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Young Women and Leadership Development
Co-constructing Leadership Learning in a New Zealand
Secondary School

A thesis

submitted in fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

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ABSTRACT

Young women's leadership is an area frequently overlooked in educational leadership development. When it is addressed, it is often done so from the perspective of adults resulting in planned learning opportunities being disconnected from the contexts in which young women lead. This thesis brings young women's voices into educational leadership conversations and illustrates the importance of including their beliefs and understandings about leadership when developing an alternative approach to leadership development.

This thesis describes a qualitative, collaborative action research study conducted between 2007 and 2008 with twelve Year Twelve female secondary school students from a Catholic Girls' School. This research sought the perceptions and views these young women held about leadership in the secondary school context. The students were involved in co-constructing a leadership development programme (*Revolution*) with the researcher and participating in it. After the delivery of the leadership programme the students and the researcher evaluated both the programme and the process by which it came about. The questions that guided this research were:

1. What are young women's beliefs about leadership and how are these influenced by contextual factors in their secondary school?
2. What would a leadership curriculum that was co-constructed through an adult/student partnership look like?
3. How effective is the process of co-construction in developing a youth leadership programme and how successful is the programme in developing leadership understanding?

Within an action research framework youth-adult partnerships were formed that allowed the voices of the young women and the researcher to be included in the process of designing the leadership programme. The students and the researcher met regularly in the process of creating a collaborative learning community to share perceptions, create, participate in and reflect upon the leadership programme. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were used to ascertain the young women's

beliefs and perceptions about leadership as well as their preferred ways of learning, what content should be included in the programme and how the programme should be structured, both prior to participating in the programme and after completing the leadership programme.

First, the perceptions and understandings about leadership that the young women held about leadership were addressed. The findings indicated that the school was a site of significant influence on the young women's beliefs and understandings of leadership and the opportunities to develop and practice leadership. There was a wide range of beliefs about leadership ranging from very basic to highly complex and this influenced the process of co-constructing the leadership programme. The changes to these understandings were later explored after participating in the *Revolution* leadership programme and this process served as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of the leadership programme.

Second, the process of co-construction that created the content and structure for the created leadership programme was examined. The findings indicated that co-construction was an effective way to create a relevant and authentic leadership programme for young women. It was also a highly complex process that required significant efforts to balance input and share ownership between the researcher and the young women. The co-constructed programme was different from programmes constructed by adults, was influenced by the school context and challenged the young women's existing views of teaching and learning. Overall, both the co-construction process and the leadership programme itself enhanced the young women's leadership understandings and feelings of ownership towards the learning process, and was enjoyable.

This study adds to the sparse literature on young women and leadership as it provides details of how young women perceive and practice leadership in the secondary school. This research suggests that involving young women in designing their leadership learning experiences can help ensure the experiences are meaningful and relevant to the contexts in which they practice leadership.

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¹ Pseudonyms have been used to identify the young women for the research

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I dedicate this thesis to one of the many amazing women in my life

Yvonne (Gran) Adlam

Every day
You inspire me
Your eternal generosity
Your caring and thoughtful nature
Your knowledge, wisdom, humility and powerful love
You have shown me what it takes and means to be a leader.

RX

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

My Definition of Youth

Youth was backyard archaeology
With mom's pots and pans
And obsolete kitchen utensils.
Youth was making a mountain
For the worms in the moist ground
And plastering our buddies with mud
To dry and rinse off in the cool sprinklers
Of the pet cemetery in Mary's yard.
Youth was climbing trees and having sales in the shade,
Throwing overripe apricots at boys we had crushes on
And dancing uncovered in the fall rain,
All in suburbia where nature still penetrated,
Where my friend, Lisa bloomed in my yard
And by all accounts still proudly stands
For some growing girl to befriend.

(Malik, 2003)

When people think back to their memories of youth they may meet an overwhelming array of feelings and thoughts. The poem above may trigger fond memories and reminiscences for some, but for others, their youthful experiences may have been less than pleasant. From stumbling through turmoil and uncertainty, through to celebrating the perceived freedom and carefree existence of childhood, personal memories and representations of youth are situated within different and changing social, political and cultural contexts. Consequently, this can result in many different conceptions of what it means to be a 'youth'. Although young people in New Zealand appear to be at the cutting edge of social and cultural change, the sociology of youth has failed to

explain the complexities that these changes have engendered and, therefore, the implications created for New Zealand secondary schools and other stakeholders involved in youth development approaches, specifically leadership development, have lacked attention. Youth in New Zealand society are immersed in a large and fluctuating variety of popular cultures such as fashion, leisure pursuits and forever-changing trends. A vast number of contexts within which youth are engaged, such as schools, families and community groups further complicate this situation. Schools are seen as prime places in which youth develop. However, it is questionable whether the means used by schools to address youth development has kept pace with New Zealand's rapid societal changes and the changing educational needs of young people.

This thesis examines an alternative approach to youth leadership development. It addresses designing and implementing leadership development opportunities with young women in a secondary school context. Many commonly held notions of leadership in secondary schools assume that teachers and staff are the primary sources of leadership. They are frequently viewed as the ones responsible for and capable of guiding and making change within schools (Sather, 1999). Therefore, involving young women in leadership and leadership development opportunities can be a complex process. There are many anecdotal accounts from students about their experiences of leadership within the school environment. My own experience is that teaching and management staff in secondary schools often make many assumptions about student leadership; for example, who can and cannot lead, what the role of student leaders is within the school and how best to prepare young people for leadership. It is the mixture of these assumptions combined with the complex nature of adult-focused, traditional approaches to school leadership contexts that makes perceptions of leadership fractious and fragile (Sather, 1999). Traditional approaches to student leadership (for example designating positions such as Head Girl, Peer Group Leader, Cultural Captain, President of Student Council and Sports Captain) often thrust students into new positions of leadership and responsibility. In many instances, these labelled roles are assumed with minimal training and preparation (Leventhal, 1999), yet the demands and expectations placed on these new leaders are high (Funk, 2002; Saunders, 2005).

Although researchers acknowledge a difference between adult and youth leadership, when leadership development opportunities are presented to young people, they are

often designed with reference to research and models that are focused on adults who are managers in businesses and organizations or administrators involved in the management of a school (MacNeil, 2006; Posner, 2004). I believe that it is also necessary to understand leadership from the perspective of young women as feminist leadership literature indicates that women experience leadership differently to men (Coleman, 2003). This will provide a greater understanding of how young women perceive leadership roles and how they develop relevant leadership skills pertaining to the contexts within which they exercise leadership. I also believe it is essential that young women are involved in the creation of their leadership learning approaches so that the design and content of the learning opportunity is relevant to the contexts in which they exercise leadership and their needs are better met.

Whilst acknowledging that there are a multitude of definitions for youth leadership and that researchers find it difficult to agree upon one, for the purpose of this research I have drawn on the work of Kress (2006) who defines youth leadership as “the involvement of youth in responsible, challenging action that meets genuine needs, with opportunities for planning and decision making” (p. 51). This definition broadly encompasses youth as active agents of change and emphasizes that the context in which leadership is exercised is very important.

Background to this Research

Prior to embarking on this research I was a teacher in a girls’ secondary school in New Zealand. It was during my time there as the Year 13 Dean², that I observed young women being required by staff to take on leadership roles within the school. There was minimal preparation for the few opportunities that were available to students and in most years, leadership preparation was generally non-existent except for a loosely termed ‘leadership camp’. The camp was at the end of Year 12 and all students in that year level went on a marae³-based residential course. Here they participated in peer support activities which they would teach to new students in Year 9 the following year. This meager ‘leadership’ experience was seen by the school as

² A position of pastoral care where a teacher on staff oversees a Year group of students alongside of their teaching position.

³ A Marae is a traditional meeting place deemed sacred by Maori (Indigenous New Zealanders).

enough to prepare the young women to fulfill the leadership roles expected of them by the school. Of course, it was also enough time for staff to select the student leaders for the following year. The 3-day camp became a popularity contest, a baptism by fire for those wanting to lead, and a painful ordeal for those who did not. As a feminist, I was concerned on a number of levels. Firstly, the way that leadership was promoted within the school, solely through formal leadership roles that provided opportunities for only a handful of students, gave students the message that leadership was reserved for ‘the finest’. Secondly, I was concerned by the lack of progressive leadership development opportunities provided to the young women. Thirdly, I was disheartened by the message that the young women got from seeing student leadership existing only in the final years of school. As a result, many of the young women were not engaging in leadership practice within the school, or outside of the school prior to this year level or once they had left school after their final year. This led to my first encounter with leadership development with young women in the secondary school, which I recorded in my research journal and which I used for my first piece of leadership research with young women in 2004.

Sarah shuffles into the hostel meeting room, her slippers scuffing the already worn carpet as she slowly and deliberately moves across the floor. With a Milo carefully balanced on top of a Cosmo magazine, she looks at me and exhales a sigh of what could only be read as frustration. Placing her mug on the coffee table, she looks over to one of her peers, rolls her eyes and plunges herself into a space on the awaiting couch. “How long will this take, I’ve got study,” her eyes piercing mine, “...AND I’ve got better things to do.”

As a teacher of young women in a secondary school I recall the occasion above, stemming from the invitation by a school principal in 2004 to provide leadership guidance for a group of young women in their final year of schooling. I responded to this request by designing and implementing what I thought to be an effective leadership development programme for a group of young women aged between 16 and 17 years old. Supported by postgraduate study in the area of leadership, I scoured my lecture notes, theories and course readings to design a programme which focused on defining, explaining and practising leadership. The programme took place the following term and upon reflection, I am now not surprised about the ‘not-so-positive’ response I received from the students. As Sarah illustrated in the example from my research journal, the desire to learn, be involved and be engaged in what should be a

positive learning experience, was non-existent. Upon consideration, I can now see that the content of the programme was far removed from the actual contexts in which the young women exercised their leadership, and the definitions and theory were irrelevant to their day-to-day experiences. I cringe as I reflect and feel apologetic, and even embarrassed that I subjected anyone to such a learning [or not] opportunity.

After completing the delivery of this leadership programme, I thought to myself that there had to be a better way to teach young women about leadership. I was a feminist who was supported by my core value of social justice. What should have been important was the leadership experiences of the young women, not the theories and definitions of leadership. These experiences and the context in which they exercised their leadership should have been central. I therefore set about redesigning how I might go through this process differently. The under-pinning philosophy for the design and implementation of the second leadership programme described in this thesis was that it had to be a collaborative process between the young women and myself (Saunders, 2005). Also, it was critical that the programme be relevant for this group. An imported leadership programme created by adults, for adults, was not likely to meet the needs of the young women in a secondary school. But before sharing specific details about how I approached the research design and implementation it is important to first contextualise this research and examine youth leadership development within the secondary school context.

The last decade has seen an increase in the area of youth leadership research. Studies about student perceptions of leadership and approaches to students learning about leadership are coming to the fore (see Arendt & Gregoire, 2006; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 2001; Funk, 2002), as researchers grapple with balancing deficit views of young people and positive youth development approaches. This growing body of research has contributed to a new research agenda that emphasizes the importance of progressively developing student leadership ability within school contexts. However, although this research can inform us about young people and their leadership development, a greater need exists. There is a call from students in schools and researchers alike (Fertman & van Linden, 1999; Libby, Sedonaen & Bliss, 2006) for leadership learning to be more relevant to the lives of young people. I believe that students should be involved in the creation of these

learning experiences so that their needs can be met. Including and valuing student voice should be central to this process. Perhaps, I thought, if students were engaged in school decision-making approaches and were viewed as active agents of change, which extended their roles beyond a consultative function, students would be more likely to engage in conversations about learning and how schools can better meet their learning needs as developing leaders.

Within New Zealand there is a dearth of research pertaining to young people and leadership in secondary schools contexts. Possible exceptions to this include current blanket strategies proposed by the Ministry of Youth Development (2003), which aim to increase youth participation opportunities in communities through the provision of youth council forums. However, these do not specifically focus on youth leadership, or school environments. Furthermore, they represent gender within youth development strategies as unproblematic. International studies encompassing youth leadership make little mention of gender, and findings are frequently treated as homogeneous, no matter whom the participants in the research were. Within the growing body of research on youth leadership, there is little study into the area of young women in secondary school contexts. Some exceptions include the historical work of Crockett, Losoff and Peterson (1984), Morris (1991) and Edwards (1994) who explored girls' perceptions of leadership characteristics. More recent work from Mono and Keenan (2000) explored designing and facilitating after-school leadership programmes with young women in secondary schools and focused on the impact of adolescent development on their leadership development. Within tertiary education Kezar and Moriarty (2000) and Sperandio (2000), broadly focused on young women's experiences of leadership as college/university students and explored opportunities for leadership in these contexts.

With little recent attention paid to young women and leadership in schools Mullen and Tutan (2004) believe there is an urgent need in this area and claim, "much more research is obviously needed for making an accurate determination of the contemporary status of female adolescent leadership" (p. 315). They go on to state, "While there appears to be forward momentum for positive change in the area of female adolescent leadership in pockets throughout society, much has yet to be accomplished" (p. 315).

The Focus of this Research

The primary purpose of this research was to use a collaborative action research approach to co-construct and evaluate a leadership development curriculum with a group of young women. I believed that by understanding their leadership beliefs and their leadership contexts learning experiences could be designed to develop their leadership practice in a meaningful and relevant way. From my study of the literature and previous work in this area, I believed that the use of adult-student partnerships (presented in the form of learning communities) and the inclusion of student voice in the negotiation and evaluation of a leadership development curriculum would assist in the creation of a leadership programme that met the needs of this particular group of students. A second purpose of this research was to explore and synthesize the international literature on youth development and youth leadership development as it pertained to young women in secondary schools and to identify the constructs used to define leadership. This informed the collaborative process of leadership development used in this research.

This research aimed to encourage school communities and students to develop an understanding of young women's perceptions about leadership and observe how a specific model of leadership curriculum development may assist in creating a sustainable leadership culture within secondary schools. Understanding young women's beliefs about leadership may provide an insight into how leadership learning within the secondary school context can be constrained or supported through different approaches. By trialling one way of learning about leadership, which used learning communities to co-construct a leadership curriculum, I believed it might be possible to indicate how effective co-constructed leadership programmes can be.

This research will assist in constructing new ways of thinking about youth leadership within secondary schools, specifically within a New Zealand context. The research will also contribute to the on-going debate regarding the importance of including student voice in school decision-making and curriculum design processes. The questions that guided this research were:

- 1. What are young women's beliefs about leadership and how are these influenced by contextual factors in their secondary school?**

2. What could a leadership curriculum that was co-constructed through an adult/student partnership look like?

3. How effective is the process of co-construction in developing a leadership programme with young women and how successful is the programme in developing their leadership understanding?

The Structure of this Thesis

Chapter One introduced the research and provided a rationale for the study. In Chapter Two the literature review examines key literature relevant to this research. In this literature review I examine and critique literature related to leadership and youth leadership development with a specific focus on young women. I examine the concept of youth and youth development approaches and outline approaches for involving young people in designing curriculum – learning communities, youth adult partnerships, co-construction and the concept of student voice.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach used in this research and introduces qualitative research using a feminist theoretical lens. The ideas surrounding qualitative feminist research, my role as a researcher within an action research process and ethical considerations will be discussed and the general framework of this research genre will be outlined.

Chapter Four outlines the methods used to gather information within the collaborative research environment. I make comment on the validity and trustworthiness of this research. The conclusion of the chapter offers a description of the research process.

Chapter Five presents the research findings relating to the young women's beliefs and their understandings about leadership. The chapter is made up of five sections. The first section outlines the influence of the school context. The second section reports on what the young women believed made a good leader. The third and fourth sections present the findings related to opportunities for learning and practising leadership. The fifth section outlines the barriers and constraints to leadership practice and learning that the young women perceived and experienced.

Chapter Six discusses the findings from Chapter Five and interprets them in light of the current literature.

Chapter Seven presents the findings with regard to the co-construction process and the leadership programme. There are three sections to this chapter. The first section outlines the findings related to the co-construction process. The second section reports on the leadership programme that was created. The third section presents the findings related to the changed and developed leadership understandings of the young women from having being involved in the leadership programme and the co-construction process.

Chapter Eight discusses findings in Chapter Seven related to the co-construction process, enhanced leadership understanding and the leadership programme in light of the current literature.

Chapter Nine is the final chapter of the thesis and provides a summary of the findings that were discovered. This chapter also outlines the challenges and limitations of this research from the methodological, sociological and developmental perspectives. This chapter highlights implications for those involved in leadership development with young women and suggests areas for future study. An epilogue concludes the thesis.

The following chapter is the literature review and explores the concept of leadership and current youth leadership beliefs, with a particular focus on young women and leadership

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction to the Literature Review

Youth leadership development is a complex area to address within the literature. It encompasses many facets that require consideration such as what leadership can be, the contexts where leadership takes place, young people's views of leadership and factors that impact on how they learn to be leaders. These aspects are all closely linked and consequently, influence each other. When investigating sociological literature it is evident that scholarly publications relating to youth leadership development are situated predominantly within bodies of literature pertaining to youth and youth development, and less frequently, educational leadership and school improvement. The focus of this research was on developing leadership with young women; therefore it was important to situate this literature review within the context of youth development inside the secondary school. This chapter provides a theoretical foundation for the research and engages with literature from a wide variety of sources. Further literature is also included Chapters 6 and 8 when the findings are discussed. This literature review crosses a number of areas in order to provide a full background to the essential elements related to this research. These areas have been synthesized and the literature reviewed in this chapter is organized into three key parts.

Organisation of the Literature Review

The first part of the literature review will contextualize the research and address the landscape of leadership and youth leadership development. Firstly, it explores the concept of leadership and specifically focuses on youth leadership within the school context. Literature relating to leadership, women and leadership and youth perceptions of leadership is synthesized. In order to contextualize the research, examples from secondary schools in the New Zealand context were sought but unfortunately few were found. Therefore studies from the contexts of Australia, the

United States, the United Kingdom and Hong Kong have been addressed. To highlight the specific context of this research, the organization and structure of the Catholic School is explored.

Part two of this literature review examines the dominant discourses of youth and youth development that have influenced youth leadership development approaches in schools and communities. This provides an overview of the concept of youth, common beliefs and the implications these hold for youth development approaches such as leadership development in schools. The notion of positive youth development as an alternative approach to developing leadership with young people in schools is examined.

Part three of this literature review examines the processes of involving young people in programme design and implementation. This part of the literature review involves an exploration into creating communities of learning and youth-adult partnerships. Consequently, the concepts of co-construction and the negotiation of content for learning student voice as vital ingredients to these processes and will also be explored. I present and critique the concept of student voice and its presence and use in school settings and within collaborative learning environments. To conclude the chapter, each part of the literature review are linked together and their relevance to this research topic and the research questions in particular illustrated.

The literature reviewed in this chapter was derived from a variety of sources. The search for literature scoped a range of education databases (for example PROQUEST, ERIC, EBSCO) and incorporated a range of journals that were accessed through online and hard copy sources. The journals came from the areas of youth development, educational leadership, research methodology, feminist literature and education. Books were also sourced from the library at the University of Waikato. Current literature on young women and leadership in secondary school contexts was scarce so at times there was reliance on studies of general youth leadership research that covered both genders, and extended beyond the secondary school into tertiary contexts. Ministerial documents from the New Zealand Government and international policy from the United Nations were also utilized to contextualize the work within global and national field of research literature. As a number of different contexts used

different terms to describe similar concepts, the search terminology used required a broad scope and related to youth leadership, student leadership, and youth leadership development. With regards to the creation of the leadership programme the terms co-construction, curriculum negotiation, integrated curriculum, student voice and learning communities were used.

The following section examines the concepts of leadership and more specifically, youth leadership. Young people's perceptions of leadership are shared and the complexities of youth leadership development outlined. As this research focused on young women, feminist literature relating to women and leadership is examined, and areas specific to this research such as gender stereotyping, socialization and patriarchy are set against the background of the Catholic School context.

LEADERSHIP: MAKING A CASE FOR YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Leadership is a complex concept. Drawing on the work of Burns (1978), Bennis and Nanus (1985) state, "leadership is the most studied and least understood topic in any of the social sciences" (p. 4). An extensive search of the literature highlighted that a multitude of definitions for leadership exist and it is far beyond the scope of this literature review to explore them all. Early writers such as Stogdill (1974) concluded, "there are almost as many definitions of leadership development as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept" (p. 259). Contemporary writers such as Ford (2005) emphasize the difficulties in attempting such a feat and declare;

...to define and describe leadership is to recognize its slippery nature, its meaning shaped by both the individual's own experiences, personal background and reflexive thoughts and by those of all the other people involved within the local context. (p. 243)

There is a considerable body of literature addressing leadership in educational settings and concepts relevant to this research include (but are not solely limited to) youth leadership (Fertman and van Linden, 1998; MacGregor 2007), distributed leadership approaches (Harris, 2003; Spillane, 2006), feminist leadership (Blackmore, 1993, 1999; Coleman, 2002; Court, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2006; Strachan, 2002), collective leadership (Denis, Lamouth & Langel, 2001; Frost & Durrant, 2003), learning and leadership (Fullan, 2002; Gunter, 2001; Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Robertson &

Strachan, 2001; Senge, 1990; Strachan & Saunders, 2007), expanding leadership capital within school settings (Sergiovanni, 1992) and constructivist leadership (Lambert, 1998; Sergiovanni, 1992). It is not within the scope of this literature review to explore all of these areas. What is essential however is to illustrate the complexity and difficulty in defining leadership and make a case for including youth leadership within the mainstream literature related to educational leadership.

Shertzer, Wall, Frandsen, Guo, Whalen and Shelley (2005) go as far as to describe the emergence of two paradigms of leadership. The more conventional view of leadership, labelled *industrial*, contains many of the traditional views of leadership from the twentieth century, such as leadership being the property of the individual, leadership pertaining to formal situations, and the idea that the terms leadership and management can be used interchangeably (Williams, 2006). This view focused on adult-based leadership theories with the aim of answering the question - what makes a good leader? Much of the research at this time addressed the qualities and traits of good leaders (Bennis, 1959; Burns, 1978; Yukl, 1981). There are also various critiques of the many traditional leadership theories which sit in this paradigm such as ‘great man theory’, ‘situational leadership’ and ‘trait theory’ approaches. For example, Rost and Barker (2000) believe that this paradigm is inappropriate for educational settings as it does not take into account the complexity of social relationships, gender, or accommodate the motivations of those who exercise leadership.

As leadership theories continue to develop, contemporary research and writing provides a paradigmatic shift in thinking about what leadership can be. This second approach is often referred to as the *postindustrial* paradigm. Its features are drawn from recent research and literature upholding assumptions of leadership being based on relationships and being collaborative in nature (for example, Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Rost, 1993). In this paradigm, leadership is viewed as a concept that does not reside in an individual and can be shown by anyone, not just those who are labelled as leaders. Leadership is viewed as distributed (Harris, 2003; Spillane, 2006), and designed to create change (Shertzer et. al, 2005). This approach emphasizes what leadership can be (Wheatley, 1999), and shifts the view of leadership from leadership

requiring a formal position, to a more holistic leadership approach taking into account what Blackmore (1993) describes as the leadership context.

Context is an essential aspect to consider when investigating leadership within this paradigm. Harris (2003) believes that leadership has different meanings for different people and this is dependent on context. Osborn, Hunt and Jauch (2002), state, “Leadership is embedded in context. It is socially constructed in and from a context where patterns over time must be considered and where history matters” (p. 789). Because of its contextualized nature, defining leadership is difficult and at times problematic. It is therefore important to present the views of leadership that have informed this research, in order to set a perimeter and foundation for further comment and discussion. As a basis for this research I have drawn on the work of MacNeil (2006), and make use of her definition which articulates leadership as a relational process that combines “...ability (knowledge, skills and talents) with authority (voice, influence, and decision-making power) to positively influence and impact diverse individuals, organizations and communities” (p. 29). This definition has been selected as the components described in it resonate with key areas that hold prominence in the design and collaborative processes of this research and it aligns closely with my views of youth leadership development.

This definition challenges the traditional notions of person-centred leadership theories. However, much of the current literature, especially in the area of youth leadership development, still attempts to define leadership in terms of acquiring specific skills (Hay & Dempster, 2004), describing a list of characteristics which make an effective leader (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005) and prescribing what curriculum should be included in youth leadership programmes to develop such skills (MacGregor, 2007). This research sits within the postindustrial leadership paradigm, acknowledging the importance of relationships and context as part of leadership and the belief that leadership can be shown by anyone, not just those people holding a formal position or role relating to leadership. However, such a belief is not necessarily common in the area of youth leadership, so it is timely to examine the common themes related to youth leadership in the secondary school.

The following section provides a perspective on current beliefs, trends and issues pertaining to youth leadership and youth leadership development. Within the boundaries of this research, the emphasis will be on current youth leadership approaches, with a section to follow which focuses on young women and leadership.

Youth Leadership

Leadership is complex; it is not a simple concept. However, understanding and appreciating the complexity of leadership is a prerequisite to supporting and challenging adolescents to be the best leaders possible. (Fertman & van Linden, 1999, p. 9)

As noted above by Fertman and van Linden (1999), it is important to have an understanding and appreciation of the complexities surrounding youth leadership. The purpose of this section is to examine firstly how the concept of youth leadership is defined and represented in the literature; secondly, to investigate ways in which youth leadership development occurs and what impacts on this; and thirdly, illustrate the perceptions that young women have of leadership in the literature.

Youth leadership is a notion that has been present and accepted in society and community life over many years. Historically it has been seen as a way of preparing young people for future life and has frequently been located in schools, homes, churches, clubs and community organizations. Schools are often viewed as prime places to learn leadership skills and Rogers (1991) believes that schools have the greatest responsibility for the education of youth leaders. Nearly every secondary school seems to express a commitment to the development of students as leaders. Mission statements exude promises of practising citizenship and developing well-rounded individuals. Some schools even offer specialized programmes with the aim of helping students to develop their leadership skills (Boatman, 1999; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Shertzer et. al, 2005).

However, youth leadership is a relatively new concept in the area of academic research (Libby, Sedonaen & Bliss, 2006), and research focusing on youth is sparse. Leadership development research is frequently aimed at educational administrators, principals and senior teachers (Sergiovanni, 1999; Wallin, 2003) and young people

are noticeably absent from educational leadership research (MacNeil, 2006; Libby, Sedonaen & Bliss, 2006; Ricketts & Rudd, 2002; Schneider, Holcome-Ehrhart & Ehrhart, 2002). Over the last decade research and publication in the area of youth leadership and leadership development has slowly increased. However, much of this literature focuses on young people at university or college (for example, Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Logue, Hutchens & Hector, 2005), resulting in a dearth of research focused specifically on the secondary school context and young women. A number of researchers call for closer attention to be paid to the way that young people learn about leadership within this setting and many researchers argue that youth leadership within the school setting overall remains an often-neglected notion with a confusing array of definitions and practices (Karnes & Stephens, 1999; Ricketts & Rudd, 2002).

Within the literature, the themes relating to youth leadership fall into two broad categories. The first category aims to identify personal characteristics in young people that assist with successfully exercising leadership. Efforts in this category focus primarily on the individual with little consideration of the context in which they exercise leadership. Examples in the literature illustrating this individual approach can be seen in the work of Van Linden and Fertman (1998) who define youth leaders as;

...individuals who think for themselves, communicate their thoughts and feelings to others, and help others to understand and act on their own beliefs; they influence others in an ethical and socially responsible way. (p. 17)

Nevertheless, this definition acknowledges that anyone can be a leader and that leadership is a set of skills that can be learnt and practised. Leadership development is presented as a dynamic process, proposing that there are certain stages which adolescents encounter as they develop their leadership.

The second category of youth leadership themes present leadership as a socially constructed notion and illustrates leadership as a form of social relationship. Leadership is viewed as involving more than the individual, taking into account the local and global context in which leadership is exercised. For example, Rost and Barker (2000) who challenge many of the historical approaches to learning about leadership and the individualized focus that leadership has had in the past, argue that

future leadership approaches must divorce themselves from being viewed as residing within the individual. They call for a focus on social change and developing leadership to influence such change. Within the school context Wallin (2003) similarly acknowledges that leadership is bigger than an individual and believes that student leadership involves the student, the school and the greater community. Similarly, Libby, Sedonaen and Bliss (2006) argue that relationships are also important and believe, “A full definition of youth leadership must encompass values, power and action; without power sharing, a theory of change, and action, youth are not exercising leadership, but taking steps to plan and implement activities prescribed by adults” (p. 23).

There are distinct differences between the literature focusing on leadership development for youth and adults. Literature focusing on the broad concept of adult leadership often targets issues of *authority* (for example, decision-making power and influence) where adults are often put in the context of real-life situations so that these aspects can be practised. Much of the literature generated in the area of youth leadership development addresses the concept of developing leadership *ability*. This literature focuses on how to lead and develop specific leadership skills, such as public speaking, running meetings and planning projects. Osberg, Conner and Strobel (2007) suggest there are two paradigms to youth leadership development; firstly, a focus on individual developmental processes and secondly, contextual practices and supports which facilitate leadership development.

Initially focusing on the individual, Kouzes and Posner (1987) identified three key avenues where leadership learning occurred. Firstly, like MacNeil and McLean (2006) and Bisland (2004), they believed that experience was important, however, they felt that this learning was predominantly trial and error, as many young people were launched into formal leadership positions during their senior years of schooling, and this might not necessarily be a positive experience. Second, they identified role models and unstructured learning opportunities as a way that learning might happen and encouraged students to model their leadership behaviour on examples within and outside the school context. Third, the one avenue they viewed to be the most successful, yet the least focused on as a legitimate learning tool, was that students could learn leadership through structured learning opportunities.

Shertzer et al (2005) claim that approaches which focus on structured learning opportunities need to be broad and encompass the relevant student context. Their research explored the influence of demographics on the leadership perceptions of college students and focused on creating structured learning opportunities as a means of allowing students to learn about leadership within their current leadership environment. By providing these structured learning opportunities, the learning environment, context for leadership and the acknowledgement of existing leadership knowledge had to be considered and acknowledged within the research design process. Interestingly, Van Linden and Fertman (1998) who investigated *how* young people learn about leadership encapsulated many of these areas but also highlighted that unstructured learning opportunities were also important. They stated:

Teenagers learn to be leaders by watching the people around them act as leaders. Leadership is learned by watching, imitating, and practicing with people. It involves trial and error and learning from mistakes and successes alike. (p. 48)

Believing in a progressive development of leadership learning they propose the following aspects for consideration. Firstly, there needs to be an *awareness* of leadership potential and abilities. Secondly, a stage of *interaction* results in a strengthening of these abilities leading to an increase in confidence and a growth in leadership behaviour. Lastly, it is proposed there should be *mastery* of specific leadership skills relevant to certain contexts. I acknowledge that many feminists refrain from using this term because of its often gendered usage, however, in the case of this research, and the dearth of literature addressing youth leadership, I felt it important to illustrate the scope and nature of the models available.

Within the second paradigm key themes in the literature highlight contextual practices and support structures that facilitate leadership development and draw attention to processes of programme design and the influence of school structures. There is a focus on building relationships with others, often through collaborative effort, for example, youth-adult partnerships (DesMarais, Yang & Farzanehkia, 2000). An essential part of youth leadership development is the inclusion of student voice and encouraging young people to participate in decision-making (Osberg-Conner & Strobel, 2007).

Kouzes and Posner's (1987) seminal work which created a leadership development instrument specifically for young people is an example of such collaboration. It continues to be updated and developed (Posner, 2004) to ensure that it has remained relevant and useful as a tool for young people to learn about leadership. This model was developed through holding interviews and creating case studies with American college youth leaders. This group of young leaders was studied and interviewed to find out what they thought were critical aspects of their success as leaders. Information from these responses was analyzed and a Leadership Practice Inventory (LPI) was created which included the five key leadership practices of "Modeling the Way, Inspiring a Shared Vision, Challenging the Process, Enabling Others to Act, and Encouraging the Heart", (Posner, 2004, p. 444). This was trialled twice more on groups of college students who suggested small changes to the LPI. Although pitched at university-aged students, it also encourages leadership development outside of formal leadership positions.

Van Linden and Fertman (1998) make the assumption that by learning about these five key leadership practices young people will acquire the necessary information about leadership to develop their interpersonal skills (such as decision-making and communication) and attitudes towards leadership in order to take up leadership positions and roles. However, Avolio (1999) found in his study of how youth learn and show leadership that youth could elect to show leadership in a variety of settings and social arrangements and he dismisses the idea that youth must have a formal position of leadership in order to develop leadership capabilities. He found that through learning about leadership across an array of contexts, young people were able to develop a more rounded approach to working alongside others and, through choosing activities where they influenced others, youth were also able to continue to develop their leadership skills more effectively in later life.

It would appear from the literature that there are few studies that relate to leadership from the perspective of youth, and in particular, young women. When studies are reported, they frequently illustrate views from university students with limited attention paid to the secondary school context. In the small amount of literature which exists on young people's understanding of what leadership can be, the focus tends to be on what characteristics make a good leader. Many young people attach certain

characteristics to students who exercise leadership within the school setting. For example, in their evaluation of two leadership development programmes which involved under-served youth, Martinek, Schilling and Hellison (2006) stated that many young people associated leadership with being “good looking, athletic, wealthy or smart” (p. 141). Students also linked leadership to popularity, personal looks and being older, about being the boss, being something that adults do, and something which is difficult to do (Van Linden & Fertman, 1998) and academic ability (MacGregor, 2007). Such stereotypical thinking can create barriers for students and limit the opportunities they perceive they can be involved in, and show their leadership. In a New Zealand study comparing leadership views across generations, Levy, Carroll, Francoeur and Logue (2005) found that most of the 21 Generation Y youth (those born between 1978 and 1994), that they interviewed identified themselves as “leaders in waiting” (p. 21). This age group was less likely to identify leadership as a position and more likely to identify leadership with “people they believe in, those with credibility and qualities they admire rather than those in the right position in an organisation” (p. 21).

Factors Which Impact on Youth Leadership Development

There are a number of factors that impact on the development of youth as leaders. Despite the fact that many current researchers have identified a new era of youth leadership, many youth development approaches are designed and created using the historical and industrial paradigm of leadership. Even current researchers in the field of youth leadership admit to creating youth leadership development approaches based on adult leadership constructs, due to the lack of research in the youth leadership area (for example Schneider, Holcombe-Ehrhart & Ehrhart, 2002).

Posner (2004) emphasizes that many of the planned opportunities for young people to develop their leadership are designed on traditional business models with a managerial focus, which hold little relevance for youth and the contexts within which they exercise their leadership. Kress (2006) points to a need to conceptualize youth leaders and their learning opportunities differently from adult leaders. Siedentop (1995) believes there is a void when it comes to identifying, teaching and providing practice in many key areas of youth leadership and such teaching usually falls back on

adult pedagogies situated within traditional traits-based approaches to learning leadership. Similarly, Klau (2006) states “...at worst leadership programs are described as an almost negative space into which practitioners project their own beliefs about what youth need” (p. 60).

Differences between youth and adult leadership approaches exist due to the way that youth are viewed by society and the fact that youth have not been involved in school decision-making in the past. Youth are often identified as a group needing to be ‘fixed’, or as a group needing assistance in order for positive development to occur. Kress (2006) believes this can result in adults positioning youth as passive consumers of leadership development programmes rather than active participants.

It is obvious that youth leadership is a difficult concept to clearly define and it is therefore no surprise that students may not necessarily recognize what they are doing as leadership. Van Linden and Fertman (1998) claim that because of the way leadership is presented to young people (frequently through formal positions), many students do not believe that they are leaders and do not seek out opportunities to exercise their leadership. The ways that leadership is viewed within a school influences how opportunities for learning and showing leadership are presented. In her work researching a leadership development initiative provided by the National College of School Leadership in the United Kingdom, Jane McGregor (2007) examined instances of student involvement and the role that students played in improving learning in schools. Her findings revealed that how a school perceived leadership was a significant factor that influenced student leadership potential. Schools that viewed leadership as a relational process rather than presenting leadership as a hierarchical structure were more likely to be sites of student capacity building, allowing students to show leadership more effectively.

The ways that adults view student leaders is also significant. When young people and leadership are referred to or defined in youth leadership literature, it is often with a future orientation, focusing on preparing young people to be leaders later in life when they are adults. An example of this is the work of Rost and Barker (2000) who call for leadership educators to orient themselves towards *preparing* participative citizens and *producing future leaders* and model citizens for a democratic society. Similarly,

Thompson (2006) makes the connection between leadership learning and the possibilities this provides for societal equivalencies and the reproduction of specific social values. MacNeil and McLean (2006) criticize this approach and argue that this view dismisses the current leadership value, possibilities and abilities of young people. For this research it was essential that the project acknowledge the current leadership abilities of the young women and provide meaningful opportunities for these abilities to be developed and incorporated into planning and action right from the beginning of the programme, not leaving them for opportunities later in the future.

Opportunities for involvement are very important for the development of leadership (Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Logue, Hutchens & Hector, 2005), but within the school context there may be few opportunities for students to learn and apply their leadership skills. The inheritance of historical leadership regimes within the school such as prefect systems and traditional leadership roles such as Head Girl and Sports Captain provide a small number of students (often those who are already inclined to show leadership) with a short burst of leadership experiences, for which they are often ill-prepared and the expectations to be successful are high. Karnes and Stephens (1999) strongly advocate that young people need to be provided with the opportunity to practice their leadership in safe and supportive environments and state:

Leadership experiences can help motivate young people and assist them in learning. Although leadership is a skill that can be taught, it is also an art that must be practiced. For this reason, youth need to have opportunities available within the school...to participate actively and assume leadership roles and responsibilities. (p. 62)

MacNeil (2006) believes that many approaches that schools currently use are not as effective as they should be, often providing a tokenistic approach. For example, she believes that the frequent common practice of:

...simply inviting youth to be a part of the “leadership team” doesn’t mean that young people will come away with a self-concept of “leader”, or improved leadership skills, or that they will have had opportunity to influence the group’s direction or make decisions. (p. 37)

Other researchers claim that the ways in which leadership opportunities in many schools are structured frequently lack authenticity and meaning (Kress, 2006; MacNeil 2006; Saunders, 2005). Examples of this can be seen in secondary schools where students are involved in running school activities over short periods of time,

with minimal support and no progressive leadership development, or participating in ‘mock’ leadership situations to practice their leadership. These opportunities lack the authenticity required for meaningful engagement, leadership capacity building and the sustainability or continuation of leadership learning. Harris and Lambert (2003) propose that if the concept of leadership was understood to be about more than the person, and encompassed the ideas of relationships rather than positions and roles, then leadership practices and opportunities to lead could be spread throughout the school. McGregor (2007) purports that for this to happen, there would need to be the formation of values-driven relationships, rather than focusing on role-based arrangements. It is therefore timely that MacNeil and McClean (2006) call for authenticity in youth leadership development and demand:

...we [adults] must create opportunities for young people to do more than hear stories of great leadership or participate in skills-building activities. We must work to create those contexts and relationships where young people can engage in the action of leadership, where they can practice and demonstrate leadership in an authentic and meaningful way. (p. 100)

In order for authentic leadership development to occur Kress (2006) suggests that collaboration is essential and that providing an environment where young people feel valued, are able to be part of a supportive group and where opportunities for active participation are valued and encouraged is essential. Similarly, Libby, Sedonaen and Bliss (2006) call for a more collaborative approach to leadership education and state:

As partners in leadership, ideally young people and adults come together to plan, problem solve, learn and strengthen their relationships with each other and in the community. (p. 22)

This was a consideration for the planning of the research reported in this thesis, and students were given the opportunity to create an environment where a close learning community could support both their learning and leadership experiences.

