values – what did you think or feel? Core strengths/values/ways of working?
If you could do it again what would you take from that situation to help you?

Fast forward and imagine you have gone to sleep and woken to find 5 years have passed. XXXXXXXXXXX School is a different place for year 9's – what might that look like? How could you use the Lego to show me that new space?

What 'gives life' to us leading at our best – highlight strengths in people/design from dream models – discuss
What are we taking from our past into the 'now'? (Photos – IPAD) .

Housekeeping

- Conversations – talk honestly and openly and sincerely – this is not the stuff you think I want to hear, it is what you want to say because it IS what YOU think
- Reminder of treaty formed with our group
- Photos may be taken – your identity will not be revealed
- Session will be recorded on this IPAD
- Our time together is valued and precious, how is it working for you?

Session 7 - Focus group

Theme

DESIGN - the essence of we, the best of what is and what could be

Outline

Introduction and setting the scene
Sharing a final story of when we are at our best to review our themes for what might be. Core strengths/values/ways of working?

Individual reflection sheets of strengths to form essence statements

I am most successful when…..
I am leading at my best when I……

Reflection on these sheets to acknowledge the best of what is and look at taking this forward. Co-creation of essence statements

Key word juggle to create our quotes

Housekeeping

- Conversations – talk honestly and openly and sincerely – this is not the stuff you think I want to hear, it is what you want to say because it IS what YOU think
- Reminder of treaty formed with our group
- Photos may be taken – your identity will not be revealed
- Session will be recorded on this IPAD
- Our time together is valued and precious, how is it working for you?

Session 8 - Focus group

Theme

DESIGN to DESTINY - what do we want and how do we get there?

Outline

Introduction and setting the scene
What are we taking from our past into the 'now'?
Essence statement sheets and quote sheets 'share-n-tell'

Action plans
Collective strengths?
What are our dreams?
Strategies to reach our dreams?
Who will help us?
Time frame to get it done?

Housekeeping

- Conversations – talk honestly and openly and sincerely – this is not the stuff you think I want to hear, it is what you want to say because it IS what YOU think
- Reminder of treaty formed with our group
- Photos may be taken – your identity will not be revealed
- Session will be recorded on this IPAD
- Our time together is valued and precious, how is it working for you?

Session 9 - Group perspectives of leadership and the AI process

Theme

DESTINY - what WE have come to know

Unpacking what we knew, have come to know and want to share with others

Outline

Introduction and setting the scene
What are we taking from our past into the 'now'?
A call to action inspired by our *discovery* and *dream* stage

Sharing all of our artefacts in large posters collected over the past weeks together

Reflection sheets – discussion on leadership views now – post it to large sheets – how do you view leadership / who influences this?

Action plan sheets – how can we put our year 9 voice and feelings into action?

Final reflections – (Appendix J)

Housekeeping

- Conversations – talk honestly and openly and sincerely – this is not the stuff you think I want to hear, it is what you want to say because it IS what YOU think
- Reminder of treaty formed with our group
- Photos may be taken – your identity will not be revealed
- Session will be recorded on this IPAD
- Our time together is valued and precious, how is it working for you?

Session 10 - Individual perspectives of leadership and the AI process

Theme

DESTINY - the ME as part of the WE

Unpacking what I knew, have come to know and want to share with others

Outline

Introduction and setting the scene
What am I taking from my past into the 'now'?
A call to action inspired by our *discovery* and *dream* stage

Final reflections – Individual interviews (Appendix K)

Housekeeping

- Conversations – talk honestly and openly and sincerely – this is not the stuff you think I want to hear, it is what you want to say because it IS what YOU think
- Reminder of treaty formed with our group
- Photos may be taken – your identity will not be revealed
- Session will be recorded on this IPAD
- Our time together is valued and precious, how is it working for you?