According to Kress (2006), adults create leadership agendas and this has resulted in students leading with less accountability and involvement within the wider school community. MacGregor (2007) believes adults are yet to accept the true depth of young people as leaders and strict parameters for leadership created by adults divide students into ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ excluding some youth from leadership opportunities. MacNeil (2006) along with others (Seidentop et al, 2004) call for

planned and progressive leadership development in school settings that allow young people to reflect on situations that require leadership. Likewise, Fertman and van Linden (1999) believe that adolescents' ability to use their skills and to recognize the situational influences that can support and promote leadership are critical to recognizing and displaying leadership potential. Furthermore, Libby, Sedonaen and Bliss (2006) encourage those involved in youth leadership education to expand our understanding about what youth leadership can be, stating:

Our thinking about youth leadership development may be better informed by a broader, more contextual approach that incorporates the unique experiences of the individual, the larger context of the leadership practice, and the specific opportunities for voice, influence and decision making. (p. 39)

However, rather than prescribing a specific leadership curriculum DesMaria, Yang and Farzenhkia (2000) suggest four critical elements that they believe are essential when considering youth leadership development. These include youth/adult partnerships, providing young people with decision-making power and responsibility, a broad context for learning and practice, and the recognition of young people's experience, knowledge and skills. These areas were foundational when designing the collaborative aspects of this research project.

Ricketts and Rudd (2002) developed a conceptual model for youth leadership. This was created through a meta-analysis of youth leadership development literature. They also espoused the need for structured leadership education, believing that there was a lack of information regarding leadership development for young people. Drawing on the work of Bloom (1956) and Fertman and Long (1990) they constructed a conceptual model (Figure 1) for youth leadership learning, proposing five dimensions and three stages of personal development. The five dimensions of the conceptual model were: (1) Leadership Knowledge and Information, (2) Leadership Attitude, Will, and Desire, (3) Decision Making, Reasoning, and Critical Thinking, (4) Oral and Written Communication Skills, and (5) Intra and Interpersonal Relations. They recommended that such a model should serve as the first step in developing a curriculum designed to teach leadership to youth in formal educational settings (Ricketts & Rudd, 2002, p. 2).

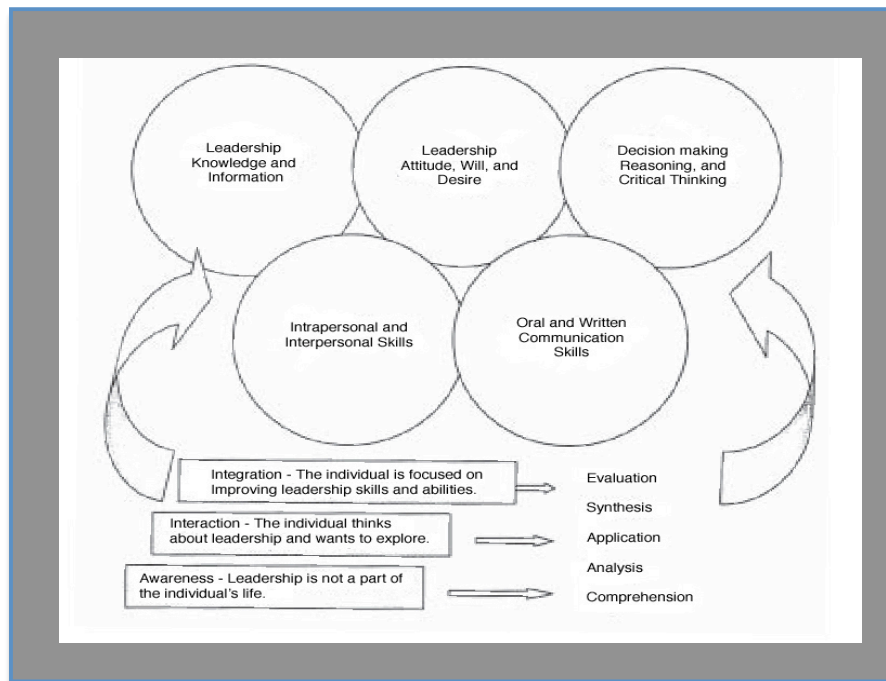


Figure 1. Model for Youth Leadership Curriculum. From “A comprehensive leadership education model to train, teach, and develop leadership in youth” by J. Ricketts, & R. Rudd, (2002) *Journal of Career and Technical Education*, 19(1), p. 7.

This model is used with permission from the author and was adapted to create a framework for beginning the co-constructive processes with the students involved in this research. This model required adaptation as it focused solely on the individual as a leader and did not move beyond this, in a relational sense, only through the development of interpersonal skills. Therefore, I drew on the work of Kouzes and Posner (1995) and made the three key areas of awareness, interaction and integration explicit, as these would contribute to exemplary leadership and create an approach for collaborative leadership learning. This approach included challenging and expanding existing leadership knowledge and practices, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way and encouraging the heart.

The key themes in the work of Kouzes and Posner (1995) provided this research with a framework to begin the co-construction process. For example, modeling the behaviour expected of a leader and what the young women expected to see in others was important within the leadership programme. Providing opportunities and space for others to develop and grow as leaders was an essential part of the learning community. Working together towards a shared goal and contributing to reaching the

goal was an important part of the co-construction process. Encouraging the heart was an important part of the existing school environment which emphasized caring for others and genuine acts of kindness. Understanding the background and complexities of youth leadership was essential in order to grasp the challenging aspects of this research. In addition, this research focused on young women. It is therefore essential to investigate the literature surrounding young women and their beliefs about leadership.

Women and Leadership

... we must never lose sight of the facts that the leaders we are discussing are women, that doing leadership may differ for women and men, and that leadership does not take place in a genderless vacuum.

(Yoder, 2001, p. 815)

Feminist critiques of leadership are set in a wider social context. Research on women and leadership in educational settings illustrate a number of significant aspects that can impact on women's representation and leadership practice (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2009). Within formal educational settings, some researchers highlight a number of barriers women face in advancing through formal leadership pathways (Coleman, 2009). Consequently, the role of the leadership context becomes significant and Blackmore suggests "research is needed to further explore the significance of the relations between context and leadership practice in order to comprehend how context shapes the practice of leadership" (p. 80).

I have found the vast and ongoing feminist critique of leadership within the literature useful in shaping my understanding about what it means to be a woman leader. Key issues related to the leadership context such as gender stereotyping, socialization into leadership, and the impact of patriarchy are prominent themes in educational leadership literature and may be considered relevant to this research. It is therefore important to acknowledge how these issues may potentially impact on the young women in this research.

The gender stereotyping of leadership styles is based on gendered socially constructed norms (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Schmuck, 1996). It is these norms which frequently

position men as the natural candidates for leadership and continue to marginalize women's ways of leading and even exclude them from being involved in leadership (Blackmore, 2002; Court, 1994; Shakeshaft, 1989). The notion of leadership being equated with masculinity is not new (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1998; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000). In her work, Yoder (2001) draws our attention to the notion of gender in leadership and the influence that gender can have on leadership opportunities for women. She believes that when issues of gender are left unchallenged major limitations to encouraging young women into leadership opportunities can be created. Kezar and Moriarty (2000) indicate:

Traditional models of leadership tend to be exclusive and represent an orientation to leadership derived from those traditionally in positions of power that is mostly Caucasian, male, upper-middle-class orientation to leadership. (p. 55)

Gender socialization can influence what could be the respective roles and behaviours for men and women leaders. Eagly and Johannesen (2001) highlight that “gender roles spill over to influence leadership behaviour in organisations” (p. 787) resulting in the behaviours of female leaders being compared to the leadership of males. Some researchers assert that the leadership attributes of women and men are significantly different, while others claim both genders can employ androgynous leadership approaches (Blackmore, 2009; Collard, 2005).

Over the last decade within the debates surrounding gender and leadership, many researchers in the area of women's leadership report that women tend to focus more on relationships and participation, sharing power and responsibility and deconstructing hierarchies, emphasize reciprocity and conceptualize leadership as collective rather than individualistic (Billing & Alvesson, 2000; Blackmore, 1989; Court, 2003; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000). With women there is often an emphasis on the need to empower and care for others, and work in consultation and collaboration with consensus (Eagly et al, 2001). Research in the area of educational leadership also highlights leadership behaviour which tends to be authoritarian, task orientated and aggressive is frequently associated with traditional masculine leadership approaches (Sherman, 2000).

However, the notion of gender socialization and leadership is a highly debated topic leading Eagly and Johannesen (2001) to purport that, “whether men and women behave differently in leadership roles is a much debated question” (p. 781). For an extensive review of gender and leadership the work of Eagly and Johnson (1990) is useful. Their meta-analysis of over 350 gender comparison studies in the area of leadership found no differences in styles for those leaders in formal leadership positions. Many researchers have raised questions about the usefulness of comparing the leadership practices and approaches of women and men (for example, Blackmore, 1998; Eagly & Johannesen, 2001; Shakeshaft, 1989), with a number of these researchers highlighting how problematic this can be. Blackmore argues that the “process of popularization of women’s ways of leading discourse treats women as homogeneous group without differences in race/class/gender or in beliefs” (p. 57), and does not necessarily consider the diverse contexts in which women lead. It is therefore timely that Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) synthesize the significant number of leadership studies related to ways in which women lead and highlight five key ways that women show their contextual approach to leadership – relational leadership, leadership for social justice, leadership for learning, spiritual leadership and balanced leadership.

The patriarchal nature of leadership is also an area which has received attention in educational leadership literature. Historically, much research on leadership has often been equated with masculinity (Billing & Alvesson, 2000). Male dominance, especially in the area of leadership, has been legitimated through social and social structures that remain unchallenged. Schmuck (cited in Bush & Coleman 2000) states

Not only do most leadership theories deny the experience of women in school, theories of leadership are fraught with biases and unspoken assumptions about the role of gender in organizations. Most theory has focused only on males in organisations. (p. 29)

This has lead to many aspects of leadership being presumed to be natural for males and seen as the norm and “the activities of women are always seen as less significant than those of men” (Coleman, 2002, p. 11). Such socialization has lead many women to believe that leadership was unacceptable for their gender (Curry, 2000). Walker and Dimmock (2002) assert that the culture of an organisation can have a significant impact on beliefs and understandings about leadership practice. This is because

educational leadership is influenced by the values and beliefs and rituals associated within a community. They hold the belief that organisational culture is the result of the rituals, symbols and heroes that are created within the organisation and which can be managed or changed. This is very much influenced by the societal culture that refers to the basic assumptions shared by groups of people in a society.

The context of this research involved the community of a Catholic secondary school. As such, it was important to consider the impact that gender stereotyping and patriarchy on the young women and their leadership. The ideology of patriarchy (also termed by hooks (2002) as institutionalized sexism) has had a “...decisive impact on the fate of women in most cultures around the globe and has tended to reinforce authoritarian values over democratic norms” (Richter, 1990, p. 525). This dominance is frequently written into societal rules and laws (and with regard to this research is evident in the Catholic church system).

One example illustrating the pervasive patriarchal culture of the Catholic secondary school was shared by Joanna Manning – a secondary school teacher with the Catholic School Board of Metropolitan Toronto. In 1992 after challenging the patriarchal nature of the Catholic Church through her criticisms of the Pope, she was dismissed from her teaching role because the school believed her actions might have a negative influence on her students. Later, when reflecting on the events at that time, Manning (1995) explains in her article *Speaking Against Patriarchy: Women in the Catholic School System*, that even though a number of inequalities exist in all school systems such as the lack of female role models for girls and the dominance of ‘old boys’ networks, they are fostered, reinforced and legitimized in the Catholic system by the attitudes of men in power. For example she states:

By barring women from ordination, by insisting that women cannot represent God to humanity, by refusing to refer to God in all but male language, the Church legislates discrimination against women as part of its very essence as a community...inherited denominational rights of Catholic school boards clash with the individual rights of teachers and subvert the aspirations of women in church and society...(p. 15)

It was not until she focused her case of dismissal on the freedom of speech for teachers and the rights of the individual, rather than for herself as a woman who was being discriminated against by the Catholic Church that she was reinstated to her role.

In the context of this research such events highlight the importance of being aware of the dominant cultures and values of the Catholic Church system and how these may be played out through school culture.

Research focusing on women in Catholic educational settings is frequently pitched at adults. The work of Collins (2005b), investigated the experiences of Dominican women teaching and leading in New Zealand schools. She examined the complexities of power relations and highlighted how these have impacted on both women's access to and barriers to leadership. However, investigation of the complexities of power relations and the influence of the Catholic Church has often neglected to address gender within the realms of youth leadership development and learning. Just as Court (1997) became aware that many of her experiences and values as a woman leader were absent in leadership literature, I too found that as I became conscious of my own leadership and the leadership of other women, the voices of young women were noticeably absent.

Young Women and Leadership

Gender is a prominent and recurring theme within youth leadership research literature, however, much of the research literature is focused on university students with a scarce focus on secondary school students. Frequently quoted research includes the work of Kezar and Moriarty (2000) who examined gender in relation to leadership style and peer evaluation. Their research explored college students and leadership development opportunities. In their large quantitative study of nearly ten thousand college students, Kezar and Moriarty (2000) found that gender had a significant influence on students' self-perceptions of leadership ability. They asked young men and women to rate their own personal leadership abilities. Their results showed that men often ranked themselves more highly than women, with women noting an increase in their learning about leadership but not necessarily their ability to lead. They found that women often had a lower perception of themselves as leaders than men and that participation in leadership learning opportunities, such as development programmes was a strong predictor of future leadership ability for many women. Kezar and Moriarty called for those who work in the area of youth development to recognize that perceptions of leadership differ between genders and

that leadership development processes differ amongst groups of students and practitioners should plan learning opportunities accordingly.

Other researchers who have studied the influence of gender on young emergent leaders and their self-perceptions of leadership effectiveness, for example Pratch and Jacobwitz (1996) found gender to have a significant influence. Their research explored the effects of gender, coping, and motivational orientation in evaluating individual leadership. Participants in their study included business studies students in a leadership development programme. A number of different matrices and personality tests were used to gauge peer and self-ratings and predict peer ratings of leadership. The findings revealed significant gender differences in the area of motivation with men showing a higher motivation to lead alone, and women illustrating a more communal and social approach to leadership. Findings from this research highlighted females often perceived their personal leadership effectiveness as lower than that of males, males had more opportunity to participate in formal leadership opportunities and females had less aspiration to lead. Komives (1994) assessed the self-perceptions of empowering leadership and the styles practiced by successful female student leaders. She found female student leaders to be most comfortable with empowering leadership practices of enabling others to act and least skilled in challenging the process. This supports much adult research that investigates what influences the leadership practices of males and females (for example, Ridgeway, 2001).

However, Kolb (1999) who analyzed gender as a predictor for holding positions of leadership found that the practices between male and female student leaders showed few differences. The only significant difference was found in the perceptions that women had of their leadership ability. These were lower than that of males. Similarly, Posner and Brodsky (1994) in their study of college students and student perceptions of effective leaders, revealed perceived effective leadership practice did not vary according to gender. In their research, they noted that effective leaders amongst students were both male and female. They found that leaders who were deemed effective, engaged in challenging, inspiring, enabling and encouraging others and role modelling were both male and female. One possible limitation of this study could be that the participants in the research were college students who were already

in formal positions of leadership (for example, executive committee members, or presidents of sororities), and already identified as successful leaders. It could be questioned whether similar outcomes would result if students who were not in formalized leadership positions, or seen as emerging leaders, or involved in informal leadership practice were the research subjects.

Among the challenges of providing youth with meaningful and authentic leadership contexts and opportunities, arises an even greater challenge – to involve young women in leadership and decision-making roles within the secondary school. Three studies found to be of significant relevance to this research were focused specifically on young women and leadership development. Firstly, the work of Edwards (1994) examined correlates and predictors of leadership in school-aged girls. She found that young women who were perceived as leaders by their peers were thought to be competent at organizing others, goal setting and generating ideas. Popularity and physical attractiveness were aspects deemed by the young women as important for leadership. These characteristics superseded others characteristics such as sensitivity and thoughtfulness. Although these results provide an insight into what the young women perceived as important for leadership it is important to be aware of the context in which this research took place. The young women in this study were Girl Scouts and as such, practiced their leadership within a relatively socialized and task-orientated environment. This may have influenced the view of leadership that the young women initially had and also the type of leadership encouraged or modeled to them by others.

Second, Denner, Myer and Bean (2005) highlighted in their work with 164 adolescent girls that it was important to legitimate a range of leadership styles. They believed that by forming respectful relationships between adults and the young women, leadership development programmes were more likely to be successful and role modeling was a key factor for this to happen.

Third, a research project by Mono and Keenan (2000) examined the impact of an after-school girl's leadership programme. Based firmly on democratic principles similar to those of Beane and Apple (1995), adults from outside the school designed a leadership development programme based on the feedback and requirements

described by the young women. Although when evaluated, the feedback from students and teachers indicated the programme to be successful in developing leadership knowledge and self-confidence in the young women, the researchers found that the lack of teacher involvement inhibited leadership practices being transferred back to the classroom and used the phrase “it takes a whole school to deliver the program” rather than a group of individuals (p. 9). With this in mind, within the secondary school there are powerful socializing factors that impact on young women. Mullen and Tuten (2004) suggest that

...opportunities for developing females as leaders coexist with the constraints of sex role stereotyping. It is possible that new ideas and improved practices are gradually being produced within the imperfect systems of secondary education, but in what form and to what extent remains to be seen. (p. 292)

However, while progress is being made towards involving young women in leadership roles in educational settings, such as school environments, sexism remains an influence on young women’s leadership practices and opportunities. Using the work of Mitchell and Webber (1999) to support their findings, Mullen and Tuten (2004) illustrated practices that encouraged young women to appear non-threatening while assuming leadership roles within the school. Ridgeway (2001) purports such actions can lead to the development of hierarchies that favour male access to positions of leadership and reinforce genderized leadership beliefs and patriarchal leadership structures.

My research was designed to identify young women’s current beliefs about leadership and look at what informed *their* leadership understanding. This was a prime opportunity to look at what has influenced these beliefs within a single-sex Catholic girls’ school. It is therefore timely to outline the context in which this research took place – the Catholic Secondary School.

The Culture and Organisation of the Catholic School

An understanding of the unique aspects of the Catholic School is essential as a means of situating this research. The history of Catholic Schools in New Zealand began over a century and a half ago where the first Catholic School was opened in Auckland in 1841 (Grace & O’Keefe, 2007). After the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, and a

marked increase in the European population numbers, the number of Catholic schools markedly increased throughout New Zealand. However, in 1877, the New Zealand Government passed an Education Act that was deemed by the Bishops within the New Zealand Catholic population to be highly secular in its orientation. As a consequence the Bishops of the Catholic Church set about establishing a new network of schools which mirrored the values and teachings of the Catholic Church. The first Catholic secondary schools commenced in the 1880s (Catholic Education Office, 2011).

By the 1970s the increased Catholic population placed pressure on schools resulting in many of them experiencing financial hardship. Approaching the central government of that time for support the government agreed to help fund operational costs for schools with distinctive religious or philosophical special character. This would allow them to preserve their special character. This system of partnership with the state school system is called Integration, and a school participating in it, is called an Integrated School. State-integrated schools;

...teach the New Zealand Curriculum but keep their own special character (usually a philosophical or religious belief) as part of their school programme. State-integrated schools receive the same government funding for each student as other state schools but their buildings and land are privately owned. (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 3)

The culture of a Catholic school is shaped by the notion of its special character which shows distinctive religious underpinnings. For example, a Catholic school expresses the core beliefs, values, traditions, symbols and patterns of behavior which provide meaning to the school community and which help shape the lives of students, teachers, and parents (Cook, 2001, p15). The nature and purpose of education within the Catholic school encompasses more than the transactional nature of teaching and learning. According to O'Donnell (2001) the links between intellectual, spiritual and personal development are central to the aims of Catholic education and highlights.

“The aim of a Catholic education is to enable the student to develop a harmony between knowledge, understanding, personal values, and a Christian worldview by creating and maintaining a Catholic culture in an educational context”. (O'Donnell, 2001, p. 19).

A fundamental principle of social justice lends itself to be a central underpinning value of the Catholic school and there is an emphasis on interaction, collaboration and

inclusiveness (Lavery, 2003). Interestingly in his work, Cook (2001) highlights the importance of maintaining the status quo and Catholic traditions within the contexts of Catholic education. He emphasizes the importance of traditions and heroes and a ‘creed’ for living which is passed on from one generation to another. For example, in the following passage, he states;

Catholic school culture is a “way of life” rooted in Christ, a Gospel-based creed and code, and a Catholic vision that provides inspiration and identity, is shaped over time, and is passed from one generation to the next through methodologies that capture and stimulate the Catholic imagination such as symbols and traditions, heroes and heroines (Cook, 2001, p. 16).

Therefore the tradition of the Catholic Church permeates the school culture and the school reflects the values of its wider community. As highlighted by Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan (1996) all schools have a set of core values which ultimately shape the culture of the school. The Catholic school environment is no different, however, what is distinctive is that many of the values which shape the Catholic school culture are pre-determined by the Catholic Church (O’Donnell, 2010, p. 24). Many of the historical dominant characteristics of the Catholic secondary school in New Zealand continue to highlight a significant level of gender socialization. Furthermore, the social structure of the Catholic Church shows clear systems of leadership that are patriarchal, hierarchical and caste-like in many ways (Spencer, 2005). For example, leadership positions such as bishops and priests are held by men only and these systems were not to be challenged. O’Donnell (2001) purports there were two main historical functions of the Catholic school. Firstly, the socialization of young people in the social fabric of the nation and secondly, the development of their religious understandings and practices as active members of the Catholic Church. In a way, the school was given the role of being a social broker for the church and was responsible for ensuring the practices, beliefs and traditions of the church were passed on to those who walked through its gates and this included the aspects of patriarchy, hierarchy and socialization mentioned above.

Structure and Leadership of the Catholic School

Due to the unique nature of the Catholic school, to further situate this research it is important to draw attention to the structure and organization of Catholic Schools. Although each school may be unique in its culture and school community, there are a number of characteristics which are shared by Catholic secondary schools.

Within the Catholic school there is an expectation that a certain number of teaching positions are ‘tagged’ for teachers who are able to participate in the Religious Instruction which supports the special character of the school. However, all teachers within the school are expected to be role models of Christian values for students (O’Donnell, 2001), and are responsible for sharing the values of the school. Leadership within the school is complex and as illustrated by Grace (2002), successful leadership in Catholic schools is closely related to the cultural and spiritual capital that a principal has. O’Donnell (2001) presents the Principal as both a cultural and educational leader who is responsible for maintaining the special character of the school. Belmont and Cranston (2009) concur and state:

“School principals hold the unique responsibility as guardians of a Catholic heritage...Drawing from their resources of cultural and spiritual capital, principals, through their daily actions, were attending to and safeguarding the Catholic identity of their schools in their leadership role.” (p. 301)

However, merely by fulfilling their role as a school leader, principals are positioned to reinforce the traditional systems and hierarchical structures of the Catholic Church, with their practices engendering patriarchal systems of leadership. In some cases this may marginalize women from leadership opportunities and formal leadership roles. One other important leadership role within the school is the link to the Church – the Director of Religious Studies. In order to preserve the special character of the Catholic School, this position was required by all Catholic State Integrated schools to ensure that Catholic values were upheld and represented in the school’s day to day life. With such social mechanisms in place to maintain these values Spencer (2005) highlights in his investigation into the organization of the Catholic Education structures in New Zealand, “...education is a social institution particularly resistant to

social and cultural change: once the pattern is set, the tradition created, it is extremely difficult to change it” (Spencer, 2005, p. 118).

As can be seen, there is a level of complexity that needs to be considered when completing research within the Catholic school environment. This research was designed to work alongside a group of young women to design an alternative approach to leadership development. As the context of research is shaped by those who interact with it, it is important to explore the way that young women are positioned within the discourses of youth development. The following section examines these discourses of youth development in the literature. It unravels the complexities of defining youth and examines the differing and changing constructions of youth as a contextually situated phenomenon, highlighting the influence this has had on youth development approaches in schools.

CONCEPTUALIZING YOUTH AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The literature on youth and youth development reveals a wide scope in the ways that they are both represented. This has resulted in the efforts of those researching to understand ‘what youth is’ and how to best enhance young people’s life experiences being neither clear-cut nor well defined. Definitions of youth vary considerably depending on the legal, social and political context (Gray, 2002; Pittman, Diversi & Ferber, 2002) and the meaning of youth is rapidly changing as young people actively construct their own group identities (Granger, 2002). Young people’s experiences are now so diverse that Wyn and White (1997) concede it has almost become meaningless to try and categorize young people. These varied understandings of youth have a significant impact on the way that youth development approaches are viewed and consequently designed. This is a compelling enough reason to examine these current understandings of youth and youth development with relevance to this research. In synthesizing the literature, I found an immense volume of work highlighting the area of youth development⁴. It came evident that there were three key paradigms relating to youth development, all of which have been informed by

⁴ For comprehensive literature reviews examining the New Zealand context and youth development see McLaren (2002) and Ministry of Youth Development (2009).

discourses pertaining to defining youth – youth development as a rite of passage, to solve a problem and to empower. An examination of these follows and I highlight how perceptions of youth have influenced youth development approaches.

Youth Development as a Rite of Passage – An Institutional Approach

One prominent theme in youth research is the discourse of age. This concept emphasizes symmetry between an individual's biological and social processes, occurring within a certain time frame (Wyn & White, 1997). Wyn and White's (1997) research investigated the numerous ways youth were represented in the community. They found that viewing youth as an age category was used mainly for policy and institutional purposes. Examples of this are apparent in many national and international policies, for example, in the World Youth Report, the United Nations uses 15-24 years to define youth (United Nations, 2007). In New Zealand policy, the official definition of 'youth' used by the Government spans the ages of 13 to 25 years (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). However, while youth is a convenient label frequently used as a categorization of young people based on their age, not all cultures fit into this Westernized image of youth (Barry, 2005). Definitions of childhood and youth are social and cultural constructs that vary according to culture, ethnicity, gender and class (Milne, 1999) and different cultures adopt concepts to describe young people. For example, in a paper discussing Pacific children's participation in research, Suaalii and Mavoa (2001) note that:

Samoans, Tongans and other Pacific communities differentiate between child and adult according to life stages, often including rites of passage such as sexual or marriage unions or engagements in official public activities. (p. 40)

This description leads to a second significant theme in the literature, which presents youth as an evolutionary concept. Throughout their adolescent years, young people are believed to be in a period of transition to adulthood (Lesko, 2001). In this view, the catch phrases of "storm and stress" (Hall, 1904, p.14) and "identity crisis" are often used to describe youth as a life stage that young people pass through on their way to adulthood which contains a period of undue stress and turmoil (Wong, 2004). These discourses draw on and feed historical theories related to developmental stages (Erikson, 1965), and reinforce the assumption that young people need to pass through a series of developmental phases before emerging from this process having 'found

themselves’. This transition is seen as a time of great complexity where young people are deemed by adults to be confused and trying to find their way. This view of youth assumes that there is a finite cut-off point where one has one’s own identity formed and that having this makes one an adult and ready to take part in adult life.

In many cultures it is these rites of passage and involvement in the wider community that define what it means to be a youth and what it means to be an adult. However, Wong (2004) argues that such a view is not so clear-cut either and suggests that confusion arises when young people are expected to relinquish the dependent roles they play in the stage of childhood, but they are not supposed to be as independent as their adult counterparts who make decisions and choices. Similarly, Miles (2000) suggests that in a rapidly changing world, the transition into adulthood was not a straightforward process and argued that young people were therefore in need of guidance from adults. Research supporting this notion is common. For example, in their work with high school youth, Larson and Walker (2006) found that the students and their teachers frequently made reference to needing to be “prepared for the real world” and there was the feeling that youth were sheltered and ill-prepared to encounter the “complex, fast-paced, hardball and risky real worlds of adult interchange” (p. 245). Findings in their study revealed that adults, especially teachers, played a critical role in shaping how young people were viewed and how they viewed themselves. Teachers played key roles in supporting young people through this process of proposed preparation. As a result of such discourse, youth development approaches shaped from these views are frequently based on preparing young people to be adults. This can include transition programmes from school into the workforce.

Youth Development to Solve a Problem – A Preventative Approach

A second paradigm of youth in the literature is that young people are problems that require fixing. Within this framework youth are often viewed as a potential threat to society’s long-cherished values such as responsibility and fairness (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). This discourse rests on the assumption that young people are uncontrollable, but, if exposed to the right social conventions, could be tamed. Youth are frequently presented as either actively ‘deviant’ or passively ‘at risk’ and

sometimes as both simultaneously. Bessant (1993) highlights the popular dual representation of young people, which conceptualizes youth as a threat and inherently bad, while at the same time, youth being the focus of hope and optimism, and being intrinsically good but vulnerable.

Lerner (2002) and Overton (1998) discuss the dangers of viewing youth as deficient and as problems to be managed to avoid ‘at-risk’ behaviour. They believe that this can lead to some young people having low self-esteem and wanting to participate in high-risk activities such as drug use and sexual activities. Moreover, Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray and Foster (1998) argue that simply being problem-free is not enough to prepare young people for adulthood. Pittman and Irby (1996) suggest that youth who are perceived as problem-free may not necessarily experience ‘storm and stress’ as purported by Hall (1904). Wyn and White (1997) make the point that the focus on problematizing youth and categorizing them into a single entity differentiated only by ‘normal’ and deviant (or at-risk) contrasts markedly with the perspectives that young people have about themselves. Young people see themselves through a variety of lenses and align their perceptions of themselves closely with specific social contexts (Griffin, 2004). From their research, Jeffs and Smith (1995) found that young people did not want to be seen as being in a state of deficit. Indeed, it was a state that they wanted to leave behind. They provided evidence that young people wanted to be treated as adults, and have the opportunity to engage in the same or similar activities as those older than themselves. Young people saw themselves as belonging to cultures that are accessible within their communities and create their identities from these (Hendry, 1993). For example, they label themselves as skaters, as musicians, as popular, where the categories of ‘age’, ‘transition’ and being seen as a ‘problem’ are not often mentioned.

The focus of youth development approaches designed from this view grew out of the understandings that it is easier and more cost effective to prevent problems rather than deal with them when they had occurred (Hamilton, Hamilton & Pittman, 2004). Examples of these youth development programmes include drug use, safe sex, bullying forums, alcohol awareness workshops and truancy prevention. The aim of the many prevention approaches is therefore, to reduce or eliminate risk factors and increase protective factors. It may therefore be helpful to investigate an alternative

model of youth development, which extends beyond criteria of age and the prevention of problems.

Youth Development to Empower – A Positive Youth Development Approach

The past decade has brought increased consensus regarding preferred strategies for youth development. This shift has led to the formation of an alternative model, described by Hamilton, Hamilton and Pittman (2004) as positive youth development. This third paradigm of youth development emphasizes moving away from a prevention or needs-based approach to a preparation or what is often defined as a strength-based approach (Pittman, Ferber & Irby, 2000). Pittman and Wright's (1991) work examined the changing focus of youth development approaches and highlighted their increasing popularity.

The positive youth development approach is based on the assumption that every young person has the potential for successful, healthy development and that all youth possess the capacity for positive development (Lerner, Brentano, Dowling & Anderson, 2002). This approach is broader than the individual. It must therefore be viewed as a combination of all of the people, places, supports, opportunities and services that young people need to be happy, healthy and successful and meet their basic needs (safety, caring relationships, and connections to the larger community while striving to build academic, vocational, personal and social skills). Pittman (1991a) states that a positive youth development approach recognizes that preventing problem behaviours is not all that is needed to prepare youth for their future.

Positive youth development approaches locate young people within a community-based framework. An example is Pittman and Irby's (1996) framework that outlined three basic principles that should guide the development of programmes, policies and the evaluation of positive youth development in schools. It is these three principles that supported the development of this research. The first principle of positive youth development is that any community must have a vision of what it wants for its young people. This community can take many forms, for example, it could range from being a community setting in a town or city, through to a school community of staff and students. In the case of this research, it was a partnership between the young

women and myself within a community of learners. The second principle reinforces the idea that young people grow up in these communities, not within the programmes that are provided, therefore the overall context in which development occurs must be considered. The third principle strongly states that youth must be seen as in partnership with adults, and that as stakeholders, they have a critical role to play in the formation and implementation of positive youth development programmes in schools (Pittman & Irby, 1996).

These seminal ideas have been revolutionary in reconceptualizing youth and have been brought to the forefront in much recent research. The Adolescent Project Team of Partners for Children (2001), based in New York, was instrumental in addressing the development of youth through this lens of positive youth development. The research team argued that youth development research and practice required a collaborative approach which emphasized youth strengths and that adults working alongside young people should focus on supporting and empowering them rather than on the problems and deficits that surround them. This approach presents positive youth development as a process leading to adulthood. But rather than a period of storm and stress, as previous discourses imply (such as Hall, 1904), it is an empowering journey that automatically involves all the people around a youth—family, school and community. It is therefore essential to consider the context in which youth development takes place to contextual this research.

Youth Development in the New Zealand Secondary School Context

In New Zealand, many researchers in the area of youth development emphasize that current approaches to youth development should acknowledge the importance of using a positive youth development framework. However, the literature outlines many differing understandings of what positive youth development is highlighting an area that is worthy of investigation.

Key literature guiding New Zealand schools in youth development approaches includes the Youth Development Strategy in New Zealand (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). These guidelines were based on the United Nations Convention on the

Rights of the Child (UNCROC), the principal international treaty for children and young people. The following six points of the New Zealand Strategy for Youth (Ministry of Youth Development, 2002) explain that youth development:

- is shaped by the big picture of society and communities, allowing the input of all cultures;
- is about young people being connected to these contexts and communities within many social groups;
- is based on a consistent, strengths-based approach such as resisting ‘risk’ and enhancing protective factors;
- happens through quality relationships between young people and adults. This includes areas such as being heard and being responded to;
- is triggered when young people fully participate in the planning and implementation of youth development initiatives. This helps them to control what happens to them and what happens around them;
- needs good information about the lives of youth and the contexts within which they live.

These points clearly reinforce Pittman and Irby’s (1996) three principles of positive youth development and also acknowledge additional factors in youths’ lives that also contribute to reaching positive outcomes. Leading on from the points in this strategy, the importance of engaging the community to support youth was acknowledged and the Ministry of Youth Development (2005) recently published a guide for schools and local communities which encourages adults to engage youth in decision-making processes locally, regionally and nationally. This emphasis on youth participation as active citizens is a key feature of many current positive youth development approaches. In 2009, the Ministry of Youth Development released a substantial report outlining the key aspects of positive youth development within New Zealand. Using examples from two core positive youth development programmes, they summarized that in order for positive youth development to be successful programmes should;

...focus on a competence- rather than a deficit-based paradigm and a holistic view of young people should be used taking into account the contexts where they are from and the settings they exist in. Activities included within a youth development programme should allow young people to have the opportunity to experience supportive adult relationships, develop relationships with their peers, feel a sense of belonging and being valued, develop positive social values and norms, build and master skills, develop confidence in one’s

abilities to master one's environment (a sense of personal efficacy), make a contribution to one's community. (Ministry of Youth Development, 2009, p. 9)

It is also noted by the Ministry of Youth Development (2009) that effective youth development programmes;

...have high aspirations for, and expectations of, young people, are well planned, with activities deliberately designed to progressively build on existing skills and competencies, have high quality activities delivered by a skilled and confident workforce, have skilled and empathetic staff who stay long enough to build trusting relationships with young people, have a 'deliberate learning environment', meaningfully involve young people in choosing and designing activities, have increasing opportunities for young people to make decisions and to take on leadership roles as they mature and gain more expertise, structure that is developmentally, culturally and environmentally appropriate. (p. 9)

Traditional national youth-serving organizations like Rotary, Peer Support, Scouts and Guides provide evidence of a range of community youth development opportunities already available. It is not the purpose of this literature review to provide a review of these sites for potential youth development. However, the one context which has specific relevance for this research, often seen as arguably the most important place for youth development, is the secondary school (Granger, 2002).

Positive Youth Development in the Secondary School

Current youth development approaches in secondary schools appear to be predicated on the traditional belief that youth are problems or in a stage of transition and that the experience of youth is the same for all youth (Hamilton, Hamilton & Pittman, 2004; Wyn & White, 1997). There is an assumption by those planning youth development opportunities that development occurs at a similar pace for all individuals and, therefore, programmes will work no matter who the youth are.

Firstly, often blanketed under labels such as 'at-risk', youth development in schools is often addressed through a needs-based approach where youth are positioned as a problem to be fixed. Under this category, there is a focus on prevention strategies and the guarding against less-than-desirable outcomes. It is questionable whether these programmes and opportunities offered to young people reflect the three underlying

principles of positive youth development outlined earlier by Pittman and Irby (1996). Youth development is sometimes used as a means of solving perceived problems such as drug use, teen pregnancy, bullying or smoking. *“Making it happen... Strengthening youth development in schools”* (Ministry of Youth Development, 2005) is an example of a New Zealand-based resource focusing on positive youth development. This resource encourages boards of trustees, principals and teachers to apply positive youth development approaches more effectively within their schools. It is based on the six principles of the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002) mentioned previously on page 52 and provides ideas about how the concepts of youth development might be used effectively in schools and the community. However, although this resource promotes itself as a tool for positive youth development, many of the messages are from a deficit viewpoint, which can ultimately position youth as problems. This guide also has a strong emphasis on educational achievement and as Pittman and Irby (1996) suggest outcomes should aim to move beyond the academic skills and competencies that are the focus of most schools to address aspects of identity and personal development. Important aspects which are frequently ignored include belonging and self-worth, communication, leadership development, citizenship, physical and mental health and social involvement. In the New Zealand context such an omission is of great significance as the key competencies of the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) purport to focus on thinking, using language, symbols, and texts, managing self, relating to others, participating and contributing – all of which could be considered as important aspects of leadership. Although these aspects are important, alone, they are not sufficient. Many of them could not exist without a dimension of leadership being present and this is yet to be specifically acknowledged within the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007).

The second common view of youth as a period of transition encourages an approach where youth are prepared for leaving the school environment through courses such as career counselling and job seeking assistance. I have seen examples of this in secondary schools where portraying youth as an age category was illustrated in health education classes where certain pieces of knowledge were imparted at certain age levels rather than based on the needs of the group or individual. Given the common themes in many schools, it is timely to ask whether such approaches are meeting the

needs of youth, or whether schools need to re-examine their understanding of youth development and moreover, their opportunities to work alongside youth? Moreover, many youth development opportunities presented in this way are formed around specialist topics. The content in these programmes is frequently designed either by outside providers, has generic content, is mass-produced for delivery to large numbers of students and is not specifically tailored to meet the needs of particular groups. A common example in New Zealand schools is the DARE programme addressing youth drug use (New Zealand Police, 1995). This does not reinforce the principle of positive youth development that encourages youth to work in partnership with adults.

Alternatively, school-based positive youth development challenges schools to think differently about young people (Thomsen, 2004). When schools use positive youth development approaches, youth are no longer seen as problems to be solved, risks to be mitigated, or vessels to be filled (Astroth, Brown, Poore & Timm, 2002). Rather, youth are seen as partners in their own personal development. They have voices that deserve to be heard and have suggestions to be acted upon. Thomsen (2004) argues:

...youth are people to be empowered rather than made to be compliant. They are resources to be tapped into rather than liabilities to be managed. They are understood to be in the process of becoming adults, allowed to experiment with their ideas and to resolve any errors that might occur in the process. (p.80)

The three basic principles of positive youth development emphasized by Pittman (1991b) suggest a number of elements need to be present for positive youth development such as leadership learning to occur. Key aspects involving knowing the content required, involving youth in the planning of their learning experiences and ensuring that the approach utilized is based on the principles of positive youth development are some considerations for schools to address and were paramount to the design of this research.

In summary, youth development cannot be a highly sophisticated and complicated prescription for fixing troubled children. Youth development is about people, programmes, institutions and systems, which provide all youth, troubled or not, with the supports and opportunities they need to empower themselves. It is well known that schools are busy places, and because of this, youth development issues can be

sidelined. The literature has highlighted that a considered and planned approach is required by schools in order to address the development of youth in schools. This approach suggests that adults should also listen to the voices of youth in order to help them develop what many researchers (Benson, 2003; Granger, 2002) call ‘assets’ such as personal identity and self-esteem and create strong support networks, in order to assist them in reaching their potential.

This section has outlined the concepts of youth and how these have informed youth development approaches. The following section extends the notion of positive youth development by examining the literature related to youth adult partnerships and student voice as a way of utilizing a collaborative process for designing leadership curriculum.

INVOLVING STUDENTS IN PROGRAMME DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The tide is turning from the antiquated notion of students as passive recipients of teaching, to a new recognition on the interdependence that is necessary between students and adults. (Fletcher, 2004, p. 4)

Within educational contexts it is frequently teachers who are the designers of curriculum and instruction (Scratchley, 2003). Because of this, Beane (1990) has suggested many young people have little control over their learning experiences because the conditions under which they learn have been determined almost entirely by adults. Within the school environment this culture positions young people as passive recipients of adult protection and knowledge (Smith, Taylor & Gollop, 2000), and places youth in powerless situations with no meaningful role other than as what Kress (2006) describes as passive consumers of information which lacks relevance to their lives. This research was designed to challenge this traditional notion and, as emphasized by Fletcher (2004) above, set out to reshape the relationship between the teacher and the student. This research was founded on the notion that young people and adults could work together in partnership within a learning community to share their voices and make decisions to create a leadership development programme. It is

therefore important to examine these key aspects integral to this research – learning communities, co-construction within youth adult partnerships and student voice.

Young people have an important contribution to make in helping adults understand what their lives are like and how they want to learn. This can be achieved by involving them in decisions about their learning. The literature surrounding young people and decision-making within school communities is generally based on one of two United Nations Initiatives: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (UNCROC) and the 1998 United Nations Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes (The Lisbon Declaration). However, in New Zealand, the Treaty of Waitangi⁵ is also relevant as Māori draw on cultural knowledge to establish appropriate ways in which rangatahi (youth) can best participate in decision-making. Despite these conventions, declarations and treaties, the processes of involving youth in decision-making in schools is still in its infancy as evidenced by those calling for further action in this area (for example, Bishop & Glynn 1999; Campbell, 2000; Ruxton, 1998; Zeldin, Petrokubi & MacNeil, 2007).

Research investigating the benefits of youth consultation is rapidly expanding and many researchers espouse the benefits of involving students in school decision-making processes and curriculum design (Lodge, 2005; McGregor, 2007; Rudduck & Flutter, 2004; Thomson & Gunter, 2005). Involving young people in decision-making about their learning can make the content relevant as the process gives them the opportunity to have a say on content, learning approaches, programme structure and contexts that are important to them. For example, in a report commissioned by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1992), young people were interviewed on what they wanted and needed from adolescent development programmes. They wanted activities that were constructive and engaged their bodies, hearts and minds. They wanted safe places to go and hang out and they wanted structures balanced with choice, as they wanted to play a role in determining the programme. Learning and practicing skills was also an important part of their learning along with spending time with adults who cared about them. Above all, they

⁵ A significant and historical New Zealand document signed in 1840, outlining an agreement in which Māori gave the Crown rights to govern and to develop British settlement, while the Crown guaranteed Māori full protection of their interests and status, and full citizenship rights (Waitangi Tribunal, 2010).

wanted to have fun. This research was a powerful way of challenging assumptions made about the way young people wanted to learn with the aim of further meeting the needs of youth, through researching students' perspectives. These perceptions young people have about their learning have provided researchers and educators with a much-needed source of knowledge, and this can play a key role in creating better conditions for learning in the future (Scratchley, 2003).

According to Scratchley (2003) adults make assumptions about what is important for young people to know and do and fail to ask young people what they think, resulting in the creation of 'one-size-fits-all' and 'top-down' approaches to learning. These are frequently based on their own experiences and Stanton-Rogers, Stanton-Rogers, Vyroost and Lovas (2004) warn there is a need for adults to step away from using their own personal experiences on which to base new youth development programmes stating:

...if we [school staff] have a concern for what current life is like for today's generation of young people, or what may help them in their futures, we cannot use our own experiences of being young or the aspirations we then held as much of a guide. If we want to promote the life opportunities of young people, if we want to help them to prepare for their futures and make well-informed choices about them, then we need to find out about this 'new world' in which they are growing up. (p.117)

Involving young people in decision-making about their learning can increase the level of engagement that they have with the learning material. Morgan and Streb (2001) examined the impact of involving students in decision-making about their learning in community service-learning projects. Using a pre- and post-survey with 200 secondary school students in 10 different schools in the United Kingdom, they found that if students were involved in planning their learning where they have a high degree of ownership, their self-concept and engagement improved, and they were more likely to be tolerant toward others. Within the New Zealand context, Bishop and Glynn (1999), believed students were able to develop an authoritative voice in the learning process when they positioned themselves, negotiated and were involved in meaningful decision-making that affected their learning.

The literature suggests that useful information can be gained on the effectiveness of youth development programmes by consulting young people. However, one

significant area lacking within the literature is the evaluation of how effective such an approach is from the viewpoints of the young people themselves. In one of the few studies addressing this, Stafford, Laybourn, Hill and Walker (2003) sought the voices of youth in evaluating youth consultation processes and found some negative aspects. The young people they interviewed felt very strongly that youth consultation needed to be purposeful, fair and representative across a wide range of students and that it required a genuine commitment from all involved. One student was quoted as saying, “Consultation should be a genuine attempt to listen seriously to young people’s views and act on them, not just a window-dressing exercise conducted for the benefit of adults about issues already decided” (p. 365). One way of actively and authentically engaging young people in decision-making about their learning is through creating a community of learners. The elements integral to this process will now be explored.

Creating a Community of Learners Through Youth-Adult Partnerships

One important aspect of the research presented in this thesis was ensuring that the voices and experiences of the young women and the researcher (me) were included. This was one way to take account of the changing nature of youth and acknowledge the diverse experiences that the young women involved in the research would bring with them, and also utilize the knowledge I brought as a researcher of leadership. The research was therefore based upon the creation of a learning community, which involved me and the young women. This learning community extended the notion of youth-adult partnerships, which are frequently commented on in the literature, and situated this research in a partnership between young women and an adult. The following section introduces the concept of learning communities and partnerships and examines the appropriateness of their use for this research.

Learning communities are groups of people who value each other as learners and provide structures for investigation, dialogue and action in which all members can participate (Fullan, 1995). Such communities create and allow for new approaches to learning and, as described by Stoll (2003), have the ability to deal with change, develop and hold a shared understanding of goals and what is important and are open

to new ideas. Other broad characteristics include collaboration, shared leadership and ongoing learning (Roberts & Pruitt, 2003; Senge, 1990a). Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews and Smith (1990) highlight similar defining characteristics but, on a slightly smaller scale, stating that a learning community could be:

...any one of a variety of curricular structures that link together several existing courses - or actually restructure the curricular material entirely - so that students have opportunities for deeper understanding of and integration of the material they are learning, and more interaction with one another and their teachers as fellow participants in the learning enterprise. (p. 19)

The definition of a learning community is continually evolving to meet the diverse needs of learners and their changing communities (Kilpatrick, Barrett & Jones, 2003). Learning communities illustrate mutual respect (Robertson & Scott, 1996) and, as Feldman (2000) purports, aim to "...strike a balance between individuality and social connectedness....[as we begin to] see the essential role that relationship, participation, reciprocity, membership, and collaboration must play in any theory of human development that aspires to guide us" (p. xiii). A sense of agency, belonging and embracing diversity are also essential elements that Watkins (2005) believes are illustrative of effective learning communities.

Taking this concept a step further Robertson and Scott (1996, p. 8) address the relationships between the teacher and the pupils within learning communities and emphasize the need for using a "power-to" approach as opposed to a "power-over" approach when building a community of learners. However, taking a constructivist approach to creating a community of learners, Carlsson-Paige and Lantieri (2005) advocate for a power with model. This leads to the notion of learning together with all community members contributing, collaborating and participating in the creation and sense-making of knowledge, as expected within true learning communities. Creating productive learning communities with students provides opportunities to develop and strengthen the relationship between the teacher and the student. Within learning communities this can be achieved through the creation of youth-adult partnerships.

Youth-Adult Partnerships: Creating Learning Partnerships With Young Women

Youth-adult partnerships are relationships constructed in a way that encourages youth and adults to work collaboratively in creating programmes and taking action on issues of interest. Mitra (2008) defines youth-adult partnerships as “relationships in which both youth and adults have the potential to contribute to visioning and decision making processes, to learn from one another, and promote change” (p. 222). She acknowledges many benefits of such arrangements ranging from teachers and students working together to gain an outcome that neither group could have reached alone, through to addressing equity issues and injustices. Youth-adult partnerships are based on mutuality between youth and adults in the teaching and learning arrangement. Within this relationship, each person sees themselves as a valuable resource with each age group offering something unique (Zeldin, Petrokubi & MacNeil, 2007). Recent literature encourages schools to explore youth-adult partnerships. Zeldin, Larson, Camino and O’Connor (2005) believe:

...the divide between the youth and adult worlds is complex, multi-faceted, and sometimes downright inscrutable for parties on both sides of the divide. Researchers have important roles in creating strong and sustainable relationships across generations. (p. 7)

The literature highlights a number of benefits of utilizing youth-adult partnerships. Engaging youth in positions of partnership assumes that they have the opportunity to make decisions. Zeldin (2004) proposes that this will increase commitment from young people towards their community. Similarly, Manefield, Collins, Moore, Mahar and Warne (2007) in their extensive account of the historical and changing perception of youth voice in education, believe that partnerships in education are highly valuable and “involving students as partners in their education strengthens their self-esteem and respect and provides practical agendas for improvement that have student support” (p.14).

Examples of successful youth-adult partnerships in education are becoming increasingly prominent in educational change literature. Denner, Meyer and Bean (2005) bring to our attention the potential benefits of youth-adult partnerships in female leadership development as a way of addressing the unique challenges faced by adolescent girls and building upon their individual strengths. They researched the relationships within the Young Women's Leadership Alliance. Investigating the

relationships between 164 girl leaders and five adult women leaders over duration of three years they found three key practices for successful programmes with young women and included, “legitimizing a range of leadership styles, creating a way for all voices to be heard, and creating a norm of respectful disagreement.” (p. 87). Moreover, further aspects which contributed to the adult leaders being successful in building relationships with the young women was to provide guidance rather than instruction, and created an environment where girls felt comfortable to speak their minds and acknowledged the importance of building strong peer relationships amongst group members. Zeldin, Larson, Camino and O’Connor (2004) warned that “strong relationships do not emerge spontaneously” (p. 5) and in order for these to occur knowledge about youth adult partnerships and a significant amount of effort and planning are required.

Research and guidance which focuses on how to create authentic partnerships and involve students as active participants in school decision-making is sparse (Mitra, 2008). Research by Bishop and Glynn (1999) in a project called Te Kotahitanga, exhorts the inclusion of student experiences and ideas as being key areas to consider in the processes of planning and designing a school curriculum. A decade later, in further research on Te Kotahitanga, Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh and Teddy (2009), highlighted the importance of using culturally appropriate pedagogy to improve the educational achievement of Māori students in New Zealand. This was again thought to be revolutionary as it aimed to engage youth people in collaborative learning processes. Through the creation of interdependent relationships between adults and students and the legitimatization of student voice through research outcomes, this collaborative approach to teaching and learning resulted in the increased educational achievement of many Māori students in secondary schools. This research acknowledged more than the school environment and utilized a Kaupapa Māori theory of teaching and learning with the aim of incorporating the knowledge of the individual, school, family and the wider community.

However, within the partnership relationship, there are some important aspects to consider. Camino (2005) supports the use of youth-adult partnerships but warns that misguided approaches can leave both parties discontented with outcomes. Examples of these approaches include holding the belief that young people need to do

everything of importance, adults need to get out of the way and give up their power, and youth must be the key focus for benefit within the relationship. Such discourses can have a negative effect on the youth-adult partnership and leave young people feeling disillusioned and resentful, ultimately putting youth development programmes at risk. Culp and Cox (2002) argue that adult and youth partnerships alone are not enough to effectively develop leadership amongst youth. They state that adults must consider societal trends to project the future contexts in which youth will demonstrate their leadership. Such considerations aligned with a good knowledge of positive youth development principles could be seen as more effective. My belief supports the views of Camino and Zeldin (2002), Larson, Walker and Pearce (2005), Libby, Rosen and Sedonaen, (2005), Stoneman (2002), and Zeldin (2004) that when approached in a strategic and authentic way, creating and using youth/adult partnerships can provide many benefits. This research used youth-adult partnerships to co-construct the leadership curriculum. It is therefore timely to investigate the co-construction process that took place within the youth-adult partnership as part of the action research process.

Negotiating Leadership Curriculum – The Process of Co-construction

Boomer, Lester, Onore and Cook (1992) amongst others call for both students and teachers to work in partnership to create curriculum in schools. This is often termed ‘negotiating the curriculum’. Libby, Sedonaen and Bliss (2006) assert:

Youth have the right to participate in the decision making that affects their lives not only because it provides a key developmental process, but also because the systems in place to address their needs will be better positioned to achieve positive youth outcomes when they have integrated young people into their planning and decision making processes. (p. 14)

Communities of learning could be potential sites for this to happen and provide opportunities for members to contribute ideas and participate collectively. In addition, Cook (1992) believes “... students learn best when they want to. They want to when they are doing it for themselves, as a result of their own needs” (p.16). It is therefore essential that the members of such a learning community have the responsibility for and ownership of their learning, and that this learning is related to their own lives. This increase in ownership can be addressed through the

examination of what learners require in order to successfully engage in the learning process. Moreover, participation and responsibility should have meaning to the individual (Anderson & Sandmann, 2009). However, such an approach challenges the traditional notions of teaching and schooling, changing the balance of power from the teacher to sharing this with the student.

Cook (1992) outlined five requirements of learners, which encouraged them to take an increased responsibility for their own learning: engagement, exploration, experience and finally reflection and consequences. He saw these requirements as essential if students were to gain an increased sense of ownership of their learning. These requirements should also be key elements in learning communities, as they must be present in the co-construction of knowledge and curriculum. Through using their own experiences and ideas, participants in a learning community can tailor the learning outcomes to provide themselves with meaningful learning experiences, which are relevant to their lives.

Drawing on research within the New Zealand context, the process of co-construction with students is a journey that uses group members' voices as an essential tool to move us from power-imposing models to power-sharing models of interrelationships (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Robertson and Scott (1996) assert that this approach allows students to participate more successfully as learners through being able to bring their prior experiences and knowledge to the classroom. However, even with support for such approaches, Scratchley (2003) and Wilson (2000) believe that adults still make assumptions about what is seen as valued and important knowledge and do not ask young people what they think. Bishop and Glynn (1999) emphasize the importance of changing power relations and creating a learning environment where the learners' sense-making processes are used and developed so they can successfully participate in gaining and constructing knowledge. It is refreshing that they stress the importance of the role of the teacher when interacting with the students so that knowledge is co-created. In their previous research with young women, Denner, Myer and Bean (2005) found in an analysis of an adult-student partnership project that the young women involved wanted guidance, not instruction; an environment where they felt safe to share thoughts and could trust the members; and the opportunity to focus their

learning on topics that were of interest to them and allowed them to explore a range of leadership styles.

Acquiring knowledge that is selected by people outside their contexts may cause students to become passive recipients and not motivated or encouraged to become lifelong learners (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). It is vital, therefore, for teachers to listen to the voices of students, allowing them to help shape the content, process, style and language of their learning experiences. Hart's (1992) ladder of participation is a model frequently used by many in the area of youth development and student engagement. In this model he uses the illustration of a ladder and its rungs to show how the level of student engagement and the influence of adults can impact on the learning experience and engagement for young people. At the bottom of the ladder he shows a tokenistic approach to involving students in decision-making that results in minimal student engagement. As they move up the rungs of the ladder, they pass through increasing levels of engagement. At the top rung students have meaningful and student-driven ownership of learning processes and a high level of engagement. This model illustrates the important aspect of not just listening to the voices of students (which he describes as tokenism, decoration and often manipulation), but also creating action from these, which can result in a high degree of participation (which he describes as child-initiated processes with shared decision-making). Similarly, Fielding (2004) emphasizes key aspects of student engagement, calling for a move from dissemination, through discussion and teacher-led dialogue, to student-led dialogue. Hargreaves (2006) similarly focuses on the aspect of student voice and states "Co-construction focuses heavily on the talk that takes place between teacher and learner – their learning conversations" (p. 18). Bruner (1996) also believes in the restructuring power relations and states that we need to

...characterize the new ideas as creating communities of learners. Indeed, on the basis of what we have learned in recent years about human learning – that it is best when it is participatory, proactive, communal, collaborative and given over to constructing meanings rather than receiving them. (p. 84)

Bishop and Glynn (1999) purport that this kind of learning environment can be created through providing contexts where learning can take place actively and reflectively. For the purpose of this research, the design process of leadership curriculum was central to success. For this reason, I have drawn on the work of

Apple and Beane (1995), in which they focus on the principles of democratic education advocating for a learning environment which encouraged the open flow of ideas, a concern for the common good, trust in the group's ability, and the active use of critical thinking to evaluate experiences and ideas. A variety of learning styles needs to be included and students must be given the power to determine which learning styles they need to use in order to learn best. Denner, Meyer and Bean (2005) support this collaborative approach to learning when working with young women. They believe that settings where young women have the opportunity to work together and practice a range of leadership styles in a supportive environment provides them with a forum where they do not have to choose between maintaining relationships or hiding their opinions (which is often the case in female youth peer groups). Bishop and Glynn (1999) encouraged those involved in the co-construction process to interact and share ideas and questions. It is unfortunate, however, that the voices of young people are not utilized and are rarely heard in educational leadership research, even though they are paramount to educational processes (Brooker & MacDonald, 1999), directly affect it and are directly affected by it (Dyson, 1995; Laws & Fisher, 1999).

This section has illustrated how learning communities provided an ideal foundation on which to base this research. Learning communities allow for strong positive youth development approaches in schools which include youth-adult partnerships and productive co-constructive processes. One essential part of such learning communities and co-construction processes demands the inclusion of student voice. This element is crucial in the setting up, the functioning and the sustaining of adult/student partnerships. The following section will provide an overview and critique of the concept of student voice and look at the role that student voice played in this research. It will also illustrate the importance of including and valuing student voice in general curriculum design and decision-making processes, calling for a new perspective of student voice – student 'dialogue'.

Valuing Student Voice – A Case for Student ‘Dialogue’ in Curriculum Design

To find voice is to find identity, and the possibility of agency in the world. Voice... is the inescapable capability, which young people require to flourish at the turn of the century. (Ranson, 2000, p. 286)

As noted by Ranson above, the capability of using voice as a means of making change is vastly important for young people. Therefore, it is reassuring that the changing nature of some schools calls for the engagement and involvement of students in planning and learning processes. The notion that there is a need for student participation in decision-making processes within schools is not a new concept (Alexander & Farrell, 1975). The concept of ‘student voice’, although evasive of definition, is currently addressed in recent school reform literature as a potential avenue for improving student learning outcomes and facilitating changes in schools (Fielding 2001; Frost & Holden 2008; Mitra 2003; Rudduck & Flutter 2000). However, although this need has been continually identified and redefined throughout a forever-growing body of literature, we must firstly understand that there are different levels of student voice approaches, and secondly question whether students are given an opportunity to share their voices. Lastly, it needs to be ascertained whether this notion of student voice is a genuinely truthful and valuable resource in curriculum design and school decision-making processes.

The previous section highlighted that youth-adult partnerships, learning communities and the process of co-construction are founded on student involvement and the opportunity for students to speak and be heard. This section firstly explores the concept of student voice as part of this process and the core values that underpin student voice work. It illustrates different ways that student voice can be utilized in school settings. Second, this section exposes some of the critiques of student voice, illustrating cautions that must be heeded by those working in this area.

Student Voice For School Improvement and Personal and Social Development

An increasing body of literature illustrates that young people have an important contribution to make in helping adults understand the contexts they live and learn in

(Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2001; 2004; Hadfield & Haw, 2001; MacNeil, 2006; Mitsoni, 2006; Rudduck 2002; Saunders, 2005). Youth have insightful views and analyses of how society works and are often willing to voice these opinions if invited. Research completed by Smith, Smith, Boler, Kempton, Ormond, Chueh and Watford (2002) has generated insights into New Zealand youth involved in communities. These insights included the invisibility and silence of youth voices in areas such as policy development and practices that were being promoted in relation to the futures and best interests of youth. They concluded that the voices and experiences of children are embedded not only in their own family, school and neighbourhood contexts, but also in the contexts of the wider society. It is therefore no surprise that some researchers in educational fields see this perspective as important because exploring perceptions and the voices of young people about their lives and experiences can provide schools with alternative sources of knowledge about youth. This in turn can play a role in creating more relevant learning environments for students in the future (Scratchley 2003; Smith & Taylor, 2000). Fielding (2004) supports such a view and states that if we can provide space for student voice, we can “open up very different sets of possibilities for students, for staff, for the school as a learning community and for the school’s capacity to engage with its communities in the process of reciprocal renewal” (p. 202).

Similar beliefs are also held by Stoneman (2002), who proposes “young people often have a perspective that is fresh, new and accurate in certain respects that adults cannot see” (p. 226), providing information that may not often be considered. Davie and Galloway (1996) highlight the benefits of giving young people a say in their education. They argue that the process can provide a foundation of cooperative learning, which in turn helps give a sense of ownership for learning, another key facet to the successful workings of a learning community. Others argue the value of using student voice in decision-making processes stating:

...researching children’s perspectives is a both fascinating and rewarding task. It is also one that is underdeveloped, but important as a means of ensuring that children’s voices are heard, whether in respect of their schooling, family or any other element of their lives. (Lewis & Lindsay, 2002, p.196)

Some credit student voice initiatives as being the influential key to reengaging youth with school, (Fielding, 2004, MacGregor, 2007), improving curriculum and pedagogy

in schools (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000), and improving school ethos (Russell & Bryom, 2007). It is therefore deemed essential that space is created for the voices of young people and that their suggestions, ideas and contributions are valued. Within a learning community, I believe there is space for this to happen. The expanding body of knowledge illustrating the benefits of utilizing youth voice in decision-making processes has led youth development researchers such as Mitra (2008) to investigate how youth voice is viewed and included in current youth development approaches.

Student voice is an essential part of co-construction. Hargreaves (2006) proposes, “student voice is at the heart [of co-construction], since without student voice, there is a severe limit to the extent to which co-construction can flourish” (p. 18). Examples of students being involved in the processes of informing school planning and policies are becoming increasingly apparent in the literature surrounding school reform (among many examples see Fielding, 2001; 2004; Innes, Moss & Smigiel, 2001; Leitch & Mitchell, 2007; Mitsoni 2006; Shallcross, Robinson, Pace & Tamoutseli 2007). In its present form, activities involving student voice range from small group discussions solving school problems (such as bullying) or issues, voicing opinions about school issues, through to working in partnership with teachers and school communities to develop and implement school improvement strategies (Mitra, 2004). Thorne (1994) shares the findings of an action research project where working alongside a group of primary school children, as part of her Masters programme, she re-visited the bullying policy at her school. Students were the key focus for the development of a new school policy and their voices were used throughout this process to create change. Students were interviewed and their ideas incorporated in this redevelopment. She believed:

...children’s views were paramount in formulating a whole school policy, based on respect. We helped them to counter bullying behaviour by creating a ‘listening’ school and a ‘telling’ school where all children are valued and listened to, where they feel safe, and where they can play an active role in the democratic process at the school. They are encouraged to contribute fully to policy and decision-making. (p. 170)

Martin, lisahunter and McLaren (2006) share personal experiences of participatory action research and lisahunter specifically describes an attempt to negotiate a school learning curriculum with Year 7 students to ease the transition into Year 8. She speaks of the richness that was discovered when time was given to exploring the lives

of the students, giving them an opportunity to share issues and dreams as a means of enhancing the learning process.

However, young people's viewpoints have often been ignored in education (Mitra, 2004; Smith & Taylor, 2000), and it is thought that this is due to their presumed incompetence and not having sufficient knowledge or experience to contribute to school policy discussions (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004; Scratchley, 2003; Wilson, 2000). The absence of young people's voices in the processes of planning systems is indicative of a historical discourse in New Zealand education. Rudduck (1995) argues that excluding young people from participating and "the bracketing out their voice" (p. 172) from the consultative processes is founded on an outdated view of childhood that "fails to acknowledge children's capacity to reflect on issues affecting their lives". Franklin and Franklin (1996) also believe that any discussion about participation rights in education is very limited and often confined to that of parents rather than those of young people. Mayall (2002) supports such a notion arguing that children's experiences at home are more negotiable than their experiences at school, often leaving them frustrated and disillusioned with school experiences.

Devine (2002) warns educators that if such discourse is left unchallenged and unexplored, there will be real and devastating consequences for youth's future engagement in communities and issues of social justice. A lack of understanding about involving students in decision-making processes implies that the school structures and strategies, which are frequently created from the teachers' perceptions of schooling and on the assumptions they make about their pupils' experiences, may not necessarily address the changing and diverse needs of their students, especially the needs of the young person today.

Therefore, it could be seen as beneficial that students are involved in the planning and implementation of programmes that impact on them or involve them. Many students believe that schools rarely listen to their views or involve them in important decision-making processes that affect their learning (Noddings, 1992). Similarly, Morgan and Streb (2003) found that when students are involved in programmes and ideas in which they do not have voice and ownership they feel it is a waste of time and they can actually resent being involved. However, Hamilton (2006) states

When student voice is really heeded, students feel respected, understand their views make an impact, have greater control over their learning – in that they are able to articulate their learning, and devise methods of improvement – and generally feel more positive about school. (p. 134)

Stoneman (2002) demands that adults create space for the voices of young people so that they can be heard. She believes “...we desperately need the energy and intelligence of youth plugged into action that will improve society now” (p.226). Although an increasing number of educationalists advocate for using student voice in educational settings and as part of school decision-making processes, Lodge (2005) draws our attention to the idea that using student voice can be very problematic. The next section will illustrate some of the challenges faced when using student voice approaches and will provide critique of this concept, which is so readily accepted as the new trend by those interested in involving students more fully in school decision-making processes.

A Critique of Student ‘Voice’.

Within the current array of literature addressing the use of student voice, and given the increased focus on including student voice in both educational settings and research (for example, students as researchers and learning communities), it is reasonable to provide space for critiquing such approaches. As a result of such critique, some interesting themes emerge, prompting a call for a more critically reflective approach to student voice inclusion and educational research and change (Fielding, 2004). Reflecting on current literature, certain themes are prevalent and it is evident that they are based on generalized assumptions held by teachers and researchers about student voice. Cook-Sather (2007) proposes that much of the current work in the area of student voice premises

...that young people have unique perspectives on learning, teaching and school; that their insights warrant not only the attention, but also the responses of adults; and that they should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education. (p. 389)

Cook-Sather (2007) points out that such assumptions can be dangerous and in fact, rather than empowering students in decision-making opportunities that impact on their learning, can actually reinforce dangerous power dynamics and stereotypes. She acknowledges that student voice research and work can take many forms, but is based

on the understanding that young people have unique perspectives in learning, teaching and schooling processes and that the views that they have on such topics are worthy of both attention and action. Researchers in the area of student voice draw our attention to the dilemmas that are encountered in and created by this type of work. An overview of these issues will now be illustrated.

One concern is based around the uncensored acceptance and value placed on student voice. This can lead to the ‘romanticizing’ of student voice. As illustrated earlier in this section, student voice approaches in their current form can take many shapes. Different approaches place different value on the voices of students, some proclaiming consultation, others claiming collaborative partnership. However, Arnot and Reay (2007) remind us that the voices of young people are no more or less authentic or important than any other stakeholder in the education community, for example, teachers, parents, trustees and principals.

Further issues are related to opportunities for genuine participation. Research on student voice by Lodge (2005) illustrated three identifiable approaches. Firstly, a process of consultation where students are consulted to gain a perspective on the functioning of a school, which often included providing feedback on teaching practices, and areas for improvement. Secondly, student voice is sought in regards to evaluation processes within a school. Lastly, and more recently, student voice has been included in educational research agendas and school processes through involving students as researchers. Some researchers believe that student voice has been firmly placed within the realms of school improvement, rather than existing for its own good. Moreover, some approaches to involving student voice are labelled as opportunities for trivial opinion sourcing

Rudduck (2006) states there is an urgent need for a theoretical consideration of student voice work. She believes that in the present climate of student voice work much of the focus is on management and performance rather than the social and personal development of the student. Similarly, Wyse (2001) calls for schools to involve students in meaningful areas of school change, areas that impact on student learning, rather than the extra-curricula notions of education. Wyse (2001) found that children’s rights to participate in matters affecting their education were rarely upheld

and advocates that young people need to be aware of their rights, stating, “meaningful participation is clearly difficult if you are not sufficiently aware of your rights” (p. 210). Furthermore, the important step of acting on the voices of students is the vital step if educators and policy makers are to move from what Hart (1992) described as a tokenistic and decorative approach to the authentic inclusion of young people’s voices. Bragg and Fielding (2005) have provided a modified version of Hart’s (1992) seminal research and acknowledge the importance of steering clear of tokenistic approaches and engaging students in meaningful actions involving their learning. Holdsworth (2004) advocates that student voice should contribute to the why of learning, as well as the how and what, and must not result in what he calls “trivial exercises in temporary engagement” (p. 7). He cites frequent examples of such practice illustrated throughout schools, such as asking students to be involved in creating school cafeteria menus, or consulting students in school decision-making processes, only to ignore their voices and recommendations. He also urges researchers and practitioners to avoid dangerous tokenistic approaches to student voice initiatives. Researchers are therefore encouraged to be reflective when designing or selecting methods to use in student voice approaches.

One further area that calls for caution is the power dynamics and the essentializing of student voice. Some researchers (for example, Arnot and Reay, 2007) perceive a danger that the process of consulting students can result in the social stratification of schooling being hidden. There is an assumption that the voices of youth will share truthful and informed knowledge about teaching and learning and school reforms. Thomson and Gunter (2006) remind us that student voice is neither neutral nor authentic as it is produced within dominant discourses of power and control within educational settings.

A last area of critique includes the totalizing of student experiences. The notion of ‘voice’ implies that there is one voice for a group of students. This is challenged by Robinson and Taylor (2007) as being a monolingual assumption which creates an illusion that one voice would represent the voices of many. Cook-Sather (2007) warns that student voice work has the potential to essentialize student experiences and can often assume a collective experience that tends to reinforce the status quo. It must be recognized therefore that there is not one single student voice in total, but a

collection of the voices of students. This recognition can minimize assumption of collective experience (Cook-Sather 2007), especially with the student body within a school becoming increasingly diverse. Furthermore, Fielding and Bragg (2003) encourage all who work and research in the area of student voice to continually address whose voices are heard, which are easiest to hear, and which are difficult to get. An example of this in New Zealand is the impact of culture and how this influences how some young people may feel about sharing their ideas and thoughts. It is important to recognize that different cultural expectations may impact on students sharing their voices. In some cultures, for example, the Pacific Island nations, it may be seen as disrespectful to question or challenge the ideas of a teacher. Fielding (2004) suggests a set of questions to consider throughout student voice activities. These include who is allowed to speak, who gets heard, who is listening, what skills are needed, how do people regard each other, what structures and systems are needed, and where are the spaces for making meaning together? These questions were important considerations during the course of this research.

The cautions and questions mentioned above are complex. On the one hand, researchers plead for teachers to ensure that youth are involved in the planning and implementation of youth development programmes that positively meet their developmental needs, specifically engaging youth in the negotiation of leadership curriculum content. On the other hand, they are criticized or cautioned for work that attempts to do this. In order to address this concern, staff must be provided with the support and professional development to enable planning procedures and youth leadership development curriculum to include the voices of the young people in New Zealand secondary schools. Recognizing the dilemmas schools face in student voice work, there is a call for teacher professional development in this area, specifically, the philosophy around student voice work, developing skills to access and implement student voice initiatives (Manefield, Collins, Moore, Mahar & Warne, 2007).

Lodge (2005) and Byrom, Thomson and Gates (2007) suggest the need for *dialogue* rather than *voice*, where students become engaged members of conversation in a climate of trust and can share and act upon new ideas. Dialogue between students and teachers can change the power balance between the teacher and the student and can also reduce the possibility of essentializing student voice. The opportunity for

dialogue through meaningful conversations and negotiation may allow stakeholders, on both an individual and group basis, to share ideas, thoughts and beliefs. All involved in the conversation in turn can clarify what is shared, and ideas can also be developed and understood. This may result in both teachers and students gaining a more thorough understanding of the perceptions involved in the current situation, but can also allow individuals to articulate their point of view, address issues relevant to them personally and to minimize inherent contradictions in both adult and student interpretations.

The Gap Between Theory and Practice

The ability to listen to the student voice is, I believe, the most significant enabling factor for the building of caring, empowering relationships in the development of a learning community. (Hamilton, 2006, p.128)

Although an increasing volume of literature espouses the benefits of students being involved in curriculum design and decision-making processes that affect their learning (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Denner, Meyer & Bean, 2005), the gap between theory and practice in some schools remains a wide-open crevice. Research by Stafford, Laybourn, Hill and Walker (2003) sought to discover what young people thought about being consulted about their learning. They found a tension existed between the processes that students were involved in and their understandings of what the outcomes should be. They discovered that many young people were disappointed about consultation processes and are often left disillusioned as a result of not seeing their ideas put into practice.

...children want to be consulted if it is done properly, if it is about issues directly affecting them and if they see it as likely to yield results that are likely to benefit them or other young people. (p. 361)

Possible reasons for such tension include firstly, the culture of the school, specifically the views of how leadership should be structured, may be an influence. This can be dependent on many factors such as age, current leadership structures within the school, external requirements to deliver a national curriculum, historical traditions, role modelling of leadership behaviour, religious focus, school processes for curriculum design and implementation and opportunities for student engagement. Secondly, there can be a lack of understanding about student and adult partnerships,

with schools, teachers and students remaining unsure of their roles within such learning arrangements. This can result in partnerships not being created or, when they are, the partnerships do not provide the expected mutual benefits to those involved. Thirdly, as a result of the last point, negative experiences resulting in tokenistic partnerships can mean that future partnerships will not be valued and can deter students from wanting to be involved in such arrangements.

SUMMARY

In conclusion, a careful study of the literature has convinced me that the re-engagement of positive youth development approaches in schools and, more specifically, formalized leadership learning is essential if young people are to experience relevant and meaningful leadership development approaches. The growing complexity of New Zealand society makes it essential for researchers to look for new ways to conceptualize youth and youth development because past theoretical models that have been used previously, and continue to be used, fail to capture the reality that they seek to describe. Moreover, adults must seek and listen to young people's experiences. It is important to recognize the impact that different contexts have on people's ideas about youth and understand the overall impact that this may have on the planning and implementation of youth development programmes, especially in the area of leadership.

The first section of this literature review presented the concept of leadership and focused on women and leadership and more specifically young women, within the school context. This section of the literature review highlighted key aspects that impact on women's leadership in educational contexts. This section also illustrated that young people are frequently ignored in conversations about educational leadership, even though their experiences should be central to such a concept. Traditional approaches to youth leadership development initiatives often create programmes which are developed from the viewpoints of adults, and students become passive recipients of leadership knowledge, which is not necessarily relevant to their contexts. This section also provided an overview of the organisation and structure of the Catholic School, highlighting areas that may impact on women's leadership practice.

The second section highlighted the different theoretical positionings of youth and youth development. I argued a number of reasons for reconceptualizing the way that we think about youth so that positive youth development approaches can be undertaken as a means to learn about leadership. A review of literature in this area has acknowledged that the notion of youth development is frequently constructed from traditional ideas of what it means to be a 'youth', which frequently position youth as deficient and needing to be fixed. This can result in 'needs-based' programmes. These programmes are often removed from the wider contexts within which youth exist and lack relevance to the larger communities in which they live. This does not align closely with the basic principles of positive youth development as discussed in previous sections which calls for a partnership between young people and adults as a means of creating relevant and meaningful developmental processes. This research proposes a positive approach to youth development, requiring a partnership between adults and students. During this research, the foundation for knowledge creation is through adult-student partnerships. These are encouraged as a means to negotiate the leadership curriculum, a process that involves student voice and a collaborative approach to designing learning opportunities.

The third part of this literature review examined the processes of involving young people in programme design and implementation. I explored the notion of adult-student partnerships and critiqued and made a case for the inclusion of student voice in school decision-making processes, especially in the case of youth leadership development. This has outlined the rationale for selected approaches of this research. It is important to emphasize that this research addresses areas that have had little attention in the literature. Firstly, it has a focus on young women only, rather than youth in general, which much of the literature tends to address. Secondly, it explores young women's leadership beyond formal leadership roles within the school. This research also addresses areas in the literature which call for more research which explores and presents work in the area of co-construction, and more specifically in this case, the use of co-construction as an alternative approach for leadership development.

The aspect of student voice was addressed and I highlighted the importance of including student voice in youth development approaches. This shows students that

their voices are valued and their ideas are worthwhile. By accessing student voice through dialogue (co-construction and the use of focus groups), tokenistic approaches and the essentialization of student voice can hopefully be avoided, as students are involved in the action phase of the research and act upon their own ideas. Finally, by stepping away from traditional notions of youth, this research allowed young women the space to redefine themselves in a positive light. I hope that this research process will give them the space to take further ownership for their own journeys of development, aligning them more closely with what they desire in the changing culture of youth. This research therefore addresses a gap in the literature where young people's voices and more specifically, young women's voices are rarely utilized in the design and implementation of youth leadership development approaches. The research is designed as a conscious effort to bring young women's voices into conversations about educational leadership.

The next chapter illustrates the research methodology for this study. The research methodology will be explained, outlining the theoretical perspectives and approaches used throughout the research. This chapter will conclude with an exploration into the complexities of undertaking research with young people and the ethical considerations for this research.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines my theoretical paradigm and choice of methodology for the research that was undertaken. The prime tenets of qualitative research illustrating key features that relate to this study will firstly be outlined. Secondly, I illustrate the paradigmatic assumptions connected with this research. Thirdly, I show the important place that feminist research has as a methodological approach in relation to this research, by outlining essential features and considerations that supported the research process. Fourthly, the action research approach is illustrated as a process central to the research design and the leadership development process. To conclude this chapter I draw on current literature to illustrate the many considerations and complexities of conducting research with young people and the ethical considerations applied to this research.

Introduction

Outlining a research methodology provides information about how the research has been designed. It is also an opportunity to illustrate the theoretical, analytical and practical approaches the research was based on. In relation to this study, research was viewed as an active partnership based on collaboration between researcher and the researched in order to share and create new knowledge (Cresswell, 2005). This view of research has underpinned the methodology generated for this research.

A key starting point to this research was the construction of research questions. This research was planned as collaborative action research with young women in a Catholic single-sex secondary school with the aim of creating a leadership programme to meet their needs. The research was guided by the following questions.

1. What are young women's beliefs about leadership and how are these influenced by contextual factors in their secondary school?

2. What could a leadership curriculum that was co-constructed through an adult/student partnership look like?
3. How effective is the process of co-construction in developing a leadership programme with young women and how successful is the programme in developing their leadership understanding?

Through asking these questions I sought to understand the beliefs and perceptions that the young women held about leadership and to explore which factors influenced these understandings. I also wanted to investigate how effective co-construction was as a process for developing a leadership programme within a secondary school, which met the needs of the participants. Furthermore, I wanted to see what a programme designed by adults and students working in partnership could look like and how effective it was at developing leadership with young women. It was essential therefore to reflect these aspects in my choice of research methodology, as this would make a significant difference to the research approaches that were to be selected. The research methodology also influences the capacity of research to move beyond taken-for-granted theoretical thought and to open up debate amongst groups and individuals (Young, 2004). Therefore, this next section will provide detail of the theoretical framework and design of this research. I also address how ethical standards within the research process were maintained. The detail on research methods and process of the research are discussed in the following Chapter 4.

The Research Methodology

How the researcher views the world affects the entire research process – from conceptualizing a problem, to collecting and analyzing data, to interpreting the findings (Merriam, 1998). The aim of the research methodology is to provide a philosophical framework that supports these considerations in the research process (Lather, 1992). As reflected by Arsenault and Arsenault (1998):

How we see the world is largely a function of where you view it from, what you look at, what lens you use to help you see, what tools you use to clarify your image, what you reflect on and how you report your world to others. (p. 3)

Within a research context, our epistemology (the philosophy of knowledge and how we come to know about the world and our experiences), and our ontology (the ways in which we see and understand the world and reality) all influence how knowledge is viewed, gathered and analyzed within the research process (Grix, 2001). The term epistemology originated from the Greek word *epistēmê*, a term used to describe knowledge (Grix, 2001). Epistemology is concerned with questioning what is to be regarded as acceptable knowledge and could be defined as the study of the nature of knowing and justification. It encompasses how we identify problems, seek answers, and the beliefs we hold about how we get information (Audi, 1999). It is primarily concerned with the origin, nature and limits of knowledge and truth. As I understand that people view things differently and how they view things will influence what they see to be true – hence, there being multiple realities, my personal epistemology is subjective. I believe that knowledge will be constructed in a subjective manner no matter what we do. For example, in designing the interviews in this research, I chose the area to investigate, I chose the questions to ask and I interpreted what the people involved were saying, just as they were interpreting the question I was asking them. I believe that this process is subjective. However, as a researcher I was conscious of ensuring a high level of reflexivity throughout the research process which I will illustrate in the next chapter.

Ontology is a term used to describe the ways in which we understand or view the world (Krauss, 2005). Ontology could be defined as the study of being (Audi, 1999; Sparkes, 1992). By attempting to understand the meaning of life we begin to think about reality. Ontology is concerned with establishing meaning about the kinds of things that exist and understanding what constitutes the world and involves the study of reality, of being, and the process of understanding the real nature of whatever something is (Schwandt, 1997). To understand a person's ontological perspective, it is important to ask the prime ontological question of whether a person believes that there is an external, real world and that the truth can be discovered (external-realist), or is the truth out there and people view it differently (internal-idealist)? (Sparkes, 1992). In this research knowledge creation was based around understanding the young women's perceptions of the world around them, hence there was a constructivist ontology. I held an internal-idealist ontology (Sparkes, 1992) and believed that because people view things differently, and information is constantly

being valued and interpreted differently by different people, many different realities can be created.

The ontological and the epistemological perspective held by a researcher will influence the methods chosen for conducting research. For example, an external realist with an objective epistemology will most likely use methods that are scientific and have a quantitative approach. Alternatively, Sparkes (1992) stated that a person holding an internal-idealist ontological perspective and subjective epistemological view may incorporate methods that allow for qualitative information to be sought. These approaches and perspectives are influenced by the set of beliefs (paradigm) of the researcher. Krauss (2005) illustrated the complex relationships between epistemology, ontology and methodology through simplified representation stating “ontology involves the philosophy of reality, epistemology addresses how we come to know that reality while methodology identifies the particular practices used to attain knowledge of it” (p. 758-759). All of these work in combination to create a research paradigm.

The Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is a term used to describe the combination of a researcher’s epistemological, ontological and methodological understandings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). A paradigm can be defined as a set of values, ideals or beliefs that frame, or provide a lens, for the way we view and interpret the world and our reality (Sparkes, 1992). Bryman (2004) believes that these beliefs will influence “what should be studied, how research should be done, [and] how results should be interpreted” (p. 4). More broadly, a paradigm could be seen as being “a particular worldview where philosophy and methods intersect to determine what kinds of evidence one finds acceptable” (Patton, 2002, p. 571).

It is essential to acknowledge that there are different paradigms within social research. Each of these paradigms is based on different ways of understanding and interpreting the world. For example, Wenger (1998) stated that research within the normative paradigm holds a focus on studying averages and what usually happens. Interpretive research studies the meanings people give to their actions and behaviour, and research

within the critical paradigm considers the political and social effects of situations on the participants within the research (Wenger, 1998).

This research sits within the interpretivist paradigm, a paradigm that is characterized by its concern for, and focuses on, the individual (Bryman, 2001). Morrison (in Coleman & Briggs 2003), believes the interpretive paradigm is an appropriate approach in educational research as “...all educational research needs to be grounded in people’s experience...for interpretivists, the core task is to view research participants as research subjects and to explore the ‘meanings’ of events and phenomena from the subjects’ perspectives” (p. 18). Central to this paradigm is the attempt to understand the subjective world of the human experience, from the perspectives of those within a context. Within this paradigm, theory is seen as “emergent and must arise from particular situations”, rather than being created by the researcher before the research commences (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p. 22). The participants involved in the research therefore played a role in helping to construct the reality with the researcher (Robson & Robson, 2002).

This research aligned with an interpretivist approach because it is based on the premise that the young women involved in this research would have differing understandings of the world and that these would be respected within the research process. An emphasis was placed on understanding and interpreting the research context in the terms of the young women’s beliefs about leadership. Kincheloe and Tobin (2006) state that from within the interpretivist paradigm the researcher must understand that knowledge producers (in this case, the young women and the researcher) “perceive the world from a centre located within themselves, shaped by the social and cultural context in which they operate, and framed by the languages that contain within them, tacit views of the world” (p. 9). In relation to this research the justification for sitting within this paradigm arose from the need to explore leadership and uncover the many perspectives held by the young women. It was not the aim of the research to create a common universal leadership development programme that could be applied across a variety of contexts. Conversely, it was an opportunity to explore the multi-faceted views of what leadership could be and what influenced these beliefs within a particular context.

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

The chosen methodological approach for this research was a qualitative action research framework. Conger and Toegel (2002) believe that qualitative investigation plays a valuable role in the field of leadership research. Guba and Lincoln (2003) broadly define qualitative research as “multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter” (p. 2), and assert it is a field made up of multiple methodologies. The genre of qualitative research has a number of key characteristics that set it apart from other research methodological approaches. It is a form of inquiry that aims to explore phenomena in their natural settings where researchers use multiple methods to interpret, understand and bring meaning to data (Arsenault & Anderson, 1998). The fact that knowledge cannot be separated from the knower and that the two are in fact inextricably linked is acknowledged as a key feature of qualitative research and is seen as a strength. Kincheloe (1991) states that a characteristic of qualitative research is its concern with context and believes that “human experience is shaped in particular contexts and cannot be understood if removed from those contexts” (p.144). Therefore, this research took place in the normal, everyday context of the participants. This context was the secondary school.

Arsenault and Anderson (1998) note qualitative research can encompass a variety of theoretical positions and many different ways of viewing and analysing data. The qualitative approach to research allows for questions to emerge as the researcher progresses and the discovery of and analysis of data may be an ongoing process throughout the research design. Qualitative research often involves fieldwork, and the qualitative researcher is usually the primary instrument for descriptive data collection (Merriam, 1998). In this case, I was the sole researcher. However, within the action research process, a group of 12 young women were involved in the action, evaluation and reflection phases of the leadership programme that was created. This allowed me to listen to and act on the voices of the young women involved in this research - a prime tenet in feminist research. This was the theoretical lens that was used for this study and will now be discussed.

Qualitative Feminist Research

The key objective of qualitative research is to uncover human experiences and understand human behaviour. However, within feminist qualitative research women's voices and experiences are central to this process. They can uncover and remove the blinders that obscure knowledge and observations concerning human experiences and behaviours that have traditionally been silenced by mainstream research (Ardovini-Brooker, 2001). In the case of this research, providing space for the young women's voices was an important way of bringing young women into conversations about educational leadership, and as such, their voices were central to this. Lather (1988) states that to do feminist research is to "...put the social construction of gender at the centre of one's inquiry" (p. 181). Although this was not made explicit to the young women in this research, my leadership experiences as a woman had informed my decisions about beliefs about leadership, and gender was central to this. It was therefore essential in my research to situate the research around the young women and within their context and experiences as developing young women leaders. According to Reinharz (1992) key characteristics which identify feminist research are that it is research carried out by women who identify themselves as feminists and draws directly from the experiences of women who are central to the research process. Knowledge is gained in order to bring about change and improvement for women rather than collect knowledge for its own sake. There is also consideration of the social context within which the women live (Wadsworth, 2001). There are many varying and diverse interpretations of what feminist research is and what it should be. What is certain, however, is that within the abundance of literature attesting definitions and characteristics of feminist research, certain themes are evident. These themes that will now be discussed as a means of illustrating the feminist research perspective of this research.

Theme One: Feminist research explores the experiences and perspectives of women.

Women's voices and experiences are central to feminist research. Ardovini-Brooker (2001) believes that "feminism grants voices to those who have been silenced. If we are to finally hear the plethora of silenced voices, then we must listen to their perspectives" (p. 1). Although such a statement which alludes to granted voice to others could be perceived through a feminist perspective as patronizing, Devault

(1990) claims that research generated by academic feminism – involving a new and careful attention to women’s experiences – is beginning to “bring women in” to theorizing (p. 96). She believes that feminist methodology is not one single described model or formula. Rather, it is a collection of approaches that subvert the established procedures of the powerful (namely men). My own understanding of what it means to talk or listen as a woman is based on the concept of women’s standpoint (Hartsock, 1981). This approach does not mean that all women share a single position or perspective, but instead insists on the importance of recognizing the implications of context, power and social interactions upon women.

Olsen (1994) draws our attention to one key characteristic of feminist research especially relevant to this research project. Research starts from women’s actual experience of everyday life (in this case, as a student leader in a secondary school) and ends with the stimulation of thoughts, doubts and questions concerning change (how they can best develop as leaders). It is the thoughts, doubts and questions that arise which underpin the feminist perspective from which this research project was created. It was essential to communicate in ways that allowed the young women to share their own experiences and perceptions and for me, the researcher, to listen and ‘hear their voices’. This meant listening to the young women’s experiences and respecting their perspectives, clarifying the meanings of the words that they used. The young women and I participated in a process of co-constructing and participating in a leadership programme and the effectiveness of that programme was researched. This encouraged the young women to share their beliefs and experiences of leadership. The importance of these experiences was reflected in the design of the research where the young women were central to the research.

Theme Two: The research relationship

Because feminist research actively seeks to reduce the power imbalance between the researcher and the participant, a key feature of qualitative feminist methodologies is the acknowledgement that the production of knowledge is a social process in which the researcher herself plays an important part (Reinharz, 1992). This involves recognizing the researcher as part of the research process and understanding how the social location of the researcher (for example age, race, gender) plays a role in

shaping this process. For this reason, in feminist research the researcher is encouraged to 'place' herself within the research process. Jones (1992) insists that this can be accomplished by acknowledging the perspective of the researcher, in terms of gender, class, culture and disciplinary orientation and how these aspects may impact on the research process. According to Brayton (1997) this assists in restructuring the unequal power relationship between the researcher and the participant by illustrating that both the perspectives of the researcher and the participant are both valid. Garrett (1999) supports this view and states that "Feminist researchers aim to investigate a socially constructed world from within and seek to break down the hierarchical and potentially exploitive relationships often created within the research process" (p. 2). In order to gain an insight into the perceptions and thoughts of the group of young women involved in a school community, it was important that I recognized that I myself held views and perceptions, which had originated from a different context and different experiences. Therefore, an element of reflexivity was required. Reflexivity is defined by Pillow (2003) as

...involving an ongoing self-awareness during the research process which aids in making visible the practice and construction of knowledge within research in order to produce more accurate analyses of our research. (p. 178)

Bryman (2001) believes that to be reflexive is to acknowledge the role of the researcher in the construction of knowledge and to see the researcher as implicated within this research process by the position that they assume during the research and the way they share the research findings. He proposes that researchers are "inescapably part of the social worlds that they are researching" (p. 141), and reflexivity demands that researchers see themselves as integral to, inseparable from and a part of the research process. Similarly, Pillow (2003) purports that "...reflexivity becomes important to demonstrate one's awareness of the research problematics and is often used to potentially validate and legitimize the research precisely by raising questions about the research process." (p. 179). In his work in the area of reflexive sociology Gouldner (1970) purported the need for researchers to confront their own assumptions prior to and during the research and consider the impact that the research has had on them, with an emphasis on examining how the research has changed them.

Theme Three: Knowledge is gained in order to bring about change and improvement for women

The feminist movement has become increasingly aware of overgeneralizations, especially in the area of western feminist positions relating to other parts of the world (Devault, 1990). Feminist research cannot claim to speak for all women (Garrett, 1999); however, it can provide new knowledge grounded in the realities of women's experiences and actively enact structural changes in the social world. Recognizing that the participants in feminist research are part of the social world and are conscious of the social realities that impact on their own lived realities is of great importance to feminist researchers and this stance, often politically motivated, plays a major role in changing social inequalities. Feminist research is also about taking informed action to make change. As Ardovini-Brooker (2001) strongly states:

Feminist research is about becoming part of the process of discovery and understanding. It is a responsibility to attempt to create and initiate social change. We must, as feminist researchers, see feminist research as praxis. Through our research we create useful knowledge in order to make a difference and inform activism. (p. 8)

In order for change to begin, however, a place of initiation and understanding of the current situation must be identified. This research aimed to explore how leadership education could take place in a different way from traditional approaches currently used in schools. As previously commented, literature on young women's beliefs about leadership is sparse (Mullen & Tutan, 2004) and their involvement in leadership preparation is under-researched. This research aimed to create a leadership programme that met the needs of the young women who were participants in my research project. This programme aimed to provide the young women with the understanding and abilities to continue their development as leaders in the both the school context and wider community and assist in maintaining a sustainable leadership culture which was responsive to the current needs of young women.

However, Lennie, Hatcher and Morgan (2003) bring to our attention some of the dangers and contradictions associated with feminist action research. They critiqued the notion of feminist research as a means of empowering women. In their collaborative work with rural women and information technology, they found that research with the goal of empowerment, and even the concept of empowerment itself,

was problematic. The shifting and complex nature of power relations propelled them to argue that there was no stable position from which to do feminist action research. They also argued that researchers could never be certain whether their research activities have been empowering or disempowering for any group and that idealistic feminist discourses taken up by the researchers involved created what they defined as “an impossible burden” (p. 77). They call on researchers to be realistic about their visions for feminist action research as a tool for empowerment. Within this research programme, the area of empowerment was not explicitly addressed. However, through involvement in the leadership programme, the young women were involved in a capacity-building process where they were developing their leadership abilities and leadership knowledge. Through a reflective process the changes in beliefs and perceptions were evidence of learning, and this new knowledge led to them initiating further action in the area of leadership within their school. However, whilst they were able to make these small contributions, the young women were not necessarily empowered to make changes to the more traditional structures and larger systems within their school.

My position as a feminist researcher within the action research process

For feminist research to be undertaken, the researcher must identify as a feminist (Reinharz, 1992). As a feminist, a teacher and a researcher, I have been conscious for many years of my personal journey and desire to provide leadership development opportunities for young women in relevant and meaningful ways. I am committed to providing educational opportunities for girls in the area of leadership. Of concern to me also is access to opportunities to practice leadership and participate in leadership development in a safe and supportive environment. My feminist beliefs have shaped this research from its conception as my own experiences as a women leader, and from observing young women learning about and practicing leadership in schools, have highlighted a lack of attention paid specifically to young women and their leadership development. One further area of concern in social research, from a feminist perspective, is the potential exploitation of the research subject. In feminist research, “respecting the experience and perspective of the other ” is key (Worrell & Etaugh, 1994, p. 444). In this research project, it was important therefore to consider my impact as an older woman, an ex-teacher, and non-Catholic and how this influenced

the power relationships within the research process.

Addressing issues of power within the research relationship is an important consideration of feminist research. As stated by Strathern (1987), present-day feminist research embraces the need to explore the researcher's place of self when researching in an unfamiliar context. Because researchers produce knowledge, they are thought to be experts (Gitlin & Russell, 1994). However, the methods of gathering data, planning and evaluating in this action research process clearly positioned me as a learner also. As MacGibbon, in Harrison, MacGibbon and Morton (2001), found when working with women at a women's refuge, I too found myself as a researcher not only positioning myself within the research process, but also being positioned by the participants. At times I positioned myself as the expert and the holder of specific knowledge that was required in order for the action research process to take place or for the leadership curriculum to be developed. This was an important part of the co-construction process. As I was not a staff member, aspects of respect, validity and how the student might consider my role were important factors to consider. As a facilitator of the initial leadership sessions and also being the researcher I was also cognizant that the influence of peer groups and interactions between research participants may influence the type of data that was shared. The data shared may also be reliant on the context of the school, and what was currently happening within the school timetable.

In summary, the themes in this section addressed feminist research that underpinned the research design and methodological approach for this research. Therefore, the processes for creating the leadership programme and for exploring the young women's beliefs about leadership needed to reflect these. The design and implementation of this research reflected these themes through the use of action research. This approach will now be discussed.

Action Research

The research design chosen for this project was action research. This section will explore what action research is and illustrate why action research was selected as an intervention and information-gathering process with the young women in this

research. I will justify its relevance and, therefore, its appropriateness for this approach to youth research and outline key considerations that were particularly relevant to this research.

Co-constructing Leadership Curriculum as an Intervention

I selected action research as a means to actively engage both the researcher and the participants in a process of co-construction in order to co-create a leadership programme. The focus was on the use of collaborative processes to co-construct a leadership curriculum that included students' perceptions of and beliefs about leadership relevant to their leadership contexts – the secondary school. Many researchers and writers have been influential in my understanding of and subsequent development of action research as a research process (Alcorn, 1986; Cardno, 2003; Piggot-Irvine & Barlett, 2008; Robertson, 2005; Somekh, 2006). Their experiences and critiques have offered great insight that was incorporated into my own understanding and interpretation of action research, especially alongside women. This has led me to realize that there is no single type of action research (Bryman, 2001). However, for the purpose of this project, I have adopted Reason and Bradbury's (2006) definition of action research as “ a participatory, democratic practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview” (p. 1).

The concept of action research is not new. Lewin (1946) believed action research to entail a spiral of events that comprised planning, action and evaluation of that action. This model was the foundational approach for designing this research. This research used the phases of reconnaissance, intervention and evaluation to structure the action research process. However, action research goes far beyond data gathering and information collection and is a form of research that could be loosely defined as learning by doing (Burns, 2000). Tolich and Davidson (1999) believe action research is “...applied research where the researcher and those being researched determine the problem and assess possible solutions...the researcher is not ‘detached’ but intimately involved and interventionist” (p.5).

Brown (2004) believes action research to be a holistic approach to problem solving, rather than a single method for collecting and analyzing data as it allows for several different research tools to be used while the research project is conducted. However, Kemmis and McTaggart (1992) strongly argue that action research is not simply problem solving. They state that it is about posing problems and is “motivated by a quest to improve and understand the world by changing it and learning how to improve it from the effects of the changes made” (p. 21). Grundy (1994) argues that action research involves a process of change, but not just for change’s sake. The change should be specifically directed towards improvement and that it must be a process directed towards, and directed by, those who are actually taking part in the journey. Kemmis and McTaggart (1992) go on to define action research as to “plan, act, observe and reflect more carefully, more systematically and more rigorously than one usually does in everyday life” (p.10). This cycle is represented in the diagram below.

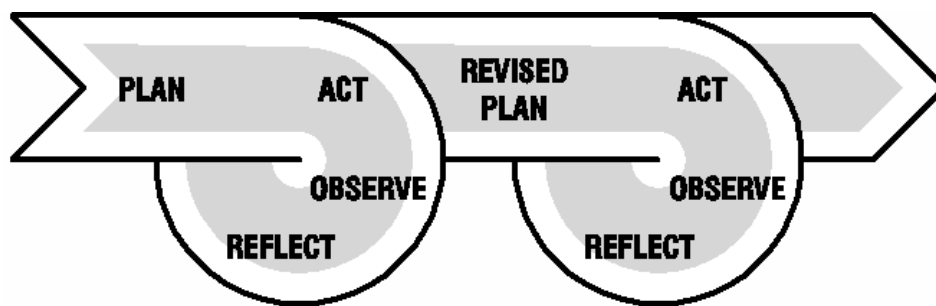


Figure 2. The Action Research Spiral. Adapted from *The Action Research Planner* (p. 14), by S. Kemmis and R. McTaggart, (1992), Victoria, Australia: Deakin University Press.

The model aims to help people understand themselves as the agents, as well as the products, of history. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1992) action research offers people ways in which they can improve social life through research on the here and now, and in relation to wider social structures and processes. This was important as the wider social structures of the Catholic Church could be instrumental in shaping the leadership context of the school and consequently the leadership experiences of the young women. Grundy and Kemmis (1981) claim that action research has the two key aims of improvement and involvement. Therefore, collaboration is an important aspect of the action research cycle (Dick, 2004). Brown (2004) describes groups of people identifying a problem, collecting evidence, doing something to resolve it, seeing how successful their efforts were, and, if not satisfied, trying again. Although

improvement is the essence of the approach (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1992), there are other key attributes of action research that differentiate it from common problem-solving activities which people engage in every day. The aspects of plan, act, observe and reflect were situated within the foundations aspects of the action research. It could therefore be said that the action research framework drew on the work of both Lewin (1946) and Kemmis and McTaggart (1992), to generate a suitable action research approach which took into account the complexity of the co-construction processes.

Recurrent themes within the literature suggest that action research is a process of intervention, involves participation, is collaborative, involves self-evaluation, and usually takes place within the participants' context (Robertson, Trotman and Galbraith, 1997). Recently there have been further efforts to distinguish authentic action research from other research claiming to have an action component. Winter (1998), who draws heavily on the work of Lewin, purports that such research is about

...decentralising the production of knowledge, removing the monopoly of universities and giving a 'voice' to practitioners and to community members. It is about helping others to find their own voices, to encourage them to speak out, to ask questions, to contest conventions and prescriptions, including those of professional practitioners. (p. 54)

I have also drawn on the eight principles underpinning successful action research outlined by Somekh (2006) who states that action research integrates research and action; is conducted by a collaborative partnership of participants; involves the development of knowledge and understanding of a unique kind and starts from a vision of social transformation and aspirations for great social justice for all.

Action research involves a high level of reflexivity, exploratory engagement with a wide range of existing knowledge; engenders powerful learning for participants and locates the inquiry in an understanding of the broader historical, political and ideological contexts. Reinharz (1992) believes researchers have the potential to create social and individual change by changing and altering relationships between those involved in the research. It is thought that through these changing relationships and interaction by collective reflection, participation and action, a form of conscientization will occur. It can be emancipatory and provides a link between

theory and practice. These themes are reflected in a similar light in the work of Bartlett and Piggott-Irvine (2008) where they outline six key themes that support processes of creating high-quality action research. These were that action research was practical, that there was an element of reflection and evaluation, that guidelines to quality and rigour existed within the action research process, that there is a commitment to producing change and recognition that there are ethical considerations to be observed. These were important considerations for this research. With these aspects in mind, the next part of this section outlines specific considerations when undertaking research involving young people.

Youth and Research

The study of youth is a rapidly growing area of research within a variety of disciplines including education, sociology, psychology and cultural studies (Best 2007). Lewis (2004) suggests that research with young people is crucial, as a means for advancing researchers' understanding of what it means to be a young person in society today. Furthermore, within the New Zealand context, Smith and Taylor (2000) state that young people have "an important contribution to make in helping us to understand the nature of childhood and to ameliorate the problems which affect their own and their families' lives" (p. iv). However, in many cases, youth research has been completed with youth as the subjects of research and instances of young people being involved, as active participants of the research process, are few.

As presented in Chapter 2, the review of literature outlined that what it means to be a young person in New Zealand society today is changing. Like Leonard (2007), I believe the recognition of this increasingly diverse group in its own right demands attention to be paid to the many methodological approaches, which involve young people in research. Current literature that lends itself to youth-focused research calls for youth to be placed at the centre of the research process and as Fraser (2004) advocates, research should be done *with* young people as opposed to doing research *on* or *about* young people. These considerations will now be addressed in relation to this research.

Access to youth for research purposes

Before research can take place, access to young people must be negotiated. The term access can be applied to qualitative research in two areas. Firstly, physical access must be gained to the participants in order for them to consent to the research. During the initial stages of research design, gaining consent from stakeholders involved in the research is essential. However, in youth research it is often the case that this consent process takes place within a hierarchy which places adults as the gatekeepers in the first instance (Masson, 2004). Once adults have granted this permission, youth are then given the opportunity to provide their consent (Leonard, 2007). This process in itself tends to reinforce traditional power imbalances within the research relationship, rendering “children voiceless during the initial stages of the research when access is being negotiated” (Leonard, 2007, p. 133).

Secondly, access to information that is to be gathered is required. As stated by Raby (2007), “...an adult conducting research with young people is an outsider who may imagine insider status based on memories of adolescence” (p. 50). However, the participant may view this situation differently, locating the adult as an outsider, and this can decrease the levels of trust and consequently shape the type of information provided or shared with the researcher. Lewis and Lindsey (2002) believe that youth themselves are able to be gatekeepers to their worlds by being selective about what they reveal within the research process.

Re-shaping research approaches for use with young people

Drawing on and critiquing popular historical approaches, Fraser (2004) argues that historical and even some current youth research practices have positioned youth in certain ways and this has influenced how researchers position youth within current research designs. The newly prominent theme of youth participation in research literature espousing research *with* youth rather than *about* youth (Fraser 2004; Fraser & Robinson, 2004; Jones, 2004; Raby, 2007; Robinson & Kellett, 2004) has resulted in a new body of literature that places many traditional approaches used for researching youth, such as interviewing, focus group research, participant selection and engagement in the research, under scrutiny. Raby (2007) calls for the need to involve young people in the negotiation of the research process so that no

assumptions are made about them or their abilities to contribute to research and that the methods selected to collect data are of best fit for the purpose.

Suitability of selected research methods

Although there is a growing interest in qualitative research methods used with youth, little attention has been given to establishing their rigour (Best, 2007). Within the realm of qualitative research there are a plethora of approaches, which can be used for the assessment of trustworthiness or merit of qualitative inquiry when working alongside adults. However, whether the same approaches are suitable for youth research are unknown, hence researchers embarking on such a journey must be extremely mindful of their research approaches, as they could be making dangerous assumptions about how suitable a particular research method could be based on its previous use in adult research settings.

Conducting semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews with young people calls for an examination of the research environment, research process and researcher practice. Gollop (2000) examined the process of adults interviewing young children and made recommendations for those researchers working with young people. Although the young women in my research were teenagers, not children, certain points that she highlights are of relevance to this research. Firstly, the negotiation of the interview process is critical. This can include the location, timing and preparation of the interview. In the case of this research, the young women were able to select the location for the interviews and choose the time of day that suited them. Many of the girls involved in the research had subject assessments or part-time jobs and this needed to be worked around. Each participant was given a copy of the interview schedule a week prior to the interviews commencing. This allowed them to see the questions that would be asked of them and the areas that would be focused on and allowed them to do any preparation that they felt was necessary prior to the interview commencing. Such events are examples of good practice in all interviews; however, they are of particular importance within this context as the sharing of power was negotiated with the young women in the research and myself as an outsider to the school context.

Furthermore, I believe there may be more effective ways of gathering data that researchers may have not considered. For example, online and social networking sites are prominent points of contact in the lives of many young people, and could be possible sites to develop new and more effective research methods. These could be more suitable for gathering information and addressing some issues of access, power and hierarchy. However, the potential of these avenues for research and a critique of their effectiveness in accessing the world of youth remains under-researched within the New Zealand context and beyond the scope of the original design of this research.

In addition to researching and interviewing youth, this research situation created further complexities because it involved a woman researching women. Devault (1990) argues that there are many implications of women interviewing women. Due to special features described as understanding ‘women talk’ where women learn to translate when they talk about their experiences, both the researcher and the participant act on a basis of understanding about the interview and follow a certain set of rules. Feminist methodology encourages a move away from the traditional roles and rules where historically personal involvements have been ignored to incorporating these at the heart of the discussion. So ‘women talk’ is seen as a valuable part of the research process and the interaction between the researcher and the participant allows for this women talk to be understood (Devault, 1990).

Keeping in mind also that communication is often culturally dependent (Wilson & Goodall, 1991), and plays a key role in gathering data and making sense of the data, it was also important to understand the cultural context within which these interviews took place. This included the researcher (me) gaining knowledge of the school context, including aspects such as the structure of the school day and terms or phrases used to describe aspects of this. Language used by the group of young women was culturally bound, and at times, this needed to be clarified to ensure that the meaning of these words was accurately shared. These aspects will be addressed in the following section on ethical considerations and participant involvement.

Ethical Considerations for this Research

In qualitative research there are many important ethical considerations that must be addressed prior to research commencing and throughout the research process. All good research design includes such considerations to protect the well-being and interests of the research participants (Stringer, 2004). However, Anderson (1998) makes the point that no single law exists to regulate research ethics and the responsibility for ethical research lies ultimately with the individual researcher. Most people who are involved in qualitative research design address the importance of ethical considerations (Merriam, 1998; Robson & Robson, 2002). In the case of this research, ethical approval from the University of Waikato was sought and granted for this research. The Faculty of Education Ethics committee based on the University of Waikato, Human Research Ethics Regulations 2000, granted this approval.

Bryman (2001), amongst others, suggested some key areas to address in order for research to be considered ethical. Like Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) he identified the areas of ‘do no harm’, gaining informed consent, providing confidentiality and ensuring that the representation of the research was truthful. I focused on these areas when designing the research approach and planning the research process. Further to this, however, I also investigated the ethical considerations surrounding working with young people. This provided me with additional areas for consideration. This next section will address the ethical considerations for this project and draw attention to specific areas that need to be addressed when researching youth within a school setting.

Do No Harm

The guiding ethical principle of ‘do no harm’ is based on protecting the rights and well-being of all participants involved in the research process. According to Tolich and Davidson (1999), by ensuring that the research is theoretically valid and socially significant, and by exercising sensitivity and judgment as the researcher, the potential for harm can be minimized. For this research to have any validity it was important that I undertook the research from the perspective of the needs of the people involved – not from the perspective of myself as a researcher. Therefore, this research was firstly designed so that the creation, design and implementation of the leadership

programme occurred through a partnership between the participants and myself. This is an important initial step in the research process. Bishop and Glynn (1999) believe that this process allows those involved in the research the opportunities to take ownership of implementing and owning change. Secondly, it was essential that the identities of the students involved in the research were protected. I therefore asked participants to select a pseudonym to protect their identity. This presented some challenges during the research process and will be discussed in the section about privacy and confidentiality.

Thirdly, it was important to ensure that the participants' time was respected. Many of these young women already had busy lives with extra-curricular responsibilities on top of their school workloads, therefore the research outcomes and processes needed to be clear and to the point. The interview schedule and focus group guidelines were used to guide the discussions and interviews and keep them on track and within the allocated timeframes. As part of the co-construction process a schedule was negotiated to take account of the expectations of all of the participants, including the researcher, and the timeframes allocated to each segment of the research process. After information had been collected and analyzed, I asked the participants to review the transcripts to ensure that what was represented on paper was a true record of their conversations and that their statements had been interpreted accurately. It was important that time was allocated for this in the initial planning. Before the research began, possible consequences of the study needed to be made clear and care was taken when planning to prevent harm to the participants. The general questions that were asked were – who will benefit from the research and to what extent is there reciprocity between what the participants give to the research and what they receive from being involved in the research? These questions were addressed through the process of gaining informed consent.

Informed Consent

The principle of informed consent arises from the subject's right to freedom and self-determination (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). According to Anderson (1998) and Goodwin and Goodwin (1996), informed consent is the most fundamental principle for ethical acceptability. The participants must be informed of the nature

and purpose of the research, its risks and benefits and must consent to participate without coercion. Burns (2000) highlights the importance of gaining this consent and ensuring that all participants are fully aware of the purposes and aims of the research. This includes gaining consent from firstly the school and secondly, the students who would be involved in the research.

In order to gain access to the students, I was required to gain permission from the school. Part of this process involved presenting a research proposal to the Board of Trustees who governed the school. Boards of Trustees are Crown entities that are responsible for the governance of New Zealand schools. These elected Boards are made up of parents, school staff, community members and student representatives, and function to ensure that schools are run in the best interests of the student body and surrounding communities. Trustees of a school hold a number of legal, financial and ethical obligations, and amongst these, the assurance to the New Zealand government that the students in their care receive a high standard of education, that the education links to national priorities stipulated by the Ministry of Education, and that the resources are utilized to ensure the highest possible quality programmes are provided for students (Ministry of Education, 2009). The general aims of the research project and requirements and ethical considerations were shared and the Board of Trustees granted permission for the research to take place with a number of stipulations: that the selection of students into the programme was a process of random selection, that I follow the policy of external providers working within the school and undergo a police check, that I inform the parents of the students about the research and the parents grant permission for their daughters to take part in the research process.

With consent from the school, I presented prospective participants with a comprehensive information pack at the first session. This allowed them to understand what the research was about and they were informed about the nature and type of information to be collected, the way it would be collected and the use to which the information would be put, along with the timeframe and amount of involvement required. This was explained to them both verbally in an assembly and information session and in a letter given to them in an information pack. Students then made the decision about whether they wanted to be involved. They provided informed consent to participate in the study by signing a short statement acknowledging such details

and their understanding of their involvement. Their caregivers, who also signed the statement supporting their child's wish to participate in the research, acknowledged the requirements of the research.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in the research process must be entirely voluntary and participants should be able to withdraw at any time (Stringer, 2004; Tolich & Davidson, 1999). However, Faculty of Education Ethical Guidelines state that this can happen at any time up till the writing of the first draft of the research findings. The opportunity to be involved in the research was shared with all Year 12 students at a year level assembly. Students who were interested in being involved then submitted their names to be randomly selected as part of the guidelines stipulated by the school Board of Trustees. Students had the right to withdraw at any stage of the research process right up till the writing of the first draft of the thesis; no judgements would be made about those who chose not to involve themselves. This created some difficulty when the principal asked for a list of names of the students who were attending and wanted to know who did not turn up for one of the sessions. She saw it as her role to chase these students up. This conflicted with the ethical guidelines that I was using for this project. I had to explain to her the requirements of the ethics that underpinned this research and the importance of the students belonging to the group voluntarily.

Privacy and confidentiality

According to Stringer (2004), a prime directive of social research is to protect the anonymity of the participants. However, such a concept is reliant on a specific research design, which aims to keep participants anonymous. In the case of this research where students were involved in meetings, participated in activities in the school grounds and shared information with each other through the school notices, the ability to keep the anonymity of participants within the school was impossible. Therefore, the notion of confidentiality was used. This means creating an understanding of confidentiality so that although, as the researcher, I was able to identify the participants from the information given and knew who has provided the information, I would not make the connection known publicly (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

Confidentiality assumes that the reader of the research will not be able to deduce the identity of the involved individual (Anderson, 1998). Anderson (1998) also believed that confidentiality involved a clear understanding between the researcher and participants concerning how the data will be used. Tolich and Davidson (1999) discuss the ethics surrounding the need to maintain confidentiality of participants and anonymity of their identity in a small place like New Zealand. This same consideration was applied to the school communities where the young women are working and socializing in close-knit peer groups. In this research privacy and confidentiality were guaranteed to the participants involved in the project. However, the students were proud of being involved in the project, so much so that they created badges to illustrate their belonging to the leadership group. This illustrated to others that they were involved in the research. However, confidentiality of personal identity in interviews and transcripts was maintained throughout the research process. Furthermore, when sharing work and reading transcripts, students wanted to use their own names rather than a pseudonym. They felt that they had done the work and, therefore, deserved the credit. This was negotiated on a case-by-case basis and pseudonyms were used when writing up the research.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity is an important facet of qualitative, feminist research (Devault, 1990) and this research, from its inception, was framed by the notion of reciprocity. Reciprocity is the term used to describe particular research actions and purposes and can be defined as the give-and-take of social interactions that may be used to gain access to a particular situation (Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2001; Lather, 1988). Golde (1986) argues that, in return for the opportunity to study and disrupt the lives of others, all fieldwork should encompass some form of reciprocity and the researchers should offer services or materials in return. In the case of this research project, the reciprocity was present in many forms.

The concept of beneficence (Hall, 2001) was central in this research. This term implies that interactions will create benefits for those involved. Lather (1988) argues if reciprocity is founded in the understanding that researchers and participants are equal, then the research process itself should benefit not only the researcher, but also

the subjects of the research. Research, therefore, should be seen as a two-way process that benefits both the researcher and the researched (Reinharz, 1992). Therefore this research was designed not only as a research process to benefit myself as a researcher (completing doctoral study), but also to create a relevant and appropriate leadership programme for the group of young women involved, in order to develop their leadership understanding. In return for being part of the research project, students were also involved in the leadership learning and the creation of the leadership programme for the school that was used in the future. As noted by Tersbol (2004), just as social relationships are based on exchange and interaction, so should the interview encounter as it is thought that it is anti-social to solely take knowledge from others. Therefore, in relation to this research the interviews and focus group discussions became an exchange of knowledge, experiences and perceptions.

The notion of reciprocity is closely linked to the value of reflexivity and validity, where those involved in the research reflect on their position within the research process and examine how power is distributed amongst those involved (Huisman, 2008). Consequently, reciprocity was one key element that assists in establishing trustworthiness within the research process. Researchers have the ethical responsibility to share the findings with the people who have been researched. As emphasized by Robson and Robson (2002), not only is this one way of protecting the participants in the research project from harm, but it is also believed that by doing so, such practice can benefit participants involved in the study. Part of this process can involve the sharing of transcripts with participants as a means of ensuring trustworthiness and also the sharing of the findings with members of the school such as the Board of Trustees and the Principal.

SUMMARY

This qualitative feminist research was about improving the practice of leadership development with young women in secondary schools. Therefore, action research was seen as a suitable method to use in this study as it aligned well with the improvement and collaborative strategies required. Action research provided a clear framework for the processes involved in negotiating and co-constructing a leadership curriculum with a group of young women. Students actively planned and created a leadership programme, participated in it and evaluated it, to make changes and re-

teach it to another group of students. This allowed for collaborative approaches to be the main tool to generate knowledge related to leadership learning and ultimately the development of a leadership learning approach. However, no research approach is without its limitations. These limitations are addressed in the concluding chapter.

This chapter has also been concerned with outlining the complexity of completing research with young women. I have highlighted these and addressed issues of ethical consideration relevant to this research. As it has concentrated solely on ethical issues that may demand consideration within the context of the secondary school and researching with young women, I acknowledge that other ethical issues outside of these may also exist. However, they are beyond the parameters of this research.

The following chapter reflects the qualitative feminist approach to action research presented in this chapter and addresses the research methods and action research process that enabled information to be gathered throughout the research.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCESS

Introduction

With the focus on bringing about the best possibilities for young women to learn about leadership, the research methods that were selected for this research needed to reflect these values. When designing this research I deliberately selected methods that aligned with the principles associated with my feminist methodology summarized in the previous chapter. This chapter outlines the methods used to gather information during the research (semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, field notes, research journal and group worksheets). It illustrates why each particular method was deemed suitable for this research and justifies their selection for this research. A critique of their use is provided, and their limitations in relation to this research are outlined.

Each of the young women participating in this study was individually interviewed twice using a semi-structured interview format. The aim of these interviews was to, firstly, further explore each young woman's self-perceptions and beliefs about leadership before the programme, and after their participation in the leadership programme. They also participated in numerous focus group discussions. Additionally, I took field notes and collected in group work that had been completed in the leadership sessions. This work included mind maps, lists, sculptures and drafts of the leadership programme sessions. The next section presents the semi-structured interview, and outlines the key characteristics and associated benefits and limitations that help define this interview method. A discussion on the limitations of using this research method in the research project will conclude this section.

Semi-structured Interviews

The interview is a popular method of data gathering and, according to Anderson (1998), it is probably the most widely used method of data collection in social research. Semi-structured interviews have become an extremely prominent method of

data gathering within a feminist research framework (Bryman, 2001), due to the ability to contextualize the interview and develop rapport and relationships with the participants. Relationships were central to the action research process and the interviews played a key role in facilitating the rapport building process. Information from semi-structured interviews formed a large part of the data collected for this research, as it was the individual voices of the young women that were central to the action research process.

Defining semi-structured interviews

Individual interviews served a key role in the gathering of rich data in this research project. They are defined by Wilson and Goodall (1991) as “a communication process in which two or more people interact within a relational context by asking and answering questions designed to achieve a specific purpose” (p. 11). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) illustrate that there is great variety of interview types used in research. These can take the form of being very structured with minimal opportunity to deviate from the planned interview sequence and content, through to more informal conversation between individuals, where there is a greater amount of flexibility to make changes to the interview process (Briggs, 1986). Semi-structured interviewing is placed more towards the latter end of this continuum and, as the key characteristics will illustrate, served as an appropriate method for gathering information in this research project.

Anderson (1990) defines semi-structured interviewing as “a specialized form of communication between people for a specific purpose associated with some agreed subject matter” (p. 190). Bryman (2001) acknowledges that within the research process there is a need for flexibility and, therefore, defines the semi-structured interview as “a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview schedule but is able to vary the sequence of the questions” (p. 110). Although definitions vary in the literature, notably strong themes emerge that assist in outlining the characteristics of semi-structured interviews. The characteristics, associated benefits and limitations will now be discussed.

Characteristics and Benefits of Using The Semi-structured Interview

It is interesting to note the similarity in characteristics between focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Firstly, both attempt to gather rich data that aim to illustrate the perspectives of the participants. Like focus groups, semi-structured interviews aim to elicit in-depth information that accurately represents the participants' own perceptions and experiences. Secondly, the change in the location of power is also noticeable in both interview types and the role of the researcher is recognized as an integral part of the research process. However, when semi-structured interviews are examined in more depth, there are a number of important features that make them particularly appropriate for this research and distinct from focus group interviews.

Firstly, the structure of the semi-structured interview in this research was pre-arranged. According to Griffie (2005), a semi-structured interview is an interview where although the questions are pre-determined, the interviewer is free to ask for clarification. The interviewer often asks questions that are quite general and has the ability to ask further questions in response to certain information shared by the participants. Bryman (2001) also believes that within a semi-structured interview the researcher has a list of questions or specific topics to be covered (often called an interview guide). Patton (1987) praises this approach of using an outline as this provides the interview with a focus, yet still allows for flexibility in the interview process. Merriam (1998) also believes that the flexibility is a key feature and benefit as it allows the researcher to respond to any situations that may arise, to further question what has been offered as a contribution by the participant, and to introduce new ideas within a topic if required in order for meaning to be made.

Due to the pre-determined nature of the semi-structured interviews, it is thought that they imply a focus. Like focus group interviews, the semi-structured interview has a focus for the discussion. The researcher opens the discussion, listens and uses prompts to guide the respondent. According to Gibson (1998) specific questions are used to gain the focused information that is required. Within a semi-structured interview, however, the questions may not follow directly from the guide, and the participant is given the freedom to respond and clarify their meanings with further

questions. Within this less formal interview situation, the interviewer is also free to modify the questions, such as the wording and sequence, in order to suit the situation and flow of discussion (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Merriam, 1998).

Within this project, semi-structured interviews provided the flexibility to clarify meaning and create further understanding of the context in which these young women exercised their leadership. Their use also countered the potential difficulty of quieter students not responding in focus group discussions. These interviews allowed for the voices of this group of young women to be heard and their perspectives to be shared. Compared to a more formal style of interview, the structured interview, where a strict question outline must be adhered to and there is little flexibility to follow up answers or prompt participants for deeper meanings (Briggs, 1986), the flexibility of the semi-structured interview style lends itself well to this research project.

Secondly, working from a feminist framework, the semi-structured interview is a popular way of gathering qualitative research data from a feminist perspective because it is perceived as talking and gaining information through conversations. This is often seen as a more informal way to gain information which can, as a result, allow for more information to be shared (Griffiee, 2005). As the voices of the young women were key to the success of the action research process and important when eliciting their understandings about leadership, these conversations became central to the research process. Patton (1987) suggests that the success of the semi-structured interview can be partially attributed to the conversational and situational nature of the research process. Allowing the interviews to remain conversational in approach can lead to a rich exploration of the context.

Due to the conversational and flexible nature of the interview outline the researcher is able to prompt discussion around a certain issue. This can encourage the participant to share their personal views and ideas about a topic in more detail. In turn, this creates the 'rich data' that qualitative research strives for. In contrast, unstructured interviews lack this focus and are often used when the researcher does not know enough about the area being studied to ask specific questions. Although this may allow the researcher to explore the research area, with the hope of learning more in order to formulate questions for more structured interviews (Merriam, 1998), there is

a possibility that when focus groups occur, key areas can be missed due to the nature of the discussion. Within a semi-structured interview, the overall outline is followed, but supported by further prompts and follow up questions.

Thirdly, the semi-structured interview allows the interviewer and the interviewee to establish a high level of rapport (Denscombe, 1998). In the case of this research it allowed the researcher in this project to gather information from the perspective of the young women being interviewed in a non-hierarchical relationship. This is of prime concern in feminist research where the issue of avoiding control over others is very important (Garrett, 1999). In the context of this research project semi-structured interviews allowed me to explore the young women's personal perceptions of leadership both before and after the leadership programme. This was important, as it was the individual stories that I wanted to hear and learn from. This process also helped me to further understand the young women's cultural contexts and the beliefs that influence their ideas about the content and effectiveness of the leadership programme.

However, just as a research method shows benefits for its use, it is always important to consider the limitations when selecting a method for use in a research project. These limitations will now be discussed in relation to using semi-structured interviews in this research project.

The limitations of using semi-structured interviews

Understanding the limitations of a research method can help to ensure that the information gathered is ethical and valid. Many of the limitations outlined in the literature relate to the actual process of conducting semi-structured interviews. Firstly, Patton (1987) believes that a weakness of semi-structured interviews is that important topics can be missed out in the flow of the interview and important data can be left out. As a researcher I needed to be aware of the need to follow the interview schedule in order to gain confidence to move through the questions and develop the rich picture of data that the participants could offer. Due to this flexibility in the interview outline, a different number of approaches in the sequencing and questioning can be taken. This may result in very different responses and reduce the

comparability of the responses. Although generalizations are not a key feature of qualitative research, the responses of the young women in this group were compared and contrasted as I attempted to make sense of their experiences and contributions and plan further action.

Secondly, the actual process of interviewing is time consuming. This aspect was not surprising as it is well documented in research methods literature that this is the case (Opdenakker, 2006). However, it is easy to underestimate time requirements during the research process. In this research, this method took up much participant and researcher time in the process of planning, delivering, and recording results. This issue was further impacted by the ethical need to check the data and responses, by the analysis of a broad range of qualitative responses and by the time required for transcription. It is not feasible to use such a research method when wishing to interview large groups in a short period of time. A possible alternative here was to restrict the number of interviews (24 in total) or use a different method such as a formal questionnaire. This was not used, as the process does not fully engage the young women in sharing descriptive, culturally explicit responses.

A third limitation is that semi-structured interviews also rely on the language that the participant possesses. This may be a challenge for both the participant and the researcher. For example, the interpretation of different words and concepts may not be fully understood or the participants may not have the language to fully describe their experiences and ideas. Liedkta (1992) also argues that the capacity of some participants to think critically about their positions and power, or lack of, is somewhat limited in the interview process.

Finally, semi-structured interviews can be limited by the fact that they take place after the event has happened. This can influence the quality of data gathered, as it is reliant on the memories of the participants and their ability to recall their experiences (Mehan, 1993). This research was planned to encourage the young women involved in the design and implementation of the leadership programme to explore and develop their leadership understandings. The aim of the interviews was to find out about their ideas and perceptions about leadership. The way that the research was designed meant that interviews were either taking place at the same time as the young women

were creating the programme or after they had participated in the leadership programme. As a result, their ideas about leadership may have already changed and this would not have necessarily been acknowledged in the initial interviews.

In summary, each of the young women was individually interviewed after their participation in the leadership programme. For each semi-structured interview, I required focused information (Gibson, 1998), and I used an interview guide to ask specific questions. During the interview I had the flexibility to ask for further information in order to clarify the responses from the participants. These transcripts were offered back to the participants so that they could check the information and ensure that the interpretation was accurate. To support the use of semi-structured interviews, focus groups were also used as a means of gathering information about the perceptions and beliefs about leadership and to assist in the design and evaluation of the leadership programme. These will now be discussed.

Focus Groups

In relation to this project, focus groups were used to co-construct and evaluate the leadership programme. Focus groups explored what the young women collectively believed was important to include in their leadership programme, areas that they wanted to address with regard to leadership, how the programme should be delivered, and their own perceptions and beliefs about their roles as leaders and leadership in general.

Focus groups were also used as part of the evaluation of the leadership programme and the processes used to create it. Focus groups were chosen as a research method for this project as it is the voices of the young women which were central to the research process. Feminist researchers are often drawn to focus groups as a research method because they believe that “...if feminist research is to create change it must not only offer critique of aspects of society but also help women to collectively change their consciousness by fostering collective identities and solidarities” (Rose, 2001, p. 22). Focus groups have been seen as one way of raising consciousness within contexts and have been embraced as a research tool by many feminist researchers (Reinharz, 1992; Wilkinson, 1999a). However, understandings of what a

focus group is are varied. The following section aims to clarify what focus group research is and explores the defining characteristics of focus groups.

Defining Focus Groups

There is no shortage of definitions of focus groups. Examples of these have ranged from large staff meetings through to small study groups and book circles (Devault, 1990; Krueger, 1994). A general consensus, however, in much of the literature is to bring together a small group of people to share their beliefs, experiences and perceptions of a certain topic (Edmunds, 1999; Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999; Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1996).

Although broadly defined by Tolich and Davidson (1999) as a “group interview situation focused by a mediator around a set theme” (p.5), many researchers are more specific in their definitions, detailing that it is the actual interactions between the group members along with the shared information that creates one of the defining features of focus group research. Morgan (1996) reinforces the importance of interaction and states that this method is “...a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher” (p. 130). More contemporary writers in the area of focus group research (Bryman, 2001; Puchta & Potter, 2004) stress the importance of understanding these interactions between group members, rather than solely the data itself that is collected from the focus group conversations and believe “focus groups are not simply a discussion between people but are focused interviews exploring interactions between participants” (Mansell, Bennett, Northway, Mead & Moseley, 2004, p. 79).

The purpose of research focus groups is to generate theory (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). In earlier decades the term ‘focus group’ within a research context has expanded to describe a range of group encounters. However, a research focus group needs to be more tightly defined as it is believed that essential elements of what is needed for a focus group to be effective are often absent (Morgan, 1997). Concern has been raised (Morgan, 1997; Puchta & Potter, 2004) that the term ‘focus group’ is often abused and many so-called focus groups fall outside the current definitions. Some of these are groups that do not provide research data (such as support groups),

some groups are not focused either because the researcher does not or cannot interact, or they are groups where the participants do not interact with each other and are interviewed separately as individuals. He makes a case for certain characteristics which should be present in any focus group, characteristics that I deemed necessary for the focus groups used in this research.

The next section explores the defining characteristics of focus groups and looks at the advantages for using this research method within the process of co-constructing a leadership programme. An investigation into the limitations will conclude this section.

Characteristics and Benefits of Using Focus Groups

Stewart and Shandasani (1990) acknowledge that focus groups can take a variety of forms, for example, a research focus group, a discussion focus group, or a problem-solving focus group. Many researchers (Litosseliti, 2003; Morgan, 1997; Morrison, 1998; Puchta & Potter, 2004) have insisted that certain characteristics must be present in order for a true research focus group interview to occur.

Firstly, focus groups aim to create rich data through group interactions. Gibbs (1997) states that a main characteristic of focus groups is to reveal, through interactions, the feelings, beliefs, experiences, reactions and attitudes held by participants, which could not be done using other methods such as individual interviews or questionnaires. She goes on to add that by using focus groups as a research method, the researcher is able to elicit many different views and emotional responses within a group context, which is often termed 'rich data'. Brotherson and Goldstein (1992) also claim that focus group interviews are excellent ways of examining people's different perspectives as they are designed to elicit multiple perspectives and are well suited to bring about discussion on topics that inform practice. Often this interaction can create unexpected insights as Agar and McDonald (1995) state:

This is one place where focus groups can shine. Through group interaction, we learn that something we hadn't noticed before is a significant issue... From the way the group takes up the topic, it is clear that something significant is going on, something significant to them. (p. 80)

For this research it was important to recognize the diversity of views and experiences of the young women in the study. Kitzinger and Barbour (1999) also believe that “focus groups are invaluable for examining how knowledge, ideas, story-telling, self-presentation and linguistic exchanges operate within a given cultural context” (p. 5). This was of prime importance in this research project. It was important for the researcher to understand the different perspectives of the young women and to make links between these and the secondary school context.

Secondly, focus groups acknowledge the importance of context. Within feminist research, the issue of context is important and should be acknowledged. In relation to understanding the important influence of social context, it is believed that feminist researchers should tap into the “very social processes” (Graham, 1984, p. 113) that constitute people’s social lives, using the usual modes of communication (for example - talk and conversation). Feminist research should avoid de-contextualizing the individual or focusing on them in situations separate from the interactions of others (Wilkinson, 1998). Similarly, Fine and Gordon (1989) warn researchers of this and in their research involving women and focus groups they argue that understanding the context of the participants is essential and state, “If you really want to know...watch me with women friends, my son, his father, my niece, or my mother and you will see what feels most authentic to me (p. 159). Like Kitzinger and Barbour (1999), Stewart and Shandasani (1990) believe that focus groups allow the researcher to gain information about a context that shapes, and is shaped by people’s perceptions. They state that individuals “respond in their own words, using their own categorizations and their own perceived associations” (p. 13). This is specifically relevant to researching with young people. The group of young women in this research brought a richness of cultural context and personal beliefs in relation to the school environment, a depth of exposure that I would not normally understand or have access to. By being exposed to these experiences, and consequently gaining a deeper understanding of their experiences, I was able to work more effectively in a partnership with the young women in order to create a leadership programme to meet their needs. This is one of the key reasons that focus groups were selected as part of the information gathering processes for this research project.

Thirdly, focus groups involve a focused, yet flexible group discussion. Merton and Kendall's (1946) influential article on the focused interview set the parameters for further focus group development. They believed that within a focused interview, it was important to ensure that the participants had experiences or opinions about the topic being investigated; that an interview outline was used to guide the discussion; and that the experiences of participants were explored in relation to predetermined research questions. These aspects all play a role in ensuring that the discussion has a focus and a purpose (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). During focus group interviews I listened not only for the content of the discussions, but also for emotions, ironies, contradictions, and tensions. This enabled me to learn or confirm not just the facts but also the meaning behind the facts. The focus group provided the opportunity for me to see the ways in which the young women collectively made sense of a phenomenon and make meanings around it (Bryman 2001). Krueger (1994) makes the case that using focus groups is a socially orientated process because people are social beings who interact with each other, and they are therefore influenced by the comments made by others.

As many of the previous definitions illustrate, these discussions hold a focus that has been determined and moderated by the researcher and, as Litosseliti (2003) purports, focus group discussions are planned and designed to gain perceptions on a defined area of interest. A benefit associated with this is that data can be provided quickly (Krueger, 1994), and with less cost than other research methods, for example, individual interviews (Bryman, 2001). This is due to the instant nature of data collection within the group discussion format and the ability to involve more than one person at a time. Within this research project (as noted in following sections which address ethical conduct), it was essential that I respected the time that the students had made available. Focus groups allowed large amounts of information to be collected in a relatively short period of time, through a format in which the students really enjoyed talking, debating and discussing.

Fourthly, focus groups value and encourage interaction. Focus groups aim to engage a small number of people in an informal discussion around a set topic (Wilkinson, 1999b). Morgan (1996) stresses the importance of interaction amongst group members. He believes that it is not only the focus of the interview that is important,

but the interaction between the participants and the set up of the interview that are also central to creating information and discussion. Bryman (2001) sees the processes of interaction as a strength and states that using focus groups “allows the researcher to develop an understanding about why people feel the way they do...allowing people to probe each other’s reasons for holding a certain view” (p. 338). Napier and Gershenfeld (1999) support this statement and add that the exciting part about focus groups is that the participants, all working and interacting together, have the chance to explore their own thoughts about topics and come to a new understanding through interaction with others. However, Kitzinger (1994) has drawn the attention of many researchers to the fact the much of the analysis of focus group data does not give the method the rich results it deserves. It is thought that a thematic approach is often used as a solitary form of data, yet the interactions between group members are often ignored and not taken into account when analyzing data, for example, group dynamics and interactions, facial expressions and alliances within groups which are formed throughout the discussions.

Within the research setting of the secondary school, the interactions between the young women and me were imperative when creating a supportive and inclusive environment for the young women to contribute and be a part of the co-construction process. Although the young women had been at school together, they brought with them different experiences as they came from a variety of backgrounds. This provided a mixed and varied milieu of information to be shared with the group and me, the researcher. The time spent forming respectful relationships at the beginning of the research was worthwhile and this helped to provide what is often termed as ‘synergy’ between group members (Stewart & Shandasani, 1990), where participants can bounce ideas off each other and add to and debate the contributions made by group members. As noted by Edmunds (1999) and Krueger (1994) the bringing together of respondents can have a synergistic effect resulting in the production of ideas that may not be uncovered in individual interviews. This was especially important in the process of co-construction used in this research. The synergistic effect encouraged the group members to create data that may not be constructed by working with individuals on their own. This was due to the sharing of ideas and the building on and discussing of the suggestions of others.

The focus group environment was set up so that participants felt able to contribute their thoughts and be part of these interactions. It was therefore essential that time was spent prior to the research creating this environment through team building and basic ‘getting to know you’ activities. Attempting to understand these interactions plays a key role in establishing meanings behind the expressions and contributions when researching with youth. It can be easy and damaging for the researcher to place her beliefs and interpreted meaning on the information gathered (Knodel, 1993).

Lastly, focus groups acknowledge the researcher’s role in creating and moderating discussion. As an outsider coming into a close-knit school community, it was essential that my current role and my role as a *past* teacher be made clear so that the participants understood my role as a researcher. This was done firstly to create credibility within the research process, but also as a means of developing a learning community that allowed power to be shared amongst group members. Focus groups as a research method allow a number of methodological issues to be addressed, such as: the de-contextualized nature of traditional social science research and the lack of consideration of power relations between the researcher and those being researched. Unlike more structured interview settings, focus group research acknowledges the role of the researcher within the research process, and with effective facilitation, the control of the focus group remains with the researcher. This allows the researcher to build rapport with participants (Fontana & Frey, 1994), and in this particular study, listen to the voices of the young women to generate a meaningful leadership programme. This rapport is of vast importance and Strachan (2005) believes it is the relationship building process that holds much value and access to information within the research process.

Wilkinson (1999a) suggests that the use of focus groups reduces the researcher’s power and control. This is because the researcher is seen as part of a group, rather than holding power in a one-on-one situation, and the participants of the focus group hold the floor for a majority of the time. The sharing of power allows the participants in the discussion to interact with and challenge each other and make further meaning from their contributions, as they hold the floor most of the time (Devault, 1990). Acknowledging the role of the researcher and reducing their power within a group situation can help build relationships. In relation to this project, focus groups were

used to listen to the voices of a group of women as a means of co-constructing and evaluating the leadership programme. Focus groups were chosen as a research method for this project as it is the voices of the young women that are central to the research process. Feminist researchers are often drawn to focus groups as a research method and, according to Rose (2001), this is because they believe that “...if feminist research is to create change it must not only offer critique of aspects of society but also help women to collectively change their consciousness by fostering collective identities and solidarities” (p. 22).

Although the benefits of using focus groups in this piece of research are clearly outlined, no research method is flawless and like any research method, focus groups can have limitations. The following section will outline these in relation to conducting collaborative youth research from a feminist perspective.

Limitations of using focus groups

Although focus groups are a valuable research tool and can offer a number of advantages to the researcher and the participants, it is also important to take into account their limitations in research. Right from the very beginning of the research process, focus groups were initiated and driven by the researcher’s perspective (Litosseleti, 2003; Morgan, 1997). The topic, the questions and the interactions were encouraged and directed towards the group by the researcher. This illustrates that, although the focus group is praised for its freedom and ability to give control and autonomy to the participants, the reality is that the research was often happening within an already defined framework. Some researchers have voiced their concerns about the façade of power negotiation between the researcher and the participants where the participants are led to believe that they have more freedom within the research process than they actually do. Krueger (1994) comments that the group interaction provided by this method provides a specific social environment, and the data generated in this environment must be interpreted within that specific context.

On the other hand, due to the flexibility within the process of conducting focus groups, the researcher had less control of the data that was produced when using this method than when compared to one-on-one interviewing (Morgan, 1997). As focus

groups lack a specific structure, they are often open-ended in their approach and the researcher has less control in the gathering of information from the discussion. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) note that this may make summarizing and interpreting the data difficult.

Interactions between group members and the researcher are seen as a key component of focus groups; however, these interactions can result in some undesirable effects. It should not be assumed that the members of the focus group are sharing their own true individual thoughts. The issue of who holds the power within the group may influence people's willingness to share their own opinion. According to Stewart and Shandasani (1990), the information gathered might be the views of only the more assertive and dominant group members and the more reserved group members may be hesitant to talk. Furthermore, there can be a tendency toward conformity (Morgan, 1997), where some participants may withhold information that they would normally share in private or to polarize their views so they did not speak strongly about a topic being discussed.

Within this research setting there were certain protocols that were culturally bound and influenced the distribution of power within the group. Examples of these were some students not speaking out due to lack of confidence, a fear of being made fun of, different social status and peer group relationships. At times this led to the discussion being dominated by one or two voices or group members simply agreeing to maintain the status quo in order to respect unwritten protocol and in order to fit into the peer group. Attempts were made to counteract such occurrences through the creation of a group contract, the sharing of expectations and by creating systems for sharing when discussions became heated, and ensuring that facilitation was fair and allowed people to contribute to the discussions. Encouraging multiple voices and perspectives can mean that focus groups are difficult to organize. Unlike in an interview where the researcher can negotiate with one person for a suitable location and time, the lifestyle demands of a larger group need to be taken into account in order to reach a decision. This may have an impact when researching in a school setting. There may be different understandings of time and resource commitments and expectations from all members involved in the research process. It is important therefore that the

expectations of all people involved, including the broader school community, need to be made clear and the processes transparent.

Applying the use of focus groups to the research project

In relation to this research process, focus groups were used at the beginning of the research process with the group of young women. Within the process of co-construction focus groups were run in order to create the leadership programme. These focus groups were approximately one hour in length and took place in the afternoon of four weekdays suitable for the focus group members. During these four sessions, group discussion and interactions were guided and moderated by myself as the researcher. Additionally, the young women were consulted before the programme started and at the end of each leadership session. It was the researcher's hope that by working in focus groups, the young women could explore their own and other group members' beliefs about leadership and share their ideas about what they needed included in such a programme. Their ideas were used as a source of information to construct a new leadership curriculum.

Choosing to use focus groups aligned well with my beliefs that the voices of the women involved in this project must be used to construct the intended leadership programme so that it met their needs and was relevant to their own contexts where they exercise leadership. As stated by Krueger and Casey (2000):

The focus group is able to produce meaningful information and do so in a manner that shows respect for traditions and uses language and culture differences as advantages. For focus groups to work, however, the researcher must be sensitive to establishing an environment where these individuals feel comfortable in talking. The researcher must approach each audience with respect, seeking their wisdom. When the researcher meets these expectations, the focus group yields impressive results. (p. 185)

Additionally, within this research project, other methods were used as supporting information-gathering techniques. These included field notes completed by the researcher in the form of a research diary. Field notes were also completed by the students and took the form of brainstorm and mind map pages, sculptures and pieces of art created in activities as products of student work from the leadership sessions and the evaluation process. These supporting research methods will now be discussed.

Field Notes

Field notes were made and noted in my research journal. Researchers use research journals to record their subjective reflections and to make notes about incidents that may arise in the research (Fletcher, Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, Piggot-Irvine & Bartlett (2008). According to Mulhall (2003) observation in social research can be structured and unstructured. Field notes are one structured means of providing a further source of data. Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) define field notes as a research action aimed at "...providing the primary means for deeper appreciation of how field researchers come to grasp and interpret the actions and concerns of others" (p. 13). Researchers can approach how field notes are taken in different ways. This is dependent on the value that they may place on them (Mulhall, 2003). For some, field notes can be the primary source of information. For others, they may be a supporting or secondary role within the research process. Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) state that "Writing field note descriptions...is not so much a matter of passively copying down "facts" about what happened...rather such writing involves active processes of interpretations and sense-making" (p. 8).

According to Cohen and Manion (2000) field notes can be written both at the time of the event (in situ) and also outside of the context of research. It is common practice in research methods literature to record field notes as close to the time of observation as possible (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Cohen and Manion, 2000), as this provides accurate, rich details and information that may otherwise be forgotten as time passes. However, Anderson-Levitt (2006) believes that the biggest challenge for researchers is making distinctions in the field notes that they have written, for example, separating the accurate and detailed descriptions of the event and the interpretative and subjective comments.

Within this research, field notes were a valuable secondary source of data that were used as a means to triangulate other data collection methods. Field notes were completed during interviews and focus groups and after each leadership session. This aided in the transcription process and also allowed the researcher to follow up on key themes or gain clarity on certain aspects of the discussions. Field notes were completed by both the researcher and by the leadership programme participants.

After each session and even during the sessions, I made notes about what had happened, the interactions between the students and common themes that emerged as discussions progressed. I commented on key aspects of the sessions, the dynamics of the group, changes I had noticed since previous sessions and any emerging trends or aspects thought to be relevant to the research questions and areas of focus. These were recorded in my research diary or recorded digitally onto a voice recorder and key aspects and themes, including quotes from participants, later written into the diary. The participants also made field notes as part of their evaluation process. These notes were recorded immediately after sessions, either as formally written notes or as brainstorm sheets.

Other Forms of Information Gathering Processes

Throughout the leadership programme, students generated pieces of work that represented their learning in the different leadership sessions. For example, one group created a canvas painting with their understandings of what leadership could be, another group made a sculpture of how leadership was represented in their school. In one session the post-it notes that the groups had written on looking at the qualities of a good leader were collected in and written up into lists. In some instances student work could not be collected – for example, during one session groups made ‘leadership pikelets’ and defined the ingredients as different components of leadership. The information about their pieces of student work was reflected upon and notes made about them in the researcher’s research diary. This information was referred back to as part of the data analysis phase of the research process. This process of analyzing data will now be discussed.

Data Analysis Within the Research Process

When interpreting student voice data it was essential to interrogate the processes used to analyze the information collected. Mitra (2007) warns researchers of attempting to fit youth responses into categories that have been created or preset by adults. Therefore, methods of data analysis must be critiqued to ensure that the approaches selected are appropriate. Litosseliti (2003) believes that analyzing the data obtained from focus groups is the most difficult stage of focus group research. However,

Wilkinson (1999a) believes that many researchers do not do justice to the rich data that is provided by the focus group interview and it is treated similarly to an individual interview. The important characteristic of group interaction is often ignored and the opportunity to analyze a further set of valuable information is lost. The choice and interpretative analysis of research data is based on the researcher's own ideas about the final research product (Morgan, 1997). Griffie (2005) states that "raw data does not in itself reveal its meaning; rather it must be interpreted" (p. 36). The first step in the process of analyzing and interpreting the data is the transcription of the interviews.

Transcription was a crucial step in the process of data analysis as there was the potential to lose, distort and decontextualize data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). According to Morgan (1996), transcription provides a complete record of the discussion and is very useful in the analysis of the data. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) state that transcriptions are more than a written record of the group interview as they allow for an intimate understanding of the content of the talk, the flow of discussion and the group interactions. Analysis of the focus groups took place through formal content analysis (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990) using a thematic approach. This process played a key role in the validation of data as the independent interpretations and understandings of the data were then shared with the students involved. After each semi-structured and focus group interview, transcription was completed and the key ideas summarized. These summaries were shared with the young women in the following session to ensure that the data had been interpreted correctly and accurately reflected the themes and perceptions of the women involved. This process occurred for each interview and focus group that was run to ensure that the voices of the students were accurately represented.

During analysis, the written transcripts were read through and substantive parts that related to the research questions were classified and coded. Coding was an effective way to manage qualitative data. Ryan and Bernard (2000) define coding as being the heart and soul of whole text analysis. Coding requires certain phases and encourages the researcher to make judgments about the data gained. In relation to this research project, firstly, a code-book was created by the researcher that defined the boundaries surrounding the key themes that emerged in relation to the research question. It is

noted by Ryan and Bernard (2000) that a good code-book will continue to develop and be defined as the processes of analysis and interpretation continue. Secondly, using the defined and emerging codes, the content of the transcripts was analyzed and key themes were identified. These were then coded using different coloured highlighters. These different colours were then collated and this information was then summarized into a chart, similar to what Strauss and Corbin (1998) define as a matrix. This allowed me to think about the relationships between the data collected and the concepts being explored. Important quotes associated with the themes were added as I classified each part of the transcript. I was careful to include the names of the young women with each quote and a record of which transcript it had come from.

Examples of student work (posters, brainstorming pages and sculptures) were collected and analyzed also. Sometimes this analysis was a shared process between the participants and me as this was a way to enhance the learning process. Other times, samples of work were analyzed solely by the researcher and themes were noted in my research diary. Photos of completed sculptures and large artwork were taken, as they were too large to keep. Student interpretations of these pieces of work were sometimes noted through written statements. However, the process of data analysis is only one step in the research process. It is an essential step that requires a significant investment of time and revisiting in order to gain a full and rich understanding of the data and what it represents. Consequently, it is useful for researchers to be able to justify its credibility. Such an issue is addressed through establishing trustworthiness not just within the research design but also within the research process and data analysis and representation.

EVALUATING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Researchers completing qualitative research must ensure that their research is trustworthy and fairly representative of their research setting and data. Judging the quality of qualitative data is different from that of quantitative data as qualitative research holds the key focus of understanding rather than true objectivity (Merriam, 1998). Guba and Lincoln (1994) believe that qualitative researchers should focus on the aspects of trustworthiness and authenticity rather than the traditional pathway of research objectivity. In doing so they believe that there is greater opportunity to

explore multiple realities and multiple perspectives. They therefore propose that aspects of trustworthiness and authenticity should be primary considerations for evaluating qualitative data. These two areas and their application to this research will now be investigated.

Trustworthiness in the Research

An essential part of high quality qualitative research is ensuring a high degree of trustworthiness. Harrison, MacGibbon and Morton (2001) define trustworthiness as “the ways we work to meet the criteria of validity, credibility, and believability of our research” (p. 324). This is concerned with the accuracy of how information is gathered and the comprehensiveness of the data (Bogden & Bilken, 1992). Research reliability is an important aspect of research design and research practice and can be reflected in how well the data that has been recorded actually represents what is happening in the natural research setting. Therefore, Patton (2002) believes that the credibility of qualitative research is reliant on the competence of the researcher. Burns (1997) suggests that to establish trustworthiness, the researcher must demonstrate that their findings and interpretations reflect the way participants experience reality. Member-checks by involving participants in the research process and giving feedback on research findings to the participants are important elements of establishing trustworthiness (Creswell, 1994; Lather, 1986). Practices such as reflecting themes back to participants for verification and sharing data collected through ongoing dialogue, regarding the interpretations of the participants’ reality and meaning, help to ensure accuracy and add to trustworthiness (Creswell, 1994). Using a number of approaches to gather information (Lather, 1986) can reveal different aspects of reality. Using only one research method can lead to the creation of a distorted or unrepresentative view of the aspect being investigated (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). Using a number of methods to gather information and check this information is often termed triangulation.

Triangulation

A number of different information gathering techniques were used in the research design to reflect the aspect of triangulation. Triangulation implies that “the results of

one investigation employing a method associated with one research strategy are cross-checked against the results of using a method associated with another research strategy” (Bryman, 2001, p. 447). Through the use of focus groups, information was shared about leadership. These same foci were addressed in the individual interviews and at times provided alternative or differing answers. Triangulation was seen as a possible way to validate the information that was gathered through these different sources. Patton (2002) stated that a common misunderstanding about triangulation is that many researchers believe that its point is to show that using different data sources or approaches can generate the same results. However, he believes that triangulation is more about finding consistency in the findings and believes that “different kind of data may yield somewhat different results because different types of inquiry are sensitive to different real world nuances” (p. 248).

I found that within the research process different methods of data gathering allowed for different types of information to be shared, for example, in individual interviews, students were more likely to challenge existing school structures and honestly and openly reflect their personal beliefs. However, within the focus group environment, such information was sometimes safeguarded and tentatively offered, only if others were doing the same. During this research process, information was gathered through a variety of sources. Interpretations of this information were reflected back to participants to ensure that it was an accurate representation of their input. Furthermore, reflexivity (as discussed in Chapter Two) was an important part of this process. As a researcher I used reflexive practices, questioning my position within the research at different stages and being aware of my place, past understandings and positioning and how this might influence the information gathering and interpretation during the research process. I also reflected on how the research was changing me as a researcher and my developing thoughts on the research process and findings as they emerged. It is therefore important to see how these aspects fitted into the design of the research and the research process.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

This section illustrates the processes used to carry out the action research for this study. The secondary school context in which the leadership programme took place is outlined and the participants in the research are introduced. The action research process is presented and the phases of the research are illustrated. A description of how information was distributed to and gathered from stakeholders involved in the research is shared. I also illustrate how the leadership programme was designed, implemented, and evaluated and indicate the future intentions of the research process.

Introduction to the Research Context – A School Portrait

As the research was carried out in a unique secondary school environment, it is timely to explore the elements that made this school context the place that it was. Information to provide this snap shot has been provided by a number of sources including the Education Review Office Report (2007), the school website, personal communication with two staff members (one Catholic and one non-Catholic teacher) and conversations with school pupils, both past and present.

This action research project was conducted in a New Zealand Catholic single-sex girls' secondary school over a nine-month period (see Appendix H for the detailed timeline). The school was a decile eight (high socio-economic) state integrated secondary school comprising classes Year 9-13, and would provide a unique insight into the influence of the Catholic Church on student leadership. There were 814 young women on the school roll during the time that the research took place and they came from a wide range of backgrounds and geographical locations. The student population was diverse in its demographics comprising 71% New Zealand/Pākehā, 13% Māori, 4% Pacific Island, 2% Chinese, 2% Korean and 8% classified as Others (Education Review Office, 2007). This diversity, however, was not necessarily illustrated further in the random selection of participants to be involved in the research. Further comment will be made on this aspect in the limitations section of the concluding chapter.

The School provided both boarding and day-girl facilities and was located next to its founding Church. The school involved in this research prided itself on offering education to young women that was integrated in the Catholic faith by prayer, worship and religious instruction. As it was a state-integrated school it taught the New Zealand Curriculum alongside the values of Jesus Christ. It was this uniqueness that lead it to define itself as a caring school, where each person is cared for and valued as a member of its Christian community.

As part of the Catholic School Culture faith was an integral part of the school and was expressed in a number of different ways. Teaching provided opportunities for teachers to work with students to strengthen their personal beliefs, leading eventually to a personal commitment in faith on their part. For this reason, and to make sure that the special character of the school was upheld, upon enrolment, parents were required undertake that their daughter would participate in regular instruction and worship. An example of this was in the aspect of school prayer where each lesson started with a prayer (either read by the staff member or a member of the class).

Through regular religious education the faith of the church and its values were explored from Year 9-13. Year 9-11 students followed a National Syllabus provided by the National Centre for Religious Studies. This is taught by both Catholic and non-Catholic teachers within the school. Students in the upper senior classes are involved in what the school defines as an intellectual approach to the understanding of the moral doctrinal and social teachings of the church. This approach is more informal and integrated into classroom work.

Students are also expected to attend key ceremonies of the Church Mass, and observe Catholic traditions, for example Ash Wednesday. The School had a chaplain who joined the College to celebrate liturgies of Eucharist and reconciliation, amongst other traditional ceremonies. On occasions the Chaplain joined in school assemblies, however, the Director of Religious Studies, who was male, ran much of the faith aspects of the assemblies. Retreats were provided by the school and seen as an important part of the school culture providing time for students to withdraw from school classes and spend time in prayer, reflection and thoughtful discussion. The school values highlighted that through the sharing of one's beliefs and values, such actions can help forge bonds of friendship, understanding and unity within each class.

Students were encouraged to serve the wider community, and display a concern for social justice. Pupils were therefore encouraged to be involved in community service (for example, working with students at a local school for children with special needs, visit the elderly and engage with work with Age Concern and participate in activities, which aim to support those in the community who are under privileged, such as food banks run by community church groups.

This particular school was selected due to the focus of the study relating specifically to young woman in their senior years of secondary school. Furthermore, I anticipated that gaining access to this school would be facilitated by a previous professional relationship with the current principal.

Introduction to the Research Participants

An important aspect of this research was to seek, acknowledge and act upon the voices belonging to the group of young women. As a result of the research these voices have been used to illustrate key aspects of the findings. However, before the findings are revealed, I feel it is of importance to introduce the young women involved in this research so that we know who they are before we hear their voices through the data. Pseudonyms have been used instead of the participants' real names.

There were 12 young women involved in this research. They were aged between 15 and 17 years. The ethnic make up of this group did not reflect the cultural diversity of the school due to the random selection process. There was one Māori student, one Vietnamese student, one student from the United Kingdom and the remaining nine students identified as New Zealand European. They have chosen to be identified as Catherine, Kate, Emma, Frances, Anna, Jenny, Chelsea, Amy, Nerroly, Tania, Mere, and Rochelle. They were all Year 12 students, most of whom had been at the school since Year 9. One had arrived in Year 11. Three lived at the school's boarding hostel (Chelsea, Jenny and Catherine) and the remaining participants were 'day-girls', living within the city (Kate, Emma, Frances, Anna, Amy, Nerroly, Tania, Mere, and Rochelle). Five of the daygirls held part-time jobs after school and on the weekends (Rochelle, Anna, Kate, Tania and Mere). The whole group participated in a number of extra-curricular activities such as sport – rowing (Kate, Catherine, Chelsea), soccer

(Frances), hockey (Frances and Catherine), netball (Mere), and cultural activities such as drama (Catherine and Chelsea), French club (Emma) and music (Mere, Tania and Jenny). Some were involved in the wider community through youth groups (Rochelle, Anna and Kate) and debating (Rochelle, Emma and Kate). There was one participant who was not involved in any extra-curricular activities (Amy).

Introduction to the Action Research Process

While there are a number of aspects to action research alluded to in Chapter Three, there are some holistic elements upon which action research is based (McNiff, 2002). These include:

The need for justice and democracy, the right of all people to speak and be heard, the right of each individual to show how and why they have given extra attention to their learning in order to improve their work, the deep need to experience truth and beauty in our personal and professional lives. (p. 5)

Within these holistic principles, there were some specific principles that underpinned the action research process. I believed action research involved an active process of participation. Designing the research in this way allowed for a shared construction of meaning throughout the action research process. I believed that reciprocity within the action research process was essential and that through developing this reciprocity, a sense of ownership by all of those involved. I also believed action research was engaged in to make improvements to a current situation, and that it involved an intervention (in this case, co-construction of a leadership programme), which took place with other people. These principles underpinned the design of this action research process and are highlighted throughout my findings and discussion chapters later in the thesis.

Over 12 months there were eight phases located within an action research framework. I will now describe each phase within the framework to illustrate the processes involved in the research.

Reconnaissance Within the Action Research Process

Phase One: Initial school contact and gaining access to students

This research held the objective of exploring young women's beliefs about leadership and working with them to create, participate in and evaluate a leadership programme. The first phase of this research, therefore, involved finding a location for the research to take place and a group of young women to work alongside. Phase one of the research involved making initial contact with the school involved, fulfilling school access requirements, and selecting students for the leadership programme and associated research. I contacted the principal of a local single-sex girls' secondary school who had expressed an interest in my previous research with young women and leadership (Saunders, 2005), and made a time for an initial meeting. During this meeting, I explained the purpose of the research and the required involvement of the school and the students who would be involved. She was happy to support this research and agreed to inform the Board of Trustees about the research details and requirements. She then coordinated a meeting between the year 12 Dean and myself. We organized a student assembly to share the information with students and ask for students to apply for a place in the research.

At this point the principal left to go on sabbatical and the lines of communication with the Board of Trustees closed. It was my expectation from the initial meeting that she would contact the Board of Trustees to clear the research process with them and ensure that they approved of the proposed project. However, when I arrived at the organized level assembly with the Year 12s I was met at the door by the Dean who stated that the Board of Trustees (BOT) had not been informed that this was happening and had not given approval for me to begin the research. With a hall full of Year 12 students, I stood dumbfounded at the school gates. After contacting the Chairperson of the BOT by phone, I was told that I would need to present my research to the BOT at the next meeting, a month away.

The following term I contacted and presented my research proposal to the School Board of Trustees (Appendix A). During this presentation I outlined who I was, my background, the proposed research, the benefits for the school and the students, the

reasons for selecting this particular school and the commitment required by the students involved. One month after the presentation, I received notification via post that the research had been approved (although there was some concern from certain board members with regard to external contractors working with students) and that in order to work on the school grounds I had to abide by certain aspects of the school's policy on external contractors. This required that I have a police check and that parents were informed of the research through the official school networks, and that my teaching registration certificate was current. I completed this paperwork as requested by the school and organized a new date for a Year 12 student assembly. The conference room off the side of the school library was booked in advance of the programme beginning to ensure that an accessible location was available with catering facilities for students to use after school.

Phase Two: Participant contact, selection and information sharing

The second phase involved informing parents and students of the research at a full Year 12 level assembly and inviting students to be part of the research and leadership programme. It was under the instruction from the Board of Trustees that the selection of participants for the leadership programme and the research be random, rather than by application and selection by the Year 12 Dean (as negotiated with the principal). So at this assembly, after an introduction to the research, students were asked to put their names forward if they were interested. It was made clear to all students that this was an opportunity for anyone, whether they viewed themselves as a current, future or potential leader or not. From the 56 names collected at the assembly, 20 students were randomly selected across six peer group classes. Parents were notified of this upcoming opportunity through the school newsletter (Appendix B) that was sent home with students that same week.

That same week, I contacted the students through an information letter and organized an initial meeting time for an information session. The letter was sent to each student via peer group teachers through the class roll. This information letter detailed the meeting time, date and location for the initial information session. During this meeting students were informed of the intent of the research, the involvement that was required and the processes that they may be involved in. They were given an

information pack with a letter that outlined the timeline, the required commitment and the goals of the programme (Appendix C). There were also letters of permission and consent for students to take home to be signed by parents (Appendix D). As some students lived in the school hostel, some parents signed and returned these by fax. Two students chose not to be involved in the research at this point due to other school commitments.

Phase Three – Exploring leadership perspectives

Phase Three involved spending time creating a community of learning so that students got to know each other. As they were randomly selected, one student who was new to the school did not know anyone in the group. The participants and I participated in team-building activities and icebreaker games. Initial focus group interviews were held to ascertain the young women's views of leadership and their perceptions and beliefs about what it meant to be a leader. There were three lots of three focus groups with five students in each lasting approximately 40 minutes in duration. During these focus groups I used a broad interview schedule that had key questions and prompts to address the topic of leadership within the school and what it meant to be a leader within their school context. Carrying out these focus groups raised a number of issues. Firstly, as the nature of the groups was so diverse in their make up, there were underlying peer group pressures which influenced who spoke and who did not. This also influenced who agreed, or was too afraid to share their own opinion. It was therefore essential to spend more time building up an emotionally safe learning environment through further team building activities and the creation of a group treaty. This extra time allocation was negotiated with the students.

During this phase of the research students also participated in an individual interview. This interview was approximately 30-60 minutes in duration and took place in the senior study room at the library on the school grounds during the school lunch time or after school. The interview was digitally recorded and notes were also written by hand. In order to maintain the theoretical integrity of the research, I used a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix E and F). Verbatim transcripts were made of each interview and posted back to students to make comment on, confirm, delete or make changes to. These were then sent back to me via free post envelopes. This first

interview focused on the perceptions that the young women held of leadership, what qualities they thought made a good leader and they also reflected on their own leadership attributes and areas they felt that they needed to develop. They shared ways that they liked to learn and also spoke of leadership experiences that they had within the school and outside of the school.

The following phases (four, five and six) are briefly outlined in the following sections. However, as they were the prominent focus of the research, these sections will be addressed in greater detail in the findings section.

Intervention Within the Action Research Process

Phase Four –Co-constructing the leadership programme

Phase four involved developing the content and creating the structure for the leadership programme. This was done through a second series of three focus groups over a three-week period using a number of questions selected from the focus group schedule (Appendix G). During these conversations students shared what they wanted to learn, how they would like to learn it (different learning strategies, both practical and theoretical) and what order the content should follow. Working together, we negotiated a framework that illustrated what the students felt was important to learn, what order to learn it in and what activities they would use to allow the learning to happen. I also drew on my leadership knowledge and teaching experience to contribute to this and expand the students' ideas about what leadership could be and also offer a variety of teaching and learning approaches.

Phase Five – Facilitating and participating in the leadership programme

Phase five involved facilitating and participating in the leadership programme. The group met for up to two hours, every week for 8 weeks. During this time the students participated in the session that we had planned together. I arrived at the school at 3.10 and set up for the leadership session in one of the school support rooms at the Library. The students arrived after class, some of them opting to get changed out of uniform. We had afternoon tea for 15 minutes. It was during this time that students shared their weekly school experiences, their challenges and their celebrations. This

was an essential part of getting to know each other and generating rapport and a supportive learning community.

Following afternoon tea, I would share the objectives for the session and we would participate in the planned leadership programme. At the end of the session we evaluated what worked in the leadership programme and what did not, and made suggestions for future improvements and changes. The students recorded field notes as the evaluation took place. It was somewhere in between phases five and six that the student named the leadership programme 'REVOLUTION'. Each letter in the word revolution represented a key characteristic of their leadership beliefs - Respect, Enthusiasm, Vision, Outgoing, Lived (walking the talk), Unique, Transform, Integrity, Open, Never-ending. Understanding the background to the naming of the leadership programme, for the remaining chapters in this research, the programme will be referred to as 'Revolution'.

Evaluation Within the Action Research Process

Phase Six – Evaluating the leadership programme and co-construction process

Phase six involved a final evaluation of the content and structure of *Revolution* and making changes to the leadership programme. Using evaluation field notes from each of the previous leadership sessions, students participated in focus group conversations and evaluated the whole of the programme, making suggestions as to what might work better, what might have more impact or have been more relevant. It was at this stage that students realized that they had control of helping decide the content and drew on their extending knowledge to improve future experiences for other students. Evaluations also took place through a second round of individual interviews. The second interview reflected on the young women's experiences of being involved in the programme and how their understandings and perceptions of leadership and what it meant to be a leader had been challenged or changed over the course of the leadership programme. Although this was also addressed in the evaluations, this allowed for a more indepth focus about what the students gained personally from being involved. My personal research diary also played a significant role in providing on-going evaluation throughout the action research process.

During this phase, the students also made a presentation to the Board of Trustees outlining what the programme looked like, why and how they created it, the benefits and challenges, and the changes and ideas they would make for the following year. This was accompanied by a movie that had been created out of photos gathered from their sessions, which they made to advertise the programme for future students.

Phase Seven – Data analysis and interpretation

Phase seven involved the analysis of the information gathered from interviews, observations, field notes, group work sheets, focus group interviews and programme evaluations. Interview transcripts were completed for the interviews and these transcripts were shared back with the participants. Individually, participants had the opportunity to view the transcripts, make changes, and add information for clarity. These were then posted back to me in a freepost envelope. The analysis of the transcripts took place through a thematic approach. Transcripts from the interviews were photocopied and different emerging themes were colour-coded and a code book was created. The transcripts were re-visited over many weeks for further analysis as new themes came to hand.

Phase Eight – Sustaining the Revolution – Unplanned leadership in action

Phase eight was an unplanned aspect of the action research and involved the young women sharing the new and improved leadership programme with a new group of students the following year. During 2008, the graduates from the leadership programme in 2007 worked alongside a new group of Year 12 students, taking them through the programme. This programme ran over eight weeks and involved 16 students.

During this time I was merely an overseer. The 2007 graduates called for volunteers through the school notices. Students collected and completed an application form from the school office, which had been drafted, edited and finalized by the 2007 graduates and supported by the Year 12 Dean. The graduates met and selected 16 students based on criteria that they had generated. The criteria included people who may have had the potential to give back to the school, showed leadership ability or

were keen to explore and develop their own leadership. They then presented this list to the year 12 Dean for approval.

The programme was launched in September 2008 for the new cohort of students. Previous graduates worked in pairs to plan and present a session that had been allocated to them. They took ownership of collecting and creating resources for this session. My role was to provide feedback on the sessions they had planned prior to them facilitating it. After each session was presented, all of the 2007 graduates evaluated how it had gone and provided feedback to the presenters. This also allowed the two students who were presenting the following week to plan and build on previous material and allow for flow and progression in the learning pathway. At the conclusion of the 2008 programme, two final focus group evaluations took place, one with the 2007 graduates who had taught in the programme, and one with the 2008 graduates who had participated in the programme. These focus groups were run to evaluate the programme and the learning that had happened as a result of being involved. This final round of focus groups allowed future ideas for improvements and structural changes to be shared. The experiences and evaluation were once again presented at a School Board of Trustees meeting by the 2007 and 2008 graduates. The graduates from 2008 ran the leadership programme again in 2009 for a new cohort of students.

This chapter has outlined the research methods used for gathering information in the research process. It has also outlined the ways information was analyzed and its trustworthiness evaluated. The ethical considerations mentioned in the previous chapter have been illustrated within the research process. A detailed account of how the research process took place has been presented. The findings of the research will now be presented in the following two chapters. The next chapter will outline the key findings with regard to the young women's beliefs and understandings about leadership.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to outline the research methods that were used to gather information within the research and present the details of the action research

process. As can be seen by the highlighted complexities involved in each information collection method, it was not a case of simply choosing and applying a method. The consideration of each method was essential to ensure firstly, its relevance for my feminist approach to research, its suitability for the participants (in this case, young women), the context and the type of information required. Furthermore, the complexities around researching young people were an important consideration. Having the voices of the young women as a central part of this research required detailed planning, using a variety of research methods and ensuring that the methods selected allowed for this to happen in a safe and valid way. Semi-structured interviews allowed the young women to individually share their voices. The focus group discussions allowed for engaging and interactive discussions between the young women, and also between the young women and myself. Field notes and supporting documentation provided further means by which to gather important information and observations through the research process and during the leadership sessions. Each of these methods was useful in contributing to the formation of the strong youth-adult partnerships. Understanding the ways in which information was gathered, analysed and interpreted is important.

The action research process was presented and the phases involved in the three areas of reconnaissance, intervention and evaluation were outlined. Each phase played an essential role in developing the leadership programme and ensuring that the community of learners and the partnership with the young women was functional and best served the interests of the young women in the research.

The following chapter examines the findings related to the young women's leadership beliefs and understandings prior to participating in the leadership development programme.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS

YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP BELIEFS AND UNDERSTANDINGS

Introduction

The purposes of this research were to explore the perceptions that a group of young women in a New Zealand secondary school held about leadership, investigate the process of co-construction as an effective means to develop a leadership programme with them and to ascertain how effective the programme was in developing leadership. The findings are presented in two chapters – Chapter 5 and Chapter 7. After each chapter of findings is presented, a chapter discussing the findings subsequently follows.

Chapter 5 shares the key findings relating to the stage of reconnaissance within the action research process. Here, the young women's beliefs and understandings about leadership and the aspects that have influenced these are shared. The presentation of these findings is divided into two sections. The first section addresses the significant impact of the school context on the young women's perceptions of leadership prior to participating in the leadership programme. It reports on their thoughts and beliefs about leadership, being a leader and what makes a good leader. Particular attention is paid to their understanding of student leadership within their secondary school context. The second section of this chapter examines the opportunities and barriers that the young women report experiencing in learning about and practicing leadership within their school. Chapter 6 then discusses these findings in light of the relevant literature.

Chapter 7 presents the findings related to the stage of intervention within the action research process. This chapter examines the use of co-construction to create a leadership programme for young women and the challenges and benefits of this

process are highlighted. The programme that was created is shared and findings related to its structure and content highlighted. These aspects are then discussed in Chapter 8 in light of the relevant literature. Both chapters of findings draw on information gathered from the semi-structured interviews, focus groups, field notes and group worksheets and I make use of students' voices as a key vehicle for illustrating the findings.

Prior to the leadership programme commencing it was important to find out the young women's understandings of leadership because this made it possible to ascertain how their understandings had changed from being involved in the leadership programme. Initially, the word leadership drew many and varying definitions from the young women on both an individual level and when they were asked to work collaboratively to explore the concept. The findings related to two key areas. Firstly, the school context had a major effect on the young women's views of leadership and the leadership opportunities available to them. Secondly, the school context had an impact on the opportunities the young women had to learn and practice leadership. These areas will now be presented and examples from the research used to illustrate their significance.

The Influence of the School Context on Leadership Knowledge and Practice

The way that leadership was presented to the students within the school had a significant impact on how the young women understood and exercised leadership. Key themes that emerged included - leadership was linked to formal leadership positions within the school, leadership was serving others, leadership created benefits, and leadership learning was an important part of preparing for the future.

Leadership was a formal position

Leadership was presented in the school as belonging to formalized positions. Consequently, positional leadership was a key theme in many of the participants' descriptions. Leadership required a title and with the title, came certain responsibilities. For example, Tania stated;

Leadership is guiding others from where you are. I mean, you have been given that position because you deserve it and have the skills...people look up to you when you're a leader.

Formal leadership positions in the school were identified as Head Girl, Deputy Head Girl, Sports Captain, House Captains, Spirit Leader, Special Character Leader, Cultural Captain, Board of Trustees Representative, Peer Group Leader, School Council President, and the Duke of Edinburgh Award and Aunties (pastoral care for younger students). Running a committee (such as French Club) was also seen as leadership as were a number of social action groups, for example, SADD (Students Against Drunk Driving), Amnesty International and Greenpeace.

The number of formal positions was small and to hold one of these positions was viewed by the students to carry power. Therefore, leadership was frequently described as holding power over others and having a level of authority amongst a known group of followers. Holding a formal leadership position provided opportunities for having power and were highly sought after by many of the students as Catherine commented;

Leadership to me...well, oh tough one...like taking charge. Like showing others the way, helping them to get things done. Here, it is about the 'doing stuff'. Like when you are a leader, you get to tell others what to do and they do it...ha ha...I can't wait!

Formal leadership roles were reserved for senior students. As a result, leadership and its associated power were believed to be gained through a rite of passage. Amy commented, "We get to be leaders and boss everyone else around for a change...I've waited for this since Year 9". Emma also associated power with leadership and stated:

Yeah, like with leadership you have the power, if you think about it, leadership is close to directing, like the orchestra. You [conductor] have to get them [musicians] playing together. You don't actually have an instrument, but they do. You organize them.

Holding this power was a desirable aspect of student leadership. However, unlike Catherine or Amy, Frances illustrated a level of complexity in her understanding of the role of a leader. Rather than a power over approach to leading, she saw a leader

as a coordinator of others, with the purpose of guiding others in order for a required outcome.

Recognition from others was a key aspect of leadership for this group of young women. The opportunity to hold a formal leadership role within the school provided avenues for visibility and external recognition within the school community. Many of the students felt that their leadership was more valuable when it was visible. Rewards such as badges, certificates and morning teas were all part of the students' belief that those around them valued what they did. Due to the limited opportunities to show leadership in formal leadership positions, some students felt that they needed to start a formal organization within the school to be recognized for their leadership and started a club because they wanted badges (external recognition) for their school blazers. As Catherine confessed in an interview:

- Catherine: Well actually, it was fired by ... fuelled by merchandise. We just wanted badges and that was cool ... we will get badges.
- Rachel: Hold up, let's go back to this. You started a group and you'll get a badge that says what?
- Catherine: Oh well, we just want badges, 'cos everyone loves badges on their blazer, people know what you can do. And we're like, 'Neah, we want drama badges'. 'Yeah but there's no more clubs that you can get badges from'. We're like, 'Oh, we'll make a club so we can get badges for our blazers and have like hats that say Drama Club' [*laughing*], so our inspiration is selfish.

Leadership and membership were two concepts that students had difficulty separating within the school context. The school lapel badges mentioned by Catherine represented either holding a leadership position (for example as a prefect), or belonging to a group or club (such as drama). Having a badge was a means of demonstrating membership of a school activity and this was very important for many of the students. For some, it illustrated leadership; to others it showed they were included in a particular aspect of the school community and for some a representation of how many things they could be involved in. Some students purchased badges to put on their blazers that had no relevance to the school; for example, a second hand Bowling Club badge was purchased by one student because it looked official! Even though students recognized that leadership was more than having a badge they felt that badges validated their leadership, identified their membership to a certain aspect

of the school community and served to visually illustrate their leadership and involvement in different aspects of the school.

Leadership was serving others

Leadership was seen as a duty to be served as they moved through the school. Many of the participants believed that leadership was fulfilling a bestowed role to serve other people and in this context it provided the opportunity to serve or give something back to the school. When they described leadership in a group, the ideas of what leadership could be often focused on working for the good of others and creating benefits for the school community. For most of the participants, the idea of leading others to a better place, creating something of significance or helping people was important. They described a good leader as someone who provided an avenue for others to ‘speak through them’ and created a following. For example, Mere commented:

I’ve been here since third form and I love my school and enjoyed my time here...by being a leader, I am serving them, it’s like a big thank you to them, a way to give back. It makes you feel good.

Jenny spoke of the need to dedicate her leadership to a certain aspect of the school such as prayer and special character and create a ‘following’ when she stated:

Well, I used to think leadership was just a badge, basically, but now I kind of realize leadership is just having the ability to be able to have people follow you and kind of be strong and having people lean on you, in a way.

Interestingly, there was a level of dissonance between the rhetoric that the young women made public when speaking in these group discussions and what they emphasized when they were speaking to me individually. The findings revealed the discourse of benefiting others and themselves was not consistent between individual comments and group discussions. When in groups, most participants shared the importance of providing benefits for others. Such a finding was not necessarily surprising within this Catholic school environment where putting the needs of others before your own was encouraged. At this school it was important to show that what you did helped and served other people. However, what was interesting was, when investigated on an individual basis, many of the young women described leadership as

being recognized and acknowledged as a leader of others, which resulted in personal benefits.

Leadership created personal benefits

The majority of the young women believed there were many benefits associated with showing leadership within the school. The phrase *showing leadership* was used, as in group discussions it became evident that many participants saw leadership as a skill or an accessory to be displayed when required, rather than an integral part of their everyday actions or behaviour. Leadership was something that they chose to actively display in situations where leadership was required and they would be recognized as leaders (for example, organizing a mufti-day or a school ball). However, beyond these situations, when they could see no benefits associated with practicing leadership, the leadership behaviour disappeared. The personal benefits associated with performing leadership superseded previous comments of serving the student body as mentioned in the group discussions. This less public view reinforced that the young women believed leadership created benefits for individuals and it could be speculated that the attraction of gaining something for themselves was a key motivator for many of the participants to involve themselves in leadership. When they were not working in a group situation, many voiced a very individualistic approach to leadership that outlined the personal benefits generated from displaying leadership and less about the how their leadership created benefits for others. The benefits associated with leadership included extrinsic rewards such as a badge for the lapel of their school jacket, an end-of-year morning tea with the principal and getting their own seat at assembly. Some formal positions of leadership entailed further training and the young women saw this as days off school or opportunities to meet people from other schools. For example Catherine stated:

Like, both head [girl] and deputy get to go to the leadership day up in Auckland. All the prefects are there like AGS [Auckland Grammar School] and St Kents [St Kentigen's College]. Pretty fit looking guys [good looking] and you get invites to their [school] ball if you're lucky.

Likewise, Chelsea acknowledged the benefits of showing leadership in the school and believed that when people showed leadership, others treated them differently, and she stated, "Like, they [the teachers] treat you as more of an adult. You get more freedom

and can go to town for lunch...Year 9s look up to you and it's so cute". Participants felt leadership was a desirable concept that helped to raise their profile among others in the school. It was a commodity and used as a form of social currency among peers. Most students held gaining a leadership position in high regard, primarily because there were so few formalized leadership positions in the school.

Leadership learning was preparation for future responsibilities

Leadership was described by the participants with a future orientation and was seen as something they had yet to do or display, or as something to be bestowed upon them. This was the case even if they were currently showing leadership in their lives. Amy spoke of leadership with a future orientation, when she stated, "I can't wait until then [Year 13] 'cause then we get to be leaders". Similarly, Rochelle, who exercised her leadership in her church as a youth group leader, spoke of her desires to "show leadership next year". She described her ability to exercise leadership with a future orientation, as if what she currently did was not known to be leadership.

Next year, if I get to be a leader, it'll be so cool, 'cause, like I've waited since year 9 to be one. I always used to look up to them, like this one head girl we had, [name], she was so good, she had good leadership, I'll be like that, that's how I'll show leadership.

Other participants reinforced this view as they described themselves as "...the leaders of the future", and Emma Jane stated, "They will need us to be good at this leadership stuff when our time comes". Interestingly, such views were restricted to those who, in their interviews, mainly focused on the school context when speaking about leadership. The small number of young women who spoke of leadership outside of the school context were more likely to identify themselves as current leaders as Tania reflected:

Yeah, I am a leader; we have a group there that we do stuff for, like games and fundraising. It's leadership I guess, because we are role models and we try to make a difference.

Despite many of the participants' understandings being restricted to the school context, it was evident that leadership opportunities acted as a dress rehearsal for

events after they left school. Leadership in the school was a way of practising skills for the ‘real world’ and the leadership opportunities provided by the school allowed them to practice for roles later in life. As Anna commented, “I mean who cares about the jobs you do here, it’s more about what you learnt about yourself while you did it. Hopefully, you learnt something, some skills maybe that help you with a real job later when you leave”. Similarly, Jenny stated:

It’s not really about what you did...like Head Girl or anything...it’s about how you did it and the lessons you learnt...it’s these that will help us when we leave school.

The young women believed that leadership was a quality that future employers valued and that by holding a leadership position, they would be more likely to get a job when they left school. Tania spoke of the future and commented that having participated in “training about leadership”, or “having it recorded on a school report ‘cause it looks good for future bosses”, meant she would be looked on favourably when being selected for future employment. One other participant, Rochelle, was seeking to be a supervisor at her part-time job and believed that participating in this training could be useful to help her to achieve that promotion. Similarly, Catherine stated

...and it would just also help me from now on and it would look good on my CV and I feel as though it ... life skills, yeah, life skills that I’ve gained.

Leadership was a trivial pursuit

Leadership was also seen as doing jobs for teachers and as a result, some students actively avoided leadership in the school context. On a group worksheet, when asked to describe student leadership within their school, one participant stated that leadership “...fake... teachers speaking through girls”. Another participant wrote, “It looks like there [sic] making a change but nothing really happens”. Similarly, Anna described leadership as, “...it’s really just a bunch of students doing jobs for the teachers and making it easier for them”. Towards the end of designing the programme Chelsea acknowledged through her own leadership experiences as a class leader, the triviality of some leadership opportunities and stated:

Well, there's like class leaders where you go and get the notices and read them out. I got some mint slices at the end of the year for doing that...there was only four girls for the whole year, so I was one of four...a quarter of a leader.

However, rather than understanding that leadership could be shared and distributed amongst a group of people, Chelsea saw this sharing as a personal weakness and evidence that one person was not completing her job properly. It became apparent that some students in the school withdrew from school leadership and as Anna acknowledged, she made a choice not to be involved in leadership at school making the point that leadership roles were created for those who were more confident, outspoken and popular. Anna shared that leadership at school was for those who were already leaders. She felt the whole process of gaining a leadership role was aimed at a certain group, that this often dismissed those wanting to learn about leadership rather than just be thrown in to lead without preparation.

Leadership was completing tasks

Leadership was seen as completing tasks successfully. As leadership was frequently connected to a formal position that had assigned tasks, it was not surprising that good leadership was demonstrated through the successful performance of tasks aligned with key roles within the school. Some of the formal leadership positions in the school even had a job description outlining the 'tasks' that were associated with the position rather than the roles and responsibilities associated with the position. Mere observed such occurrences in action and stated:

You know who the good leaders are because things get done. Like for the social, we were really rushed and things were left out, cause there was no planning and she [the head girl] did not lead us properly.

The views of what made a good leader were limited by the school context and reinforced within the school structures. This included the way leadership was presented to the students in the school context. Examples of this included the layout of the school newsletters, starting with reports from the Head Girl through to the House Captains. Furthermore, certain privileges bestowed upon the individual had a direct correlation to the formal position held within the school. Examples of this were invitations and seating arrangements at functions such as school assemblies and church meetings and access to and writing in the school magazine. Students saw the

group of selected individuals as the school leaders and they were referred to as such by staff.

Effective Leadership - Perceptions of What Made a Good Leader

The views that the young women held of what made a good leader were wide-ranging. However, the common themes relating to what made a good leader lay in two areas, firstly, personal skills and secondly, personal qualities.

Personal skills

Firstly, performance-based skills that assisted getting a task completed were ranked as very important characteristics. For example, participants felt that the skills of being able to speak publicly, being organized, delegating and managing their time, were essential to being a good leader. A leader must also have the knowledge to fulfill the expectations of others and have experience in what they are leading or doing. Leadership was viewed as a task-orientated behaviour. Consequently, many of the beliefs about what made a good leader were restricted to skills that assisted a person to complete a task. Success and failure to complete a task were seen as important indicators of quality leadership and students easily allocated the responsibility of leadership to other people, rather than seeing it as part of their own actions. To have a leader taking charge of something meant that the leader took responsibility for the failure or the success of the activity. As Chelsea stated;

Like you know that the pressure is on them, and if it doesn't get done, they are the ones that look stink...So a good leader gets people on their side to help them so that they don't have to do it all by themselves.

Personal qualities

Second, personal qualities were an important aspect of good leadership. Being laid-back, approachable, caring, outgoing and showing confidence while being humble were deemed essential attributes of a good leader. To be able to help and give hope to others, put other people's needs first before their own, along with being mature and respected, truthful and fun were also seen as important personal qualities that leaders should have. The ability to build relationships was deemed important in leadership by

a small number of students as relationships helped to create a network of friends and supporters. This was interesting as it also reflected the ways in which potential leaders often gained access into formal leadership positions in the school through being voted in by their peers.

Understandings about leadership ranged from being very simple to complex. Some participants described leadership at a more basic level, such as telling people what to do, starting fads in fashion or language and getting noticed by people. Chelsea described leadership as the opportunity to “be the boss and get what I want done. People do it for you and it’s cool”. Other views were more complex and leadership was described as a way of being and acting in life as Tania indicated:

As a way to bring people together, you don’t have to be at the front.
It’s an ability to shift people’s ideas, get them to listen and
acknowledge each other and then create something together.

Kate collated the qualities listed by the groups and reflected on what she believed made a good leader.

I think a good leader is someone who you can get along with and
they’re open to ideas, or don’t act as if they’re above you. They act as
if you’re on the same level, and they get on with like ... like a friend.
Our leader has got to be someone who you’re able to talk to not like a
power play, kind of thing ... a good leader is someone who you’re able
to talk to openly about things and they will not judge you.

Those who held more complex beliefs about leadership were often those who had opportunities to show leadership outside the school context, for example in their youth group, family or part-time employment. This indicated the possibility that these experiences may have provided opportunities for reflection and more practice resulting in a deeper understanding about what leadership could be. It was also interesting to note that when speaking within their groups, some personal qualities seemed to be of more importance, such as those previously mentioned as being laid-back and approachable, caring, outgoing and confident yet humble, being able to give hope to others, helping people and put other people’s needs first before their own. However, when interviewed on an individual basis other qualities and skills seemed to take priority such as being fun, and popular amongst the school community. Looking good was also important. Nevertheless, although this conflict was present, it was

obvious that some students exhibited more complex views of leadership. These were further illustrated when students shared their perceptions of the opportunities available to them to learn about leadership.

Opportunities for Learning Leadership in the School Context

Many of the young women perceived there were limited opportunities to learn and practice leadership in their current setting. Four areas where students identified leadership learning occurring were, formal training opportunities organized by the school, experiential learning, role modelling, and learning outside of the school in sports contexts.

Learning leadership through formal training opportunities

All students acknowledged being involved in formal leadership positions designated by the school system was the key way to learn about leadership. Many held the belief that those students who displayed leadership would automatically receive leadership roles when they moved into their final year at school. Once students were in these roles, they would be provided with a small amount of training, such as day workshops and guest speakers. This was the case with the formal leadership learning opportunities offered at Year 12 and the beginning of the Year 13. There were four of these opportunities available to students and were all aimed at senior students. There was a Leadership Camp for Year 12 students going on to Year 13 run by school staff as a way to select leaders for the following year. An excerpt from the school Newsletter reads:

The Year 13 Leadership camp has certainly inspired Year 13 to accept leadership roles this year. The enthusiasm that they have shown already augurs well for 2009. A highlight of the Camp was the very creative Liturgy the Year 13 organised and facilitated. The Special Character Student Leader for 2009 is *****. We look forward to all she will be doing for us in this role (February, 2009, p. 5).

A student mentoring programme called Aunties was available for Year 12 students. This programme was for students who wished to mentor a Year 9 student and was run by school staff. A specific leadership development day called HEADZUP was a day workshop for head prefects and deputy head prefects at the Year 13 level and was run

by a local community organization. There was also leadership day in Auckland (run by KPMG) for the Head Girl and Deputy Head Girl. There were no formal leadership learning opportunities mentioned for the junior school students.

Learning leadership through experiential learning

Students learnt about leadership informally through an unplanned experiential learning cycle and role modelling. Students turned to informal learning processes as a means of developing their leadership knowledge as they felt that it was left up to the individual to learn about leadership. There was an underlying belief amongst the group that leadership learning ‘just happened’. Many students felt that leadership was learnt through gaining experience and through the processes of trial and error. For example, Emma stated, “you have a go and if it didn’t work, you learn and get better for next time”. A small number of school events were acknowledged by the students as assisting with leadership development, for example, roles and responsibilities provided through the Church such as assisting with Mass and community services. Students believed that they learnt from these attempted leadership experiences and this improved their leadership practice based upon the mistakes that they made during the previous opportunity. However, some felt that such a process was ineffective and sometimes frightening, putting people off wanting to lead, as Kate questioned:

What if you don’t know that what you are doing is wrong? That you have nothing to judge it on and cannot improve? What if you do not have the tools to get better? Who helps you?

Learning leadership through role modelling

Role modelling was an important avenue for learning about leadership. The students believed that much of the learning about leadership in their school came from watching other leaders in action and therefore it was important for the leaders to be visible. Consequently this shaped the type of leadership that was valued and most preferred by the students. For example, Nerroly believed that being a leader “means you are a role model for the young students and this is good for them, they look up to you and you feel important”. However, this comment was an exception as, throughout focus group and conversations over the leadership programme, it was

evident that the actions of some of the group did not necessarily meet this rhetoric. Furthermore, in some instances, where students spoke of having role models in order to develop their leadership, many did not see themselves as leadership role models for others. Only a small group, often those who held more complex views of leadership, made this connection.

Leadership role models within the school assisted with leadership learning. Students acknowledged how they developed their leadership from observing previous prefects and teachers. Past student leaders of the school greatly influenced the students' beliefs about leadership. One past leader was mentioned on a frequent basis in the interviews as being very successful in her role as Head Girl even though she had left the school three years earlier. She demonstrated many of the qualities that the young women saw in a good leader. She was described as being very visible within the school community and a good role model for others. It was this type of leadership that was valued by most of the young women in this study and when they reflected on desired leadership qualities or influential leaders, they often spoke about this past Head Girl. Learning through watching other prefects lead was valued by Catherine who reflected on how she learnt about leadership prior to the *secondary* opportunity;

I got my views on leadership from the people I saw around me, like ... that is the Head Girls that we've had and what I think is a crappy one and one I think is a good one...I compare, work out what's good...you see leadership and so you're like, 'Oh, that was good and *leadery*. I'm going to do that too.

Teachers were important role models for developing leadership. Jenny highlighted how she observed a teacher who she believed was a leader and stated, "Mrs H is a leader, she has taught me heaps about myself and how to get on with people. She is a good role model and always shows that she is happy to see you and helps". It was interesting that when discussing teachers as leaders, students identified teachers who were not in a formal leadership position such as a principal or dean. However, when discussing students as leaders, these students were all in formal leadership roles.

Leadership role models and opportunities to learn about leadership were also identified beyond the school gates. Parents were a source of leadership learning. Mere spoke of learning about leadership through her mother;

My mum mainly...she is so strong, heaps of people look up to her. She is on heaps of committees and since I was little I had to go along. I have seen her make decisions, win fights, comfort people. To me, she is a leader and I've learnt to lead from her.

Learning leadership outside of the school through sporting contexts

Sport provided opportunities to learn about leadership. This learning opportunity was connected to both the school environment and the wider community. Sport was identified as a place to learn important attributes for leadership, such as “being a role model” and “being able to motivate others”. Kate described the influence of her rowing coach as a role model and outlined dedication and commitment as his key leadership qualities and, “because of this, we would do anything for him. He is quiet, not out there as a leader, but I think sometimes a quiet leader is even better. He’s also really humble, I’d like to lead like that”. Catherine spoke of sport as more of an avenue for showing leadership rather than learning about leadership and described the tasks involved in being a leader within her team;

Like the captain, no one teaches you about it, it just happens, the coach has the say, no one votes you in, no one teaches you, but you become it [the captain] and it’s cool. You get an armband and do the toss and run the warm up.

Those involved in sporting teams acknowledged that leadership could be shown through being committed to a group of team members and being a role model, not just a formal position as Catherine mentioned above. Examples raised by some of the young women illustrated a complex level of understanding. For a team to be successful, leadership must be distributed amongst the team. As Tania stated:

We all need to show it [leadership] on the field. It is what separates us from others, we think for ourselves and we are all invested, is that the right word? Yeah, invested in it, we are committed; we all have to show leadership for that.

Within this sporting context, leadership did not reside solely within one player, or labelled position, for example, the coach or the captain. Although these people were seen as good role models, the understanding of shared leadership and responsibility for the success of the team was a key theme. However, such thinking did not transfer back into the school setting, where leadership remained attached to a formalized

position and the responsibility lay solely within the individual who held the leadership position.

Opportunities to Practice Leadership

Many of the young women acknowledged that there were few formal opportunities to show leadership within the school, especially during the junior years of the school. The more formalized and visible leadership positions in the school were reserved for Year 13 students. One exception was at Year 11, where there was one formal leadership position as a Board of Trustees Students' Representative. Year 12 students had the opportunities to mentor younger students through the Aunties programme (where Year 12 students buddy up with new Year 9 students to support their transition into secondary school). Year 9 and 10 students did not have any formalized leadership opportunities, with the exception of class captain. Frances acknowledged that the few formal opportunities to show leadership at this level meant that many previous leadership opportunities and existing leadership knowledge were under-utilized. She believed that responsibility was taken away from students as they entered the school at Year 9. Many students had been leading in their previous junior schools prior to entering secondary school. She explained the difference between leadership in the primary and intermediate school and spoke of her experiences as a junior school counsellor, where she held a great deal of responsibility, and then moved to secondary school and had none.

I [moved]... to a big school, ... like you go from having responsibility and stuff when you're little, 'cos like when we were student counsellors we had to ... solve people's problems, we had to work in the tuck shop and stuff like that. And then like ... to go here it's just like ... no one really expects anything of you. Like ... we're not really expected to join into the school in any way.

While a small group of participants praised the school for creating more positions of leadership (such as increasing the number of deputy prefects so that more students could experience leadership), others believed that this took away from the original positions and argued this created an element of triviality in some leadership opportunities. They questioned whether the positions were actually leadership opportunities at all due to the prescriptive and repetitive nature of the tasks. Kate reflected on opportunities available to show leadership and commented:

There's actually been an increase in leadership positions like ... we only used to have three. Head Girl, Deputy and Sports ... I think and now we've got like Arts Leader, Special Character, Cultural Leader and ... so there's been like more of that, which means we've got a range of assemblies now, so it's not just sports and academic. We've got arts assemblies and cultural assemblies ... It's good because then everything has ... not a say ... but like a ... I don't know how to put it ... like we're not being biased towards one thing.

The opportunities to practice and develop leadership and to learn to be a leader were concentrated on a small group of people within the school. It was perceived that the students in this small group were assisted into formal leadership roles and positions by school staff. Participants agreed that the final term at the school was leadership season for Year 12 students and one participant described how this time of the year was harvest time and an opportunity for teachers to pick the 'leadership fruit' that was ready. During Kate's interview I encouraged her to continue with her metaphor and to follow is a condensed version of what she shared:

Now [end of Term 3] leaders are ripe for the picking. This year has been an OK crop, average, not as good as past years...they [staff] have been pruning one particular tree for a while now and she is fruiting...real sad 'cause now they are not looking for other apples because they like the taste of the one they grew, they don't ask whether the market out there would like this one the best...They have...watered, fertilized and pruned this tree to make it fruit, but the orchard around them has suffered because all of the resources have been concentrated on one small group of trees...all uncared for, below average trees around it.

Kate came from a family of orchardists and she used this knowledge to illustrate her interpretation of the leadership opportunities and selection processes within the school. She illustrated a level of complexity in her understanding of how the school, and more specifically the staff, influenced the leadership culture within the school. She spoke of the 'grooming' of students from when they arrive at the school in Year 9, through to the senior school. She illustrated how the teachers put the values of the school into practice by the way they showed their preference for leaders who had certain qualities. She also spoke of the impact that this had on surrounding students or aspiring leaders within the school community. She explained how leaders were identified early at school and groomed for leadership positions over the years. In her metaphor Kate warned the school of possible implications of this, and used the metaphor of lightning strike and blight to illustrate the dangers. In her interview she

foreshadowed the changing needs and desires of the public (school community) and how tastes (needs and abilities) may be different, but because the teachers do not try anything else, the status quo remains. Jenny's comments reinforced such a view;

They sort of have them all organized before we even get a chance to put our names forward. Like, the head girl, she's been helped to get there. It's pretty much a sure thing and she will get it.

Opportunities for informal leadership were noted by the students but rarely referred to as possibilities for leadership opportunities, for example, to belong to a school club (such as drama, an international club such as the French group, Stage Challenge or a sporting group). Other informal avenues for learning about leadership were acknowledged and a small number of students saw peer groups as sites of leadership opportunities where you "...could be the leader of your group...but I don't see a lot of leadership in anything else really...except when you get to Seventh Form [Year 13] (Frances).

Barriers and Constraints to Leadership Perceived and Experienced by Participants

After exploring the opportunities to practice and learn about leadership, the participants were asked about aspects that inhibited them from learning about or practicing their leadership. Three key areas deserve mention and further comment; firstly, the school structures and processes for student leadership nomination and selection, second, the access to learning opportunities and third, the students themselves.

School structures and nomination processes

The participants perceived that existing school processes and structures were barriers to student leadership. The traditional leadership structure of the school restricted the number of students being involved in formal leadership roles due to the small number of positions available. Once these roles were filled, the young women perceived that there were no more opportunities to practice their leadership. For example, when asked about showing leadership in other places Amy stated, "I mean, what's the point, they have it all...there's nothing left". Amy illustrated her initial understandings of

leadership being contained only to these formal positions. It was difficult throughout the programme not to keep focusing on these positions, as at the time when this research and the leadership programme took place, it was the end of the year and students were busy campaigning for senior leadership roles within the school.

The participants also believed that the formal processes used by the school for the nomination and the selection of student leaders was a barrier to student leadership. They felt that there was a lack of transparency in the nomination and voting processes when allocating formal leadership roles within the school. When asked to describe the process Tania stated:

Just ... you apply and then all the names go up on the board ... the board in the staffroom. And then the teachers all get asked to say if they'd be good or not. So, it'd be like, 'Oh well, actually this person never does their homework and isn't actually a very good role model, so no'. So they get people for each role, then they all say a speech at Leadership Camp and then the seventh formers 'vote' ... yeah right ... apparently that never actually happens, 'cos apparently one year everyone voted for these people, but these people never got chosen, so it's like, 'Whatever!' ... so really ... Mrs ... the teachers ... principals etc, they already know who they want and that leadership camp's a waste of time. But they say it's good, so yeah, it might be ... I don't know.

Within these processes staff had significant influence over student access to leadership and were perceived as significant barriers. On one level staff were involved in the original selection of the group of students and on a second level they were also asked to provide feedback to ascertain whether the student was a suitable applicant. Kate shared her experiences of being an Aunty (a senior mentor for Year 9 students who were new to the school) and highlighted the influence of the staff. When she reflected on the process of applying to be involved in leadership the following conversation took place:

- Kate: You have to apply. You usually have to fill out a form and answer a few questions. And then it is, they [Deans] do a check to see with your teachers whether you're ... whether you apply yourself and you're diligent and do well in school and all that kind of stuff.
- Rachel: So the teachers sort of decide [who/you?] ... ?
- Kate: They have a say in it, I think.
- Rachel: And do most people put their hands up to do it?

Kate: Quite a few people did when I did and ... 'cos I know quite a few who were declined for the position... maybe like a fifth or whatever of people that apply that don't get it.

School rules also impacted on the opportunity to exercise school leadership within these roles. Within the small group of formal leadership positions available, it was stipulated by the school that certain positions were only to be held by those who were practising Catholics (for example, Head Girl). Catherine spoke of her passion to be Head Girl, but then sadly explained the fact that she was not Catholic meant she would not be appointed, as she was unable to hold such a position in the school. She felt that this was a type of discrimination, yet was unable to question this process within the school.

Even though the principal acknowledged in my informal conversations with her that there were only a small number of positions available, there was little evidence of action in the school to encourage students to demonstrate leadership outside of these roles. This resulted in a small active movement of leadership at the senior end of the school and reinforced the discourse that leadership was a task reserved for a small number of able students and those who had demonstrated leadership in years prior to Year 13. Conversely, some students overcame certain barriers by illustrating a high level of strategizing. Rochelle spoke enthusiastically in an individual interview of her willingness to be involved in the formal school leadership structure. On a number of occasions she illustrated a level of strategy as she shared her goals for the following year;

Yeah, I'm going for special character for next year. I'll probably get it but just in case, I'll put my name in for sports captain too. Not as good and totally different jobs I know, but best not to have all my eggs in one basket... Besides... I don't think many people are going for Special Character next year, not many good ones anyway. And I'm pretty sure I'll get like House or Deputy if I don't get one of the others because there's only like five people left in my house and I think only three people are going for House Captains and there's three positions. So ... pretty much ... I'll get one.

Rochelle's plans to acquire a leadership position the following year involved a high level of strategizing and decision-making. However, in focus group discussions, she maintained a casual approach and did not divulge her strategies for gaining a leadership role. It could be speculated that she was attempting to display the qualities

deemed important for leadership by this group, for example, humility and selflessness, yet still fulfilling her own personal agenda of securing a leadership position.

Limited access to learning opportunities

The participants perceived limited access to relevant and meaningful learning opportunities as a barrier to leadership development. They indicated that the leadership learning opportunities that occurred were often planned on a one-off basis and did not include any follow-up by the school, resulting in non-sustained leadership learning. This non-sustained approach was obvious to the participants and Tania points out in one interview, “It’s like...that’s it...you’re a leader now and they wash their hands of you. It’s kind of all dumped on you and full on, then nothing”. Learning opportunities were disjointed and lacked progression. This resulted in much of the learning being forgotten before students had the opportunity to apply it. Common phrases used were “thrown in the deep end” and “sink or swim”, emphasizing students’ feelings of being unprepared for leadership roles. They felt they had to rely on their existing leadership abilities with minimal support from the school or their peers. Opportunities for learning were restricted to students in their final year of schooling and difficult to access if you were not in a formal leadership position. Kate shared her experience of training for her leadership position as an Aunty.

But it’s [the Aunties’ programme] just a week, so you’ve got a training day the year before and then you go right into it...It’s usually in the holidays I think. well ... yeah ... I don’t think the training day’s actually that good because all you basically do is ... I think we played one or two games, and we got an Aunty’s Book, which is like a ring binder thing with a whole lot of games in it that you could choose from. And that was pretty good, because I know quite a few people used that ... but ... yeah, I don’t think the training day was that ... flash... Well, I’m comparing it to this, to be honest, and it’s not that good compared to this...Maybe ... ‘cos I think an RE (religious education) teacher and a French teacher run it and ... yeah...not good.

In her comments Kate acknowledged that school staff might not have the expertise in this area to run the programme. The allocation of leadership training to staff was not an aspect explored in this research, however, it would be interesting to find out why

certain staff were appointed into these positions of responsibility and investigate what professional development they received to assist them.

Barriers created by students

The participants perceived that the deliberate actions of some students created barriers to leadership. On many occasions, students acted as gatekeepers and sabotaged other people's leadership opportunities. Students strategized over formal leadership positions, splitting votes on purpose and campaigning against people who they did not see as suitable candidates for formal roles. Students were responsible for omitting others from informal leadership opportunities and some students felt that leadership was more of a rite of passage than an opportunity for all. These actions reinforced the leadership culture created by school processes and presented to them by the staff of the school. In one example, the students involved in the leadership programme were themselves actually responsible for restricting opportunities for others to practice leadership because the younger students had not "done their time" to deserve leadership. In their planning for the following year, the graduates of the programme decided that the leadership programme should therefore be reserved only for senior students, that those people wanting to be involved had to apply, and that the graduates from the previous year would decide on who would be successful applicants based on their views of who would be suitable leaders in the future.

Some participants did not see student leadership as an attractive proposition. The creation of trivial leadership roles created a barrier to authentic leadership and this was frustrating. Some participants felt that the school trivialized leadership and created positions such as increasing the number of deputy head girls to two instead of one. The school also created leadership positions to serve the function of the school, for example, rubbish monitors, to assist with litter control and rubbish pick up. This placed those elected as rubbish monitors in the position of showing power over others and this made the students in the research angry. It also affected their social currency (reduced their popularity amongst their peers), and reduced the possibility of gaining votes the following year if they were standing for election into a formal role. Kate who was involved in rubbish duty as a rubbish monitor spoke very strongly about this task:

Maybe it's just they've got to be leadership roles that ... you actually got to look forward to and you actually lead... because I know that she's asked the Sixth Form year level to do basically rubbish duty and ask juniors to pick up rubbish. And that's not something that basically ... people aren't going to admire people like that who go round telling people to pick up rubbish. Yeah, and leadership roles that actually make us be respected, whereas if we're asking someone to pick up rubbish, I know a lot of students have either had the rubbish thrown back at them or abused. And that's not setting us up... like, that's not giving us a good image for next year when they're going to be voting... 'cos I think this influences largely ... next year's leadership roles, 'cos quite a few people don't turn up to do it and there is a roll that they take to check how often people are doing it, is that kind of thing...leadership?... , its really it's got nothing to do with it and it wouldn't ... it's not really helping in the slightest bit.

During the research process the young women acknowledged there were few leadership opportunities for them as senior students. They contacted the principal who instigated further leadership opportunities in the form of litter collection. All Year 12 students were rostered on to supervise the collection of rubbish during the school lunch hour and this duty was described as a senior leadership role. However, the students did not believe that it was, and it was seen by them as an attempt to appease their call for more leadership roles by creating a greater number of formalized leadership positions within the school for year levels other than Year 13, and overall, to assist with the smooth functioning of the school.

Anna held a relatively complex view of leadership and recognized how disconnected school leadership was from the lives of the students. She believed this was an example of the school not recognizing what was already happening in their lives and such aspects did not come into play when the school designed leadership opportunities. She angrily stated;

I mean, it's really old fashioned, as old as mum, even my gran probably. The way they shove it on us. That's why I'm not there, it's lame, small. I mean, what does it teach you? Like, without trying to sound like a noter [boaster], I do heaps more than that [head girl] outside of school and don't expect a medal. I have brothers and sisters to look after, I am the oldest, I have a job at [business] and am a youth leader at SpeakOut [youth group]...I do heaps of stuff that could be leadership, but I don't go crying for a badge or a medal. At least this way, I answer to myself, I don't have too many rules and heaps of catfights [slang term for fights between girls].

Some students felt that leadership was presented like this to students and they had little option but to work within the existing leadership structures. As Anna commented, "...it's really just a bunch of students doing jobs for the teachers and making it easier for them". Anna acknowledged the triviality of leadership within the school context throughout her interviews and during focus groups shared and vented her frustration at being involved in such a situation. As she did this, other students began to examine their opportunities to learn about and practice leadership more critically. However, uncovering these understandings proved challenging at times as the young women confessed their unwillingness to criticize the current school environment. Comments such as the school was "doing its best with what they had" or "they don't know so we shouldn't expect it from them", punctuated the interviews. More frequently, such understandings and beliefs manifested themselves as silent protests as some students demonstrated the choice not to become involved in the school leadership structure. For example, Tania had deliberately opted out of school leadership. Up until her interview she had said very little about the leadership culture within the school. However, when asked about leadership in a one-on-one situation, Tania shared her views:

It's screwed really, they say – be leaders, make a difference, but then they don't let us do anything. We are spoken to and for before we even get a chance to speak. How do we get to show leadership? Real leadership? Not here! Not by doing demeaning tasks, or by pampering Year 9s. That'll never change the world.

Moreover, she did not like the way that the school truncated leadership opportunities and her active resistance to leadership was her silent protest and her way of showing her disapproval. As the leadership programme was not part of the school, and was driven by the University, she felt it was acceptable to be involved. Tania's level of frustration was twofold; firstly, because her complex understandings went beyond the traditional notions of leadership on which the school based many of its leadership opportunities, and secondly, because there was only a small group of people who thought the way that she did, making it difficult to even begin challenging the current leadership environment. As a result, Tania's choice of action was to resist the current leadership climate and show her leadership elsewhere, outside the school gates.

Mere acknowledged the difficulty of showing leadership independently, yet not wanting to undermine those already in formal leadership positions. Furthermore, she made the point that not all students cared about leadership within the school and had fought not to conform to the current school model of leadership. Like many of the participants, Mere was careful in her interview not to sound disrespectful but acknowledged that the way the school portrayed leadership was not for everyone as she commented, "... like for a lot of people they probably just don't care ... don't really have anything to do with it and sort other things for themselves". Furthermore, differing expectations of leadership between staff and students and a lack of information about formal leadership roles was a barrier to leadership. Nerrolly felt that there was a lack of information about leadership for aspiring leaders and stated:

Just because you know nothing about it. Like you're just so uninformed ... you're like, 'Well why would I want to go for something that I know nothing about?' ... like you don't know what anybody does really... informing the students of what the Head Girl and what all the other leaders do, and what you'd be expected to do and what would be expected of you if you were going to go for one of the positions... like, it [leadership] doesn't seem that appealing really I guess.

Many students felt that the messages students received about leadership were confusing and, although they were told that anyone could be a leader, when someone took the initiative to do this it was frowned upon. Mere shared an example of this:

I don't think so, because I think at our school it's quite ... you've got to be quite good academically to be a leader. You can be ... Yeah, selected for a leadership role and those are the only basically leadership ... main leadership roles within our school. But I know there are a few students who have wanted to and have acted out on their own... and a friend of mine started a drama club, and ... but our school's not really good with acknowledging stuff like that, because on their report, it didn't have it and when they asked if it could be on their report and all that kind of stuff, the reply was that it hadn't been running long enough. That was upsetting for them and I know someone who started a random act of kindness club ... and ... we do have ... like special character clubs and stuff like SADD and there's a leader of that, so I suppose you do have the opportunity to lead.

SUMMARY

The context of the school had a significant influence on the views that the young women had of leadership. It played a key role in not only being the provider of opportunities to practice leadership, but it also shaped the leadership experiences for the young women who were fortunate to gain one of these few opportunities. As such, leadership was frequently described as something that helped with the smooth functioning of the school, and therefore was linked to the completion of tasks and fulfilling of a specific job description. The formal opportunities to learn about leadership were few, and when they were provided, they were often disjointed and lacked relevance. There were restricted opportunities for aspiring leaders as much of the leadership learning opportunities were concentrated on the students who had been groomed for leadership positions within the school. Students turn to role models as a means of informal leadership learning with students identifying teachers, other students and sports coaches as key sources for learning. Whilst students identified a number of barriers to leadership learning and practice, with the majority of these relating to school structures and processes and the lack of learning opportunities, students themselves were identified as gate keepers to leadership and provided complex strategies to uphold traditions of rite of passage and institutional prefect systems, through voting systems and election strategies.

In conclusion, this chapter has reported the findings addressing the beliefs and perceptions that the young women held towards leadership prior to participating in the leadership development programme. The factors that influenced those beliefs, understandings and leadership practices and the challenges and barriers the young women faced have also been illustrated. The findings have highlighted the powerful influence of the school context on young women's views of leadership. This same context has been illustrated as having a significant impact on the opportunities to learn and practice leadership, presenting the students with a number of constraints and barriers to leadership within the school context. The following chapter will discuss these findings in light of the relevant literature.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter draws on the research findings from Chapter 5 and comments on these findings in light of the relevant literature with regard to the original research questions. In this chapter I examine and discuss the significant influence of the school context on young women's leadership beliefs, knowledge and practice. This will include highlighting opportunities and barriers the young women perceived they had to learn about and practice leadership.

YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

The context of the secondary school is diverse, dynamic and purportedly responsive to the needs of its students. More importantly, it is a powerful force in shaping young people's understandings about themselves and the world around them. It is therefore important to examine how the school context impacted on these leadership beliefs and perceptions of the young women in this research. As noted in the literature review in Chapter 2, research into the perceptions that young women hold about leadership is sparse. However, a small number of studies point to the impact that context can have on the way that young people in general view leadership (for example Komives, 1994; Osberg-Conner & Strobel, 2007). In light of the relevant literature, the following section examines the findings that highlighted the influence of the school context on the leadership beliefs and perceptions held by the young women. I also comment on the opportunities and barriers young women had to learn about and practice leadership.

The findings indicated that the school context was powerful in shaping the beliefs, knowledge, and understandings that the young women held towards leadership. This

finding was not surprising as literature illustrating the impact of the school culture on the individual is a strong theme in educational research (Hargreaves, Earl & Ryan, 1996). Within this body of literature, two main discourses are present and espouse firstly, the belief that leadership can define and shape the culture of a school (Schein, 1992), and secondly, more alternatively, that it is the school context and culture that shapes the leader (Sergiovanni & Corbally, 1986). Of course, much of this literature relates to the leadership of adults and more specifically, school principals. However, in the case of this research, what is interesting is the Catholic school context had a significant impact on the young women's leadership beliefs and understandings.

The Young Women's' Leadership Beliefs and Understandings

The views of leadership held by the young women were varied and ranged from very basic to very complex. What was surprising was that the findings revealed many of the young women had complex understandings of leadership, and frequently these students were involved in showing leadership outside of the school context. Such a finding is of significance as the current traditional pathways for designing leadership learning experiences pay little attention to the level of learning that students bring with them, or their engagement in leadership beyond the school gates. There is also little consideration of prior knowledge of leadership or current leadership abilities. Instead, leadership is taught as a one-size-fits-all approach. Moreover, in the literature there is little about young people's level of leadership understanding or complexity – more about leadership as transactional skills and the qualities of a leader that assist with the completion of tasks. This transactional approach to leadership is deemed by some (for example, Leithwood & Jantzi, 1998) to be outdated, non-sustaining and, in many educational settings, this belief has been superseded by the notion of transformational leadership.

For some students in this research, leadership understandings were restricted in nature and their leadership understandings were situated solely within the school context. This level of understanding remained mostly with those who were yet to show leadership beyond the school gates. The findings illustrated that the Catholic school context was influential in shaping their leadership understandings and many of the

young women in this situation held beliefs of leadership which were informed by the traditional structures and patriarchal systems within the church. These will now be discussed.

Participants' Discourses of Leadership

Holding a formal position

The findings firstly highlighted that the young women's views of leadership were influenced by existing school structures such as the way leadership was presented to students and the opportunities available for students to show leadership. For example, leadership was presented to the young women in the form of formalized leadership positions. This resulted in the young women seeing leadership tied to a formal role or position and being about completing tasks to help with the smooth functioning of the school. Positions of leadership such as head girl, cultural captain and special character leader were all positions highly sought after by many students.

The actions that the school took to define leadership through presenting formal leadership positions reinforced the importance of the formal leadership roles within this school structure. Such a finding was not surprising and would not be an aspect which was unique to this specific context. However, the hierarchy of these leadership positions mirrors the structures within the Catholic Church, emphasizing a hierarchy of leadership roles and systems that restrict leadership to only a certain few. For example, a rule within the school outlined that only a Catholic girl could hold the position of Head Prefect. This mirrors certain structures within the church that provides leadership pathways for specific individuals and are frequently based on gender. For example, the ideology that only men can be priests. Grace (2002) comments that it is not surprising that the leadership structures of many Catholic schools continue to reproduce the Church's hierarchical structures, having an emphasis on authority and autocratic outcomes due to the powerful nature of the historical context. However, shifts in leadership understanding are also bringing about different ways of practicing leadership. As highlighted by Thomson and Blackmore (2006), the choices to redesign and reshape the work of leaders in schools

have created opportunities to redefine leadership in schools. For example in their work which focuses on the redesigning the leadership structures of the school rather than the performance of the individual principal, they highlight the possibilities co-principalships can have on the leadership context of a school. Using two Catholic schools as examples of this occurring, they emphasized how these arrangements highlighted the need to refocus leadership priorities so that structural hierarchies are moved aside to make way for new opportunities to redesign leadership based on important cultural differences and understandings about leadership, community and education. Research such as this draws attention to the possibilities of changing the nature of traditional leadership systems and I believe could also be effective in not only modelling to young women a different type of leadership within the Catholic school, but could also be a useful consideration when designing student leadership structures.

The findings indicated that the Principal was aware of the lack of formal leadership opportunities available to students. As an attempt to make superficial changes to the leadership structure of the school, a number of new leadership positions were created by the principal to better represent the student body and the increased diversity of the students within the school (for example, Pacific and Māori leadership roles had been created). However, in doing so, she further reinforced the notion that leadership was tied to a formal leadership position and that opportunities to show leadership were through gaining one of these positions. Further actions by the school included the first newsletter of the year featuring the current student leaders, listing those who were successful in gaining one of the twelve formal leadership positions within the school (Head Girl, Deputy Head Girl, Special Character, Arts Leader, Sports Leader, Cultural Leader, and six House Leaders). The other positions that the students recognized as sites for exercising leadership (The Aunties' programme, Rubbish Monitors) were not mentioned in the school correspondence and such positions lacked visibility within the school community.

Upon closer investigation and analysis the findings illustrated that the Auntie's programme was designed as a pastoral care initiative that aimed to socialize new students at the Year 9 level into the school environment. Such a programme was aimed at teaching them about the existing structures of the school, school processes

and sharing school regulations and values. We could speculate that the role of the older students was pass on traditional understandings of the school context to the young students, once again instilling the traditional structures of the school and consequently, the Catholic Church. Such a finding highlights how students are positioned within existing school structures to reproduce the traditional cultures of the school. This links closely to the work of Zacharakis and Flora (2005) who investigated the roles of community development programmes. They concluded that rather than expanding leadership opportunities beyond the existing pool of leaders, development programmes tended to reproduce existing leadership structures. This highlights the difficulties associated with changing the leadership culture of a community.

Furthermore, the Aunties programme could also be viewed as a tool to socialize the young women in stereotyped leadership roles. The young women involved in leading (for example, within the Aunties Programme) were positioned in pastoral care roles which emphasized what is frequently termed in the debates within androgynous leadership literature as ‘soft leadership’, and often linked to the roles of women. However, Blackmore (1999) presents in her critique of the binaries of leadership (e.g. hard-soft leadership, reason-emotional decision making), an argument that this can position women into stereotyped leadership roles that reinforce male dominance within leadership discourses. Such a concept has been contested widely in the literature and Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) highlight;

“there has been considerable resistance to examining the relationship between maternal or mothering skills and leadership in schools. These qualities – nurturing, organizing, motivating and listening – have often been overlooked and in some cases marginalized and diminished with respect to leadership...for many, connecting leadership to mothering is seen as “less than” leadership. It risks marginalizing women once again as being not “real leaders” but caretakers for young children.” (p. 84)

Presenting leadership in binaries such as these separate key aspects of leadership that should be integrated (Gunter (2001), and can even marginalize important leadership aspects needs to be recognized, for example individual leadership ability.

Consequently, prior to the *Revolution* leadership programme, the young women struggled to conceive of leadership outside of these roles promoted by the school.

Although they were offered leadership opportunities, these opportunities were available within a restricted context. It could be speculated that the provision of leadership in this restricted manner mirrored the patriarchal nature of the Catholic Church leadership structure. This finding is significant because it illustrates that the recognition of context is important when considering leadership development opportunities in secondary schools. This research has highlighted that the context can have a powerful influence on what young women believe leadership to be and how it can be practiced. Therefore, when designing leadership development approaches, the aspect of context must be considered.

What I also learnt from this finding is that because the young women's perceptions of leadership were based mainly on the notion of leadership existing in only formal leadership roles, the expectation to show leadership outside of these roles was minimal. It was only after the young women had participated in the leadership programme and developed a broadened understanding of what leadership could be and where it could take place, did they begin to consider leadership opportunities beyond these formal roles and in some cases show leadership by actually creating these opportunities for themselves. It is therefore important to gain an understanding of young women's leadership beliefs and understanding of their leadership context prior to designing leadership development programmes. This can ensure the learning experience that is created is relevant to that context and is cognizant of the structures and leadership discourses that may impact on any leadership development approaches. This was an essential part of the reconnaissance stage within the action research process where the young women were individually interviewed about their leadership understandings and participated in focus groups exploring leadership within their school context.

Rites of passage and Gate keeping

The majority of formal positions of leadership were at the end of the schooling pathway (last year of school). The young women in the research, therefore, looked towards this situated leadership as a rite of passage rather than seeing leadership as a phenomenon that could be shown by all. It was therefore no surprise that the students

in this research stated that there were minimal leadership opportunities available to them until they reach the senior and final year of school.

Many of the young women believed that many students entering secondary school had come from schools where they were previously senior students, often fulfilling leadership roles within the primary and intermediate schools. On arrival at secondary school, the participants believed this leadership identity was removed as they fell into the traditional leadership structure. This finding reinforced aspects from the work of MacBeath (1998) who also found that students wanted schools to provide greater access to leadership opportunities than what was currently offered, and “most student responses advocated the participation of students in school leadership irrespective of age” (p. 84). Such a request challenges the traditional pathways of student leadership within the school, where leadership is reserved for senior students.

However, interestingly, as noted later in the section of barriers and constraints to leadership, once some of the young women had been through this rite of passage and reached their senior years of schooling, they were happy to maintain the status quo within the school and not seek to change the number of formal leadership opportunities available. Interestingly, much literature has coveted the masculine culture of organisations which reinforces the role of males being gate-keepers to leadership opportunities for women (for example, Acker, 1994; Bagilhole et al, 2008; Blackmore et al, 2006; Brooking, 2005; Coleman, 2002; Shakeshaft, 1987, 1993 & Strachan & Saunders, 2007).

However, in this research the young women’s comments relating to their rite of passage highlight similar themes to this literature and indicate the powerful influence of these ritualized progressions into leadership. It might be useful to draw the likeness of such behaviour to the ‘Queen Bee Syndrome’ – a phrase termed by Staines, Tavis, and Jayaratne (1974). Although this concept is related mainly to women working in organisations, aspects of this may be useful when interpreting the findings from this research within the school context. This syndrome highlights a general phenomenon where women who had been individually successful in male dominated contexts were less likely to support other women to gaining similar experiences (Mavin, 2008). Furthermore, as these successful women were often

positioned in senior roles and had the ability to make decisions to remove barriers for other women, they did not and more frequently denied that there was any sort of discrimination against women (Rindfleish, 2000).

Although the context for this research context was not-so-much male dominated in terms of males being present and holding key leadership positions within the school, the patriarchal discourses mirrored in the school leadership structures made for few leadership opportunities being available to the student group. When looking at the context of leadership in which the young women in this research practiced their leadership, their view of leadership as a rite of passage was very clear. However, although they saw it as a potential barrier for student leadership, when given the opportunity to remove this barrier, they did not. They believed that the other young women in the school needed to “do their time” just like them, once again, reinforcing another barrier to leadership, but also maintaining the traditional leadership structure and highlighting their roles as ‘Queen Bees’ within the student population.

Although Mavin (2008) acknowledges the concept of ‘Queen Bees’, she highlights that it is the underpinning gender systems “embedded in organizations socially construct and impact upon women’s behaviour towards women...” (p. 83). Once again, this highlights the importance of critically examining the broader leadership context in which the young women practice their leadership and were modeled leadership, and not just the inter-relationships between young women within the school.

Leadership as service

A key theme in the findings was that the young women indicated a disposition to serve others and show leadership for the good of other people. For example, when Mere said, “...by being a leader I am serving them, it’s like a big thank you, a way to give back”. This could be understandable given the outlined values of the Catholic School on the school website which state;

Our strong Catholic character permeates all aspects of our school. One of the ways we acknowledge this character is in our expectation that each of our students will engage in activities of service. It is through such service that our

students are encouraged to strive for Justice, and in so doing reflect and share the Truth, Love and the Peace of the Gospel. (p. 5)

The notion of assisting and serving is a strong theme of servant leadership as proposed by Greenleaf (1991). Embedded within this leadership paradigm is the importance of assisting, serving and helping others, and ensuring that the needs of others are served before one's self. It is proposed by some researchers in the area of servant leadership that God recognizes such selflessness as Frick states "the servant leader is one who is a servant first and acts with integrity, foresight, intuition, [and] a dedication to consensus" (p. 354). However, interestingly, the young women's notions of servant leadership presented leaders working and leading from the front, being very obvious in their work and portrayed successful leaders as idols and someone to gaze up to. It could be suggested that many of the role models for the young women were in visual positions of leadership and these staff were a position of authority. Cook (2001) emphasized the importance of having visual leaders within the Catholic school context and stated:

Heroes and heroines personify a school's shared values. As role models, saints are easy for people to relate and with whom students can identify. Saints provide standard to which we strive. Students of all ages need role models. Who the school picks as role models, along with what is rewarded provide telling information about what the school truly values... (p. 31)

Although these beliefs perhaps mirror the leadership structure of the Church, this could also highlight a conflict between the discourses of servant leadership that include humility and the values of the Catholic school. A tension between the rhetoric of the school and the action by the participants may become apparent with further investigation.

Youngs's (2007) investigation into servant leadership made use of a tree metaphor to illustrate the internal and external factors of servant leadership. The external factors – represented by the tree above the ground represented the visible leadership practices, however, the tree roots, below the surface of the ground represented the personal "inner landscape or heart of a genuine servant leader" (p. 103). The findings from this research resonated with such a metaphor. In part, however, the visual part of the tree was often represented in rhetoric by the students and the school and not necessarily portrayed in practice. For example, the findings illustrated that the

dominant theme of serving others was prevalent when the young women were speaking in front of others, yet when just one on one with me, the perceptions of leadership involved aspects of extrinsic rewards and ultimately the benefits created for themselves. The metaphor of the tree therefore may have been represented in practice with a very shallow root base in some instances for some of the students.

Servant leadership espousing the need to help and serve others was the desired model portrayed by the school - yet many of the participants were motivated to lead by external benefits that they would receive in return and would give lip service to aspects that the school staff wanted to hear. The school was attempting to instill values and beliefs about leadership in the girls yet the structure they provided to do this in did not allow access to the desired benefits by which the students were motivated. This incongruous practice created a leadership purpose dissonance between the school and the students. This eventuated because the system (the school context) was not part of the change process (co-constructing and participating in the leadership programme). Due to historical and patriarchal nature of the Catholic Church, traditional views of leadership prevailed and these included authority, hierarchy and the importance of women serving others. The question must be asked - how can a leadership culture be created which allows for the serving of others which meets, extends and maybe supersedes the traditional leadership structure, yet is attractive to the young women and a motivating factor for them to be involved in school leadership? It could be suggested once again that rather than change being directed at the individual level (the young women) that in fact the broader school context, including the church is involved in the co-construction processes of the leadership programme as this is where a significant amount of leadership development can take place. However, such a suggestion may be highly problematic as the belief structures of the Church and consequently the school are theologically grounded and changes to this would require revolutionary challenge to Papal authority.

It could be possible to encourage the school to become conscious of the leadership culture within the school through the provision of opportunities for guided reflection by those in leadership roles such as the Director of Religious Studies. Embedded in this process could also be opportunities for all involved to critically reflect on the

leadership culture of the school and the processes which enable and prevent young women from leading and being involved in leadership development opportunities. This may link to the words of Bennis and Goldsmith, (1997), who perceptively state (13 years prior to this research), “in order to transform ourselves as leaders, we must recognize and shift the paradigm through which we view leadership itself” (p. 71). I believe that encouraging those within the school context (for example, teachers, principals and those in the wider Church community) to reflect on their leadership understandings and beliefs and the impact these may have on the broader school context and the individuals within the context, could lead to a greater possibility of changing the way leadership is perceived by students within the school context.

When Sergiovanni discussed Greenleaf’s concept of servant leadership he purported that servant leadership was closely related to Greenfield’s (2004) moral leadership. However, servant leadership was not about becoming a leader to gain “power over people but power to serve” (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 280). The notion of power was highlighted in the perceptions espoused by many of the young women in a number of ways. Even though many of the young women had been immersed in the school culture for nearly four years, their initial beliefs about leadership still emphasized having power over others as an important part of leadership. Much literature has been dedicated to the investigation of power and authority within the Catholic Church. Within the New Zealand context Collins (2005) and Spencer (2005) give in-depth accounts of the unique context of the Catholic School and include power and authority as an important dimension. Similarly, Grace (2002) also highlights the aspect of power within the Catholic School context and believes “the hierarchy of the Catholic Church represents an agency of considerable power and the Catholic bishops have used this power to develop, shape and control Catholic education in specific ways” (p. 30). Consequently, the school culture became a powerful shaper of the rhetoric and what the participants felt leadership should and could be. This could have attributed to the young women’s personal desire to have power over others, which manifested as a significant part of their initial leadership understandings.

Although servant leadership was a key theme of the school, the aspect of having power was still evident in the school leadership structure. The school encouraged leadership amongst the students, but it was leadership in order to perform specific

functions for the school to help it to function, mirroring the Catholic belief of service to others. As part of the school tradition, great status was given to those students who were nominated as senior leaders such as Head Girls and Sports Captain. Although this may not be unique to this school context, it is limited and restrictive leadership positions such as these which shape these students' perceptions of leadership and hence the views of leadership shared by these students were very narrow. This supports the view of Chelladurai (1993) mentioned earlier, by acknowledging that a leader behaves in certain ways due to the demands and constraints of situations. In this research it was the way leadership was presented to the young women and the opportunities made available to them that influenced their leadership beliefs, understandings and practice. Simple messages from the school about leadership such as answering to adults within the school context, the completion of tasks, public and administrative duties created the students' narrow view of leadership, and a restricted leadership culture. Control was maintained by shaping beliefs held by students into certain ways of behaving through providing traditional stereotypes of leaders and teaching new students about traditions of the school.

The young women in this research practised their leadership within a certain context – the Catholic secondary school, a context that espoused Catholic views and demanded certain characteristics of the individual such as putting others before self, caring and compassionate, being a servant first then a leader and having a commitment for the common good (Crippen, 2004). Much of the literature in the area of Catholic Schools and young people looks solely at the positive influence of religion on young people; for example, Smith (2003) theorized about religious effects among adolescents. He went as far to suggest key areas (community and leadership skills being one of these), which resulted from the positive effects of religion. The significant influence was the modelling of leadership within the religious context, for example, observing rituals being enacted within the congregation. It appears from the findings that the impact of religion provided the students with a restricted view of what leadership could be. It was rituals such seeing Priests perform ceremonies at congregation and the important role of the male Director of Religious Studies within the school which reinforced the socialized gender leadership discourse of men holding power. This illustrates a need for critique of the influence of religion on adolescents as many of these aspects such as the unproblematic nature of gender, have been either dismissed or overlooked. It is

important for schools to reflect upon the messages that young women receive from being in this leadership context. In order for this reflection to occur, the voices of young women must play a role in this reflective practice so that a variety of viewpoints can be understood.

Many of the young women connected leadership with benefits for themselves within the school context. This finding begs the further questioning of - if it was evident that the participants involved in leadership opportunities had a more complex understanding of leadership, was it because they had the broader experience, and this experience impacted in these understandings? Or was it because these understandings prompted them to move beyond the school to find opportunities for showing leadership? As some of the students had been involved in leadership opportunities outside of the school context, they experienced a level of frustration due to the restricted nature of the leadership structure and lack of leadership opportunities. This encouraged them to actively seek leadership outside of the school as a way of showing their discontent with the way the school considered leadership.

Therefore it is evident that just as in good classroom teaching where we strive to acknowledge and utilize what the learner brings with them, it is important to do the same for leadership development. Recognizing that young women may have leadership experiences outside of the school context can validate this knowledge and allow them to draw upon it in a range of contexts – an aspect deemed very important by Denner, Meyer and Bean (2005). It may also lead them to recognize leadership in a range of contexts and outside of what they are normally exposed to within the restricted nature of the school. It is therefore essential to work with young women to find out what they do know so that leadership learning and experiences can better suit their needs and abilities as leaders and they can make more significant contributions to the school environment, enriching the leadership culture as they do so.

Many of the leadership qualities that the young women felt were essential for effective leadership focused on the skills of person to get a task completed rather than leadership qualities required of a person. This finding reinforced the work of Edward (1994), where traditional youth leadership development approaches employed a ‘tool and skills’ approach to develop certain skills in young people. Examples of these

skills in more current observations include public speaking, time management, and goal setting (MacGregor, 2007; Saunders, 2005). Frequently, in adult-generated leadership development opportunities, students participate in sessions aimed at developing their personal skills that are seen as important aspects of leadership, or seen as important aspect of being a good student within the school. This presents to students a restricted view of what leadership can be, and can inhibit students developing leadership across a range of contexts. For example, leadership in different cultures can mean different things and can be represented in different ways. Yet, the one-size-fits-all approach fails to consider this. A more contextually responsive approach (for an example, see Strachan & Saunders, 2007) is required if leadership programmes are to expand beyond the tools and skills approach. One question which could be asked here is how can leadership development opportunities (which include the culture and structure of the school) shift students from the place of what could be seen as ‘knowing’ about leadership to the place of ‘being’ a leader?

However, if the school did not exist the question could be asked, how would youth leadership look beyond the school gates? To address such a question, I turn to the work of Cassel, Huffaker, Tversky and Ferriman (2006) who explored online social networks an alternative site for young people to show leadership. In their research which investigated students showing leadership on the Internet within this online social community, they found that the youth who were elected into leadership roles did not adhere to the traditional adult styles of leadership that were modelled within their schools and families. The youth who were elected into the online leadership positions by their peers placed the needs of the group as central to their leadership, they referred to the group and not themselves within the community and rather than being the sole contributor of ideas to conversations, they synthesized the contributions of others. Such a finding mirrors the beliefs and perceptions that the young women in this research had *after* their involvement in the *Revolution* leadership programme. Prior to the programme, many of their understandings were limited to task completion and to have power over others. This finding indicates that students have the capacity to create their own leadership identities in contexts where they have significant levels of control. It therefore reinforces the importance of involving young women in redefining what leadership can mean for them in different contexts.

What is unique to this research is that specific parts of the school culture, namely, school traditions and the Catholic Faith were important parts of the school community and powerful forces in shaping the leadership structure and opportunities of the school for both staff and more importantly, the students. Therefore, in school contexts there needs to be an awareness of the existing leadership structures and a reflection upon these in terms of the influence they have on student discourses of leadership within the school context. Students' discourses that address opportunities for leadership learning aspects will now be discussed with links to the relevant literature.

Opportunities for Learning Leadership in the School Context

The young women perceived few formal opportunities to learn about leadership in the school. Consequently, they believed role modelling was an informal, yet very important way for students to learn about leadership. They believed that many teachers became important leadership role models for students, especially those in formal leadership roles. Interestingly, the majority of the staff in the school were women and this may have influenced the allocation of positions of leadership within the senior leadership team. Rather than these roles being related to the special character of the school (one exception being the Director of Religious Studies who was male), the roles related mainly to the organizational requirements of the school. In the case of this school, at the time of this research the key roles (such as principal, deputy principal and senior deans) were all held by women. Jean-Louis (2004) believes that this aspect of school culture - where leadership roles are highly visible, could be very powerful in shaping young women's views about leadership and can in fact promote female leadership.

Such a leadership arrangement could be compared with young women's experiences in co-ed schools where the gender composition of staff may be different and leadership roles are more often spread between the genders, with men holding many of the key leadership positions. For example, although statistics illustrated that 71.8% of State and State Integrated schoolteachers in New Zealand were female, this group held only 62.9% of management positions. Furthermore, the number of females

in principals' positions was 45.0% in 2008 (Ministry of Education, 2009), although this number has been steadily increasing over the past ten years, from 34.4% in 1999.

Although the finding of the importance of women in the school being role models was encouraging, much of the leadership they were modelling was characterized by caring and nurturing roles through their key roles in pastoral care – an important expectation of the Church (Cooke, 2001). This aspect of role modelling is an important aspect to critique to gain an appreciation of just how powerful the role models can be in passing on traditional beliefs and understandings. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Principal plays a key role in modelling the values of not only the school, but also the Catholic Church. Furthermore, the importance of access to these role models should not be overlooked. As the findings indicated that the young women actively sought female role models in leadership positions and senior teaching roles within the school, the question could be asked – If the representation of women was significantly less in other contexts, and the role models available for young women would be significantly less what impact would this have on their leadership development?

The wider context beyond the school did not have as much influence as I expected and the influences outside of the school were not as significant as portrayed in the literature. Grant, Fouenier, Ito and McIndoe (2006) explored key motivating factors that influenced students' leadership in secondary schools in Surrey (United Kingdom). They found that family, friends and teachers played a key role in influencing young people's leadership. However, the findings from this research concluded that family members had only a small amount of influence over how this group of young women viewed leadership, with a small number of the group indicated that their mothers were role models for them as leaders. Some of the young women spoke of how their parents showed leadership and how this helped them to understand what leadership could be. Like this research siblings were noticeably absent from the comments and did not seem to play a significant role in influencing the young women's beliefs about leadership. Such a finding is surprising as in much of the youth development literature siblings are touted as holding significant influence over their siblings (Schoenberg, Salmond & Fleshman, 2008). Such a finding may be present due to the small number of participants that made up the research sample or the structure of their families (for example, being an only child), or their position

within the family (for example, being older or younger than others). This finding could also point to just how powerful the influence of the school context and the Church in this particular research actually was.

Interestingly, the sporting context was an area that some students commented on as being a place where leadership could occur, although many felt that learning about leadership in this context was happenstance and not necessarily planned for. Catherine's comments, which allude to leadership "just happening" and being frequently directed by the coach but has no preparation, is an example of the unplanned nature of youth leadership in the sporting context. Interestingly, Howell (2010) in her feasibility study of using sport as a vehicle for youth development highlighted that assumptions are made about youth sport and leadership development. She contended that although there was an important link between the two, leadership development should be planned for, whereas the leadership knowledge and the physical participation in sports were indeed separate. I find this interesting as Howell's findings highlight assumptions made about youth leadership development in sporting contexts and perhaps, it is these assumptions that were shared by the participants in this research. Although some of the young women indicated that they learn leadership from playing sport, in the same instance, they also mentioned that within the sporting context no one necessarily taught them about leadership, which is similar to the school context.

The school⁶ espoused, as illustrated in the school mission statement and across numerous newsletters, that all students should be able to show leadership. The mission statement of the school exuded the commitment to developing leadership as one of the school values and stated:

[The school] educates and empowers young women to be Catholic, faith based, lifelong learners; committed to excellence, ready to serve, to challenge and to shape the future. Our Values include justice, truth, peace and love, generosity of Spirit, equity, leadership, diversity, integrity, innovation, excellence, and collaboration.

Many of the young women could identify the mission statement of the school. However, upon discussion of its components, there were a number of interpretations.

⁶ The name of the school is withheld to uphold the ethical commitments for this research.

Many students did not believe that the school holistically lived by these values and felt that lip service was given to many of the aspects mentioned. The findings illustrated that school structures did not fully support such rhetoric and instances of explicitly teaching about leadership were few. Attempts of students challenging injustices within the school (for example, attempting to create more leadership opportunities through expanding the number of clubs) were discouraged. This finding resonates with the work of Funk (2002) who found in his work with youth that schools do not necessarily teach their students about leadership, rather, they allocate leadership roles and expect the students to perform these roles, learning through trial and error. Such actions could be linked to the hierarchical nature of the church where there is little authority for women and few opportunities for them to take responsibility for key leadership roles outside the school.

What is also interesting is that the school was cognizant of the fact that leadership needed to be taught (which is not the case in many schools), yet, little action was taken by the school to develop leadership in the students across all levels of the student body. Greenleaf (1977) believed “that leadership involves teaching and mentoring, as one of the major requirements of leaders to invite others toward service” (p. 181). Schools may be more effective in preparing and involving young women in leadership if they put their rhetoric into action. Demonstrating to students that the school is committed to students becoming and being leaders would be an important step in involving young people into meaningful and relevant leadership development. As a feminist I believe this would mean that leadership development opportunities were connected to the many different contexts in which the young women practiced their leadership and that it drew on their prior knowledge and experiences so that progressive approaches could be designed which met their needs.

Opportunities for Practicing Leadership in the School Context

The structures within the school also influenced the opportunities which students had to access formal leadership positions. It was perceived by the young women that there were few opportunities to practice leadership. Many of the opportunities highlighted by the young women were formal positions of leadership within the formal school prefect structure. It was only after participating in the leadership

programme that the young women saw leadership existing outside of these roles and in aspects of their lives outside of the school. Within the Catholic school environment this occurred through mechanisms such as mass, providing badges for recognition of service to the school and the doctrine espousing certain ways of behaving – for example, sacrificing self for others and the formal leadership position of Head Girls was reserved for a practicing Catholic only. Such a finding within a Roman Catholic School is not unusual as research by Sather (1999) highlighted that in most secondary schools this is frequently the case. However, in her research she found the approaches of one school that actively planned to involve students in leadership outside of formal positions created more harmonious multi-ethnic environments as students actively sought opportunities for leadership within the school. What is significant about this finding is that it was the young women who, after experiencing the restrictive nature of leadership within the school and through their participation in the leadership programme, recognized the need to actively seek out leadership opportunities. Such a finding supports the work of Collins (2005b) who highlighted that the barriers and constraints that operate within the Catholic education system, can also provide means for opportunities to show leadership in other ways. Students became responsible for the planning of this to occur and this encouraged them to act and improve the situation by showing leadership in other ways outside of the formal school leadership structure. However, whilst there were some opportunities for the young women to create change, for the most part, the traditional leadership structures remained the same. There may be a danger in working at the individual level (the young women) when they operate within the wider school environment that was not included in the development or change process.

SUMMARY

In summary the findings of this research reveal that the context had a significant impact on the young women and their leadership. However, the work of Osberg-Conner and Strobel (2007), which investigated leadership development of young women, emphasized that youth also influence the context in which they learn. Within the context of this research, this was not obvious until the planned processes of co-construction were set in place and the young women began to take the initiative for running the programme for another group of students. Therefore, it may be the

case in this research that such a process needed to be formalized, as there was little evidence of this influence happening informally in the area of leadership development.

This chapter has discussed the findings related to the beliefs and the understandings that the young women had about leadership prior to participating in the leadership programme. It presented how the Catholic school was a powerful context in influencing these beliefs and understandings. Due to the nature of the Catholic school environment, there was a focus on servant leadership. It could be suggested that the school modeled the hierarchical structure of the Church and the young women viewed such an environment as restrictive in providing opportunities for leadership development. One positive element was the presence of staff and student role models in the school context who were identified by the young women as an important way to learn about leadership.

The following chapter presents the findings from the co-construction process and the leadership programme. During this chapter findings related to the process of co-construction are presented, the outcome of the co-construction process is examined and the effectiveness of the leadership programme in developing the young women's leadership understandings is explored.

CHAPTER 7

RESEARCH FINDINGS

THE CO-CONSTRUCTION PROCESS AND THE LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

This chapter presents the findings related to the intervention aspects of the action research process. Co-construction was used to create the leadership programme and ascertain the effectiveness of the leadership programme in developing leadership understanding with young women. There are three sections to this chapter. In the first section findings related to the co-construction process that was used to create the leadership programme are presented. The challenges and benefits of using this process are highlighted. Second, I present what the co-constructed leadership programme looked like. In this section, I provide an overview of the leadership programme and present key findings relating to the content, structure, implementation and evaluation of the leadership programme. The third section of this chapter examines the effectiveness of the leadership programme in developing the young women's leadership knowledge and understanding. In this section I address the changed and developing understandings of leadership held by the young women during and after participating in the leadership programme. Information collected from semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, interviews, photos, group worksheets and my research diary are used to illustrate the key findings in each section.

The process of co-construction was an essential part of the action research process. This allowed me to work collaboratively with the young women to generate a leadership curriculum that met their needs. However, in selecting this methodology, I had not taken into account aspects that fell outside the design and planning of the leadership programme. My initial understandings and beliefs of what the co-construction process would be like had developed from the literature in Chapter 3 (a methodical, equal and sequential process) and these beliefs were challenged during

the research process. The next section examines the use of co-construction as an effective tool for developing a leadership curriculum and outlines the benefits and challenges associated with this process.

Co-construction Challenged Existing Views of Teaching and Learning

The participants initially found the process of co-construction very confusing as it often contradicted their existing beliefs about teaching and learning. The notion of challenging and questioning an adult or even their peers was a difficult concept for the students to grasp and action, especially during the learning and designing phase when the relationships between the group members and me were still forming. At these early stages of the programme, I was aware that the young women were not comfortable in critiquing the process that was taking place and although I had outlined that this was a necessary and important part of the co-construction process, they were hesitant to provide feedback on the work of others and initially did not question or challenge the ideas that I suggested. They were used to being given information rather than critiquing contributions or creating the information themselves. This difficulty extended into the relationships between the young women also and Catherine commented on her earlier uneasiness within the initial stages of the co-construction process:

It was hard to suggest changes to something when someone had offered it up...like they were totally stoked with their idea and I felt stink trying to change it. Like that day when Chelsea said we needed more than the worksheets because they were boring, and Frances got real fired up because she thought the worksheets were fine as they were...sometimes we got a bit divided and after that people were too 'fraid to make suggestions.

Over time the young women became more accepting of the co-construction process. The developing relationship between us may have influenced this. As a group we spoke openly about the co-construction process and how it could work more effectively. They acknowledged the benefits and difficulties of this different way of approaching learning and made comparisons to their current experiences in school. It may have been useful for me to introduce this process in more depth during the

introduction and reconnaissance phase of the action research process. The young women appreciated being able to share ideas freely and commented that this was useful in creating the leadership programme, but also how this approach assisted their learning about leadership.

Like, when we were making those lists together. People had such different ideas [about what made a leader]. It was good to hear them because then you might find something that you had not thought of. Like vision...or something. It was a good way to learn (Emma).

The views of teaching and learning which I believed were held by the school staff influenced how I facilitated sessions within the programme. The location of the leadership programme was in a room very central to the school and close to staff walkways. The room we used had large windows on one side, providing outsiders with a clear view of what was happening in the classroom. I was very aware of what the co-construction process might look like to an outsider. The teaching and learning approaches we had selected were non-traditional and included much discussion, negotiation, debate, a wider range of student-centred activities with students facilitating aspects of sessions with a key focus on experiential learning. The process was flexible in structure and the learning environment seemed chaotic at times. I felt self-conscious as I thought staff might perceive this as an ineffective and unplanned learning environment. I believed I had to rein in loud discussions and teach ‘from the front’ of the class to illustrate what I thought the school staff would perceive as effective teaching practice, as this was the nature of my employment at the University, a pre-service teacher educator. It could therefore be expected that I model what is sometimes expected as effective teaching practice in schools.

Such actions inhibited the co-construction process and had negative effects on the learning partnership. An example of this came at the end of an afternoon session when four groups of students were discussing their preferred ways of learning. This created much debate as lists were scribbled on whiteboards, post it notes were slapped on walls and information categorized into themes. There was loud calling out from different parts of the room as people shared their suggestions. However, as this exciting (and very noisy) activity was occurring, I became aware of the school Board of Trustees members gathering in the foyer. They were to shortly have a meeting in

the room that we were using. As an attempt to illustrate what I believed the Board members would see as an effective learning environment, I drew the noisy discussions to a close, had students sit back down into their seats and reclaimed my position standing at the front of the class to begin writing on the whiteboard. Upon reflection, I realized that in the instant I called the group together, I had intruded on and taken over a wonderful piece of learning that had, until then, been owned by and facilitated by the students. I changed the dynamics of the learning as soon as I interjected and this was very unfortunate. My reasons for doing so were misguided, wanting to appear in control of the group and be viewed as a traditionally effective teacher. I believe that this may have affected the information that was finally recorded at the end of that session as discussions were truncated. However, the tight timeframe of the session ending in fifteen minutes may also have impacted on this.

The Co-construction Process Was Dependent on the Young Women’s Ability and Willingness to Articulate Their Leadership Understandings.

The co-construction process reflected the levels of leadership understanding and contextual knowledge that the young women were willing and able to contribute to the learning process. Some of the young women already held very complex understandings of leadership, however, their ability to articulate these understandings varied and this impacted on the co-construction process. Sometimes this was due to a lack of confidence or the inability to recognize their actions as leadership, for example in this focus group;

Neroly: I don’t do anything to do with leadership...I just want to learn about it.

Frances: But you are a leader, you’re always running stuff and doing things for others

Neroly: Is that leadership? I mean, it’s so easy to do. I didn’t think of it like that.

Frances: Yeah...like the barbeque you ran and the advertising at assembly that was cool.

Other times, the lack of articulation was because the context itself prevented voices from being heard. Within the youth-adult partnership complex understandings of leadership were freely shared during the individual interviews; however, these understandings were not necessarily illustrated in the group activities and there was sometimes an unwillingness to share knowledge about leadership. So, there were instances where participants held back and did not contribute or contributed in ways to match the learning of others in the group, by consciously ‘lowering’ their level of contributions. This practice was not frequently exercised the other way (perhaps only on one or two occasions), where students shared knowledge about leadership that raised the current level of conversation. An example of this was in one of the initial sessions when the young women were talking about the design of the leadership programme and one student made a recommendation based on her existing knowledge about leadership.

- Chelsea: ...Like showing others and getting them to do stuff...we could have a senior leaders’ day.
Frances: (Who held rather complex understandings about leadership), But it’s not about making people do something...more like getting them alongside...
Chelsea: But having a leaders’ day would be cool
Frances: [Sigh]...that could work...it could be in the common room...

In this instance, Frances glanced over to me as if to say...too hard to fight this one! She let Chelsea’s contribution stand, rather than continue to challenge the knowledge that had been presented. She gave in and then started contributing to the conversation with suggestions based on Chelsea’s idea. When questioned about this later Frances confessed that she did not want to appear bossy or a know-it-all amongst the group.

Co-construction Required Constant Reflection on Balancing Contributions

Ensuring a fair balance of influence throughout the process between the participants themselves and secondly, between the participants and me (I was the researcher *and* facilitator) was central to the co-construction process. I was working within a specified timeline in order for the research to be completed. As the end of the year was approaching and I would not see these students again, a sense of urgency was created. However, the students were working within the structure of the leadership

programme and they were not bound by the research timeline. I had to contain my desire to steer the design of the leadership programme. At times, as a researcher and co-designer of the leadership programme, I felt dishonest as I took control of the design process. I had to acknowledge that the process, albeit frustrating and time consuming, was an important journey for many of these young women and I was part of a partnership, not the sole designer of the programme.

Many of the participants involved in the co-construction process were not used to sharing ideas and having them implemented. This meant that although they were keen to be involved, in many instances at the start of the process, I was driving the process. However, what was important was when the momentum began, I was able to withdraw from taking a lead role and only inject myself into the curriculum creation process at different stages when I saw it to be necessary (for example, to probe with further questions, guide discussions on a topic or add further information). This was one of the benefits of using a co-construction process. As Catherine stated:

Well I don't really know that much about leadership, so how helpful am I going to be? Like shouldn't we just get told what to do?' ... But then it got me thinking that maybe the whole thing of being a leader is being able to create stuff and then ... with your help, of course, which thank God we have your help because I wouldn't know where to start. But then, you didn't know the school, or us so we helped you there. So, it was good that we sort of realized what a leader needs and then with your input of how we can achieve getting these things with the activities and stuff. That was quite good.

Therefore, the initial stages of the leadership programme development had a high level of input from me. I was aware of this and understood that this may have influenced how the participants viewed the programme. However, I brought with me a level of leadership understanding that they did not have. Likewise, the students brought with them an understanding of the school context that I did not have.

In the later stages of the co-construction process the students dominated the leadership design and planning process. This meant sometimes I felt lost and isolated as the group spoke of areas relevant to the church, practices that I had not heard of, and of a school community of which I was not a part. It was essential that the

learning community that we had formed aided in minimizing the impact of such occurrences and ensured that those involved in the co-construction process felt valued and included. However, even within the learning community, smaller groups of students began to form based on a number of factors, for example, popularity amongst peers, and groups of students who belong to similar sports teams or classes. I was mindful of this and endeavoured to address this in sessions as groupings were made or tasks allocated to ensure that students had the opportunity to work with a variety of their peers.

The influence of peer groups and social status within the group had a significant impact on whose voices were heard and what information was shared. Maintaining a balance between student contributions was challenging. At times, conflict arose within the group as particular students dominated group discussions. Some students felt initially that it was the popular students whose ideas were heard and acted on and found it frustrating that some students' voices were more prominent in the design process, as Jenny stated "it was frustrating because Chelsea always took over, I mean, no offence, she is really hard to keep in, but she just thought her ideas were the only ones that mattered and people got left out, like Anna and Tania, oh and Mere". Similarly, Catherine acknowledged this occurrence and, although she highlighted the positive aspect of group conversations and contributions in the co-construction process, she also felt that certain students dominated at times and commented;

It was cool to be able to talk so much and just talk ideas through without having to do something like an essay or a skit or something. We just need to make sure that people don't take over, like in the groups I felt sorry for Mere because she hardly got a word in because Chelsea just goes for it.

Chelsea did not necessarily address the issue of dominating discussion in her interviews or the focus group, but did comment that it was easy to get excited in a focus group. She remained unaware of her dominance in the focus group discussion, even when such a topic was discussed in the final evaluation of the co-construction process.

The Co-construction Process Was Far Reaching

Contributions to the co-construction process were made on many different levels and through different means. As the co-construction process was reliant on the contributions that students made, the methods of contribution varied within the group and there were different layers to the student voices that were shared. Some students were immediately forthcoming with ideas, suggestions and information in the sessions. They responded quickly to questions and often led the small group discussions. It was therefore important to ensure that these students did not take over the process and disregard the ideas and suggestions from others. Other students required more time to make contributions and the speedy process of negotiation did not necessarily provide them with this time. A small number of students shared ideas through text messaging or email rather than in the full group forum after the meetings had happened. For example Kate,

H e l l o Rach

I made a few **alterations in red** 2 the 'Registration of Interest' form. I think it all looks good. They're just suggestions though!

Just thinking more about the leadership thing – I know its late but important things for me are honesty and 2 have good morels [sic] – like do things for the right reasons. This way people have a pillar. They are a bench mark for that a leader can be and how they can act, Sorry to add that in now but everyone had sooooo much to say I culdnt [sic]get a word in. maybe I nd[sic] to work on my own leadership! See you Wed lunch time for our meeting 2 plan 4 Tuesday nxt wk [sic].

Kate

Contributions such as these ones received by text or email were also a valuable part of the co-construction process. These responses were frequently more insightful and considered that the suggestions which were offered in the group discussions. More often, implications and justification for the ideas or suggestions were also provided. I had not planned for this within the process and the management of this information became difficult as it negated the aspect of consensus within the group decision-making processes. This aspect required me to make notes from texts, reply using

email and forward information to the group. As a result, the boundaries of the co-construction process, although bound by the school context were expanded and shifts in thinking were occurring outside of the school and the formal co-construction process. For example, during one session it had been decided that certain content was to be created for learning about motivating others. However, by the time the next meeting occurred, new decisions about what could happen within the session had been decided based on the research that students had completed outside of the focus group discussions. I had not initially planned for this and upon reflection, I believe this is an essential element of the co-construction process – the ability to research and draw on new information from outside the group.

The participants began at different places in their leadership learning, and it was important to consider their individual starting points and initial understandings of leadership when creating leadership development curriculum. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there was a broad range of leadership understandings and some students had very complex understandings of what leadership could be, for example, Frances who described leadership as something which changed depending on where you are and some students had very restricted views of leadership, for example, Chelsea who described leadership as being the boss and having control over people. This impacted on the co-construction process as the contributions made by the students were shaped by their own knowledge and understandings and also of the knowledge of those around them.

Within the co-construction process the creation of new knowledge occurred in both formal and informal situations. For example, when I worked with the whole group of students, we co-constructed the leadership curriculum together and also learnt about leadership and the school context through this process. This creation of new knowledge also happened when students worked alongside each other in smaller groups and in more informal learning situations. For example, when students shared their understandings of where they could show leadership, Catherine reminded Jenny about her tutoring as an opportunity to be a role model. Jenny had not identified herself as a leader in this role. Leadership learning happened in informal situations and continued outside the formal leadership sessions. This learning occurred between different groups of people, and sometimes beyond the original research group, when

participants engaged their parents in discussions at home. More often than not, such learning was unplanned, sometimes tangential to the original plan for the session, and took place through many different avenues, such as peer groups and online social networks.

Respectful Youth-Adult Partnerships Were Central to the Co-construction Process

Learning alongside an adult in a partnership arrangement was a process that the young women found attractive. However, this finding came through after the programme had been completed and was not specifically a reason for initially becoming involved. Jenny reflected on the co-construction process and commented;

It's kinda like cool, like not even work. I mean, we all enjoyed coming 'cause we learn stuff, and it's stuff we want, not random stuff...and like, you listen...like you seem to know what we need and go and organize it. That's pretty cool. I wish our teachers did that too, you know, like made stuff just for us, stuff that was important. It's cool to work together on it [leadership learning], you have cool ideas.

The co-construction partnership allowed for an increased sense of ownership of the process by the young women. As the structure of the programme took shape and planning of the session content began, they enjoyed being able to contribute to ideas about how the learning should take place and intensely evaluated the experience after participating in the session. Emma described the learning processes and stated:

...you don't realize that you're learning or making connections that you can relate to other people. So I'm so excited to show people next year about it, and they'll be all like, 'Oh this is so much better than what we thought it would be!', and we now have the smarts to make decisions about what we want to learn and we can just design how we want to do it...and change it. It makes the learning heaps more fun and you want to do it 'cause you planned it'.

Within the co-construction partnership the young women acknowledged the learning environment and relationships as key factors in the success of their learning. Catherine reflected on the experience of being part of the learning process and commented:

I think it's more ... it's more ... together ... we're more ... we're all comfortable with each other, I feel, like and it's sort of like even though you are the teacher, you're not really the teacher. You're sort of more ... just part of it. So it makes ... I think it takes the pressure off. But then I s'pose having that pressure off makes us learn more what's really real ... the realness, you know?

This partnership with the young women provided opportunities for them to work in small groups and build strong connections with their peers. They appreciated the opportunity to engage with others and work with people they did not normally have the opportunity to work with. When asked what made the learning approach successful Anna replied:

It's just nice to sit around and talk about leadership but not ... it doesn't feel like school, it just feels like hanging round with your friends and learning about stuff how we want to... it's pretty relaxed. You get to meet people you don't hang with and make new friends, like we all say 'hi' at lunch and stuff.

Overall, the young women were positive about the process of co-construction and many participants commented that co-construction should be used more frequently in schools. They enjoyed the different approaches that I had planned for them to use within the co-construction process as they were different to what they did each day in school. The enjoyment extended to the practical resources which included the felt pens, paper, cardboard cut outs and post-it labels that they had access to. They also questioned why other teachers did not take this approach in the classroom more often and felt that this would be an excellent way of involving students in the planning of learning, as they would be more motivated to learn. Anna believed that the process for learning in partnership was effective and a good way to create a leadership programme. She questioned the existing practices of teachers in schools and asked:

So, why don't all teachers do this [ask us what and how we want to learn]? I mean, if they did, I reckon we would learn more, and enjoy it. I mean, teachers could have made *Revolution*, but it would've been lame. Had like heaps of those peer support games and theory 'cause that's what teachers like. But, I reckon, it's cool because our ideas are there and they suit us. Like heaps of drama stuff, discussions and different activities...we have all included how we like to learn.

Even though some of the participants struggled with the complexities of the co-construction process, they still felt they were able to be active agents in some respects within their current environment. This was an important aspect of the action research process and was significantly different to my past experiences of leadership development with young women. However, for many their understandings about co-construction did not go further than their immediate surroundings. They saw the benefits of using co-construction as a way to create a programme and ensure that it met the needs of the participants, however, many of them did not carry this understanding through when planning for the future. For example, they were happy to deliver the same programme to a new group of students. Only a small number of participants understood the contextual nature of the process and were able to see the importance of engaging student voice with the co-construction process for the future as Anna also stated:

‘cos it’s kind of been like designed for us ... like we ... yeah, we like met up at first and you kind of got to know us a bit better and like we talked about what kind of things we’d like to do and that. I don’t think it really could be improved for us, but for a different group of people they might like doing different activities and different things like that to learn about it ... to learn about leadership.

Overall, the findings indicated that co-construction was an effective way to generate a leadership programme with young women, however, there were also factors that restricted and influenced the development of the programme itself. With these aspects in mind, the next section addresses these areas and presents the leadership programme that was created.

THE CO-CONSTRUCTED LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

The process of co-construction was planned and implemented to allow the young women and myself to work together to design and create a leadership programme that was contextually relevant and met their needs. As highlighted in the previous chapter, collaborative processes were used to design the leadership programme and there were certain aspects that impacted on that process of co-construction. It is therefore timely to examine what these processes created and describe the leadership programme.

Introduction to the Leadership Programme

Initially the young women and I worked together for five weeks to create the leadership programme. However, although this was an important part of creating the intervention within the action research process, I do not believe that the young women viewed themselves as being an integral part of the research process. I sensed that they saw this step as being separate from the research and viewed it solely as an opportunity to generate a leadership programme.

Firstly we considered what the programme might look like and developed a structure based on how and when the students wanted the programme to run, and where they wanted to locate it. It was decided by the group that the programme would then run over ten weeks. There would be one session per week that was two hours in duration. This gave participants time to get to the session, have afternoon tea, participate in the leadership session and then evaluate it. The students named the leadership programme *Revolution*, based on their understandings about what leadership could be, however, this name did not come about until half way through the programme. This aspect is discussed in the next section.

With these structural aspects decided, we then set about designing the content of the programme. This process was complex as it involved ascertaining what the young women already knew about leadership, gaining knowledge of the contexts in which they practice leadership and also negotiating what learning approaches would be used.

Ideas for content within the programme were suggested by both the students, based on their views on what they needed to learn, but also by me, based on my own knowledge of leadership development. There were three phases to the implementation of the leadership programme – establishing a learning community, participating in the leadership programme and evaluating the leadership programme. These phases reflected the action research process for developing and modifying the leadership programme and were important parts of the co-construction process.

Establishing a learning community was an essential, initial phase as the aim of this was to create and maintain a safe and supportive learning throughout the leadership programme. The students and myself created a group treaty and this outlined expectations and guidelines that we felt were important for the leadership programme and the associated research to be successful. We selected aspects that we felt ensured people in the group were able to contribute ideas, be respected and feel comfortable working with others. These guidelines were revisited throughout the programme as a way to maintain the learning environment. Further to the treaty, icebreaker activities and games were planned for the initial sessions that allowed students to get to know each other. Below is an account of the content that addressed these four main programme themes.

Co-constructed Leadership Programmes Are Different From Leadership Programmes Which Are Generated By Adults

The programme that was generated through the use of a youth-adult partnership looked different from programmes that were not co-constructed. The differences fell into two main areas. First, the content of the programme was different to that of adult constructed programmes, and second, the structure of the programme, although confined by the school context, showed variation. The programme was designed around the key areas of awareness, interaction and integration, which were noted in the literature review by Kouzes and Posner (1995) as being very important for leadership development to occur. As part of the co-construction process I provided these areas as a basic framework from which to start. However, one final element that was not in the original model was the element of reflection. It was through the

discussions in the co-construction process and the participant's engagement in the action research process, that they developed the model further so they had the opportunity to reflect on their own leadership practice. The process of co-constructing a leadership programme through a youth-adult partnership generated some interesting and unexpected findings, which I now address.

The content of the programme

The process of co-construction became part of the leadership programme. The co-construction process was responsible for a significant amount of leadership learning and personal reflection and also offered the opportunity to form respectful and productive learning communities. It was therefore difficult to ascertain whether it was the leadership programme alone that shifted the leadership behaviour and understanding as it became difficult to differentiate between the co-construction process and the leadership programme. As I believed that the programme should take account of the young women's ideas, the content proved to be very different from traditional programmes. One significant difference to conventional leadership programmes was that the programme began by focusing on the individual. The programme was designed to increase *self-awareness* so that the young women could gain an awareness of their own leadership by reflecting on themselves as leaders in different places in their lives. The first three sessions addressed the young women's understandings and beliefs about leadership and they were given the opportunity to reflect on their leadership practices and what they could offer to the school and the wider community. This part of the programme involved unpacking their personal beliefs and perceptions of leadership with my aim of repackaging these understandings to include a broadened and more inclusive view of what leadership could be.

The content of the *Revolution* leadership programme was different from many school-based leadership programmes created by adults. The content was experiential and based on activities that required a high degree of practical involvement. These activities were selected by the students and involved a significant amount of movement, opportunities for building trust amongst group members, interacting with others and having group discussions. Many of the sessions included a variety of

adventure-based learning activities where students had to work together to solve group problems. This was represented in the leadership programme as a key topic of Leading Others and was related to the second theme in the leadership programme (*interaction*). The focus of this part of the programme involved activities that required interaction with other people and practising leadership in different situations. A key difference here is the progressive nature of the content delivery and the opportunity for students to self-select contexts that were relevant to them and practise showing leadership in safe and supportive learning environments. This is different to programmes designed by adults where contexts and role-play situations are frequently pre-determined and lack relevance to the lives of the participants.

In the *Revolution* leadership programme there was an emphasis on solving problems and working with others in both small and large group activities and the young women experienced both leading and being led by others. Being led by others was a unique aspect of this programme and differed from conventional approaches that mainly focus on leading others. The students believed that it was important to experience a range of leadership approaches and that it would be useful to look at these approaches in a range of contexts. Four sessions involved a series of problem-solving activities, including some that were physically challenging and others that required formal group discussions, research and the presentation of solutions. One example of such an activity was the young women participating in a role-playing exercise in a small group. They were given a behaviour-type to display. Examples of these behaviours included: asking questions at the end of every sentence, falling asleep when others are talking, relating the story back to themselves, or fiddling with equipment while the conversation was happening. While one group member told their story about a memory that was important to them, the group members had to fulfill the roles that they had been allocated. Afterwards, the group discussed how they felt performing the role and how the speaker felt. This was an excellent introduction to a discussion on how leaders needed to be at good listening and the group explored what active listening could be. This was further considered in small groups through the use of a Y chart. A Y chart is a piece of paper divided up by drawing a 'y' in the middle of the page. This divided the page into three sections which were labelled as 'looks like', 'feels like' and 'sounds like'. Students filled in their responses based on questions that are asked by a facilitator. For example, in this

instance, I led questioning on what good listening might look like, feel like and sound like. This was a unique way to gather information when students were sharing their thoughts and ideas and differed from the frequently used brainstorming processes in conventional programmes (which interestingly was ranked as a least preferred teaching approach due to its overuse).

A further difference was illustrated in the high number of opportunities to apply the theoretical work completed together. For example, an activity called the Radioactive Dinosaur Egg was used to apply the aspects of active listening from the Y chart in order to solve problems. Given a set amount of equipment, the young women had to work together to design a contraption to lift an egg out of an area and transport it to the other side of the school grounds. They were not to enter the area around the egg and human skin could not touch the egg. Using elastic, ropes, and buckets and skipping ropes, they had to work to design, transport and safely lower the egg to the final destination. This activity involved working alongside others to contribute ideas and make decisions about the best way to solve a problem, however, the key aspect that the young women reflected on was the ways they illustrated active listening skills. The activity was repeated with different leadership roles being allocated to different individuals.

Another difference was the emphasis on making links to other leadership contexts beyond the school. In the sessions that addressed leading others, there was an investigation by the students into what motivated them as individuals and as group members. We explored the concepts of internal and external motivation, looking at reasons for motivating others and how we might achieve this. A number of simple activities allowed participants to practice motivating others in group situations. This led to a series of sessions that addressed managing conflict and working together. One activity encouraged small teams to work together to keep a ball off the ground. Participants could only touch it once in succession and it had to be shared around the group. The aim was to set a goal of the number of hits the group could perform together and attempt to reach this goal within a timeframe.

As part of this theme we explored other areas in our lives where there were opportunities to apply this knowledge and looked at key aspects of setting goals,

supporting other people around us and reflecting on the language we use to do this.

As a conversation with Mere illustrated;

- Mere: That was heaps harder than I thought...
- Rachel: What made it so hard?
- Mere: Staying positive when other people stuffed up!
- Rachel: So how did you manage to stay positive?
- Mere: I pretended that they [the other participants] were my younger brothers and sisters and that they were learning to do it. Then, I felt that I was better and could teach them, and not expect them to be perfect.
- Rachel: Interesting strategy...have you used this in other places?
- Mere: Yeah, like at netball...

Mere was employing strategies that she used outside the school context to help her manage in situations where she did not necessarily have all of the control. The students enjoyed these activities and many of the participants felt the activities prepared them for situations they might face either the following year or in their lives outside of school.

One other key difference was that students were involved in creating resources and designing activities in the leadership programme. For example, the young women felt that in their school, being able to solve problems, work with others, resolve conflict would be very useful and illustrated good leadership. They spent much time preparing for this session, gathering information, creating games and typed up and laminated scenarios that they thought they might be faced with next year and gave them to small groups to discuss. They then role-played their solutions to the group. As each group had the same set of scenarios it was interesting to see the different views and solutions to the conflicts they were resolving. This emphasized the differences in leadership knowledge and in some cases, the confidence to make decisions and put these into action. These scenarios ranged from school-based situations to community group involvement. What was interesting was the depth of critique and reflection that occurred after each role-play performance that added further value to the activity.

The process of designing the Revolution Leadership programme and the participation in the programme lead to an increased understanding of what leadership could be and

this shifted leadership beyond the individual into more global contexts. This allowed students to engage in discussions about contexts that were relevant to them and design opportunities to develop and demonstrate leadership (*integration*). Upon reflection, I found this was an excellent way to teach the participants about setting and reaching goals as it allowed for students to be active designers of their learning. It was also an opportunity to demonstrate and practice leadership. Through peer feedback students enriched their initial understandings and shared ideas about how they might make change and make a difference in the contexts that they selected. For example, when Tania decided she wanted to do the 40-hour famine, the group discussed this idea and built on it. The final result was that Tania found an issue where people in other countries did not have access to food and clean water. She wanted to learn more about this and let people know that New Zealanders were very lucky in comparison and that we should support the needs of others. The plan was that Tania would start a group in the school and support others to also do the 40-hour Famine to raise money. She would be the coordinator and contact person and hopefully get more people on board. She stated that this would be more effective because there would be more people doing the famine to raise money and she would play a role in influencing their ideas and understandings about poverty in the world. After the discussions, the participants assisted Tania to create an action plan to illustrate how she could reach her goal to make change. This included a list of things to do, resources, support she would need and a timeline to achieve this goal.

The final aspect of the programme encouraged the students to reflect on their own leadership practice and the impact of the leadership programme on their understandings about leadership. This element of *reflection* provided an important learning tool for the group as students commented on how their beliefs and understandings had been challenged or changed. This aspect of reflection also extended to the young women considering leadership beyond the school gates and making plans for their future leadership development.

The structure of the programme

The overall structure of the *Revolution* leadership programme was greatly influenced and bounded by what could be described as the ‘traditional structures’ of the school

such as the school timetable and term structure. Consequently, there were only a small number of structural differences from conventional programmes. However, I believe these to be significant.

Students had many ideas that were very different to the ways that leadership learning was previously presented to them. However, these ideas were often put to one side, as they could not fit them into the structure of the school context. The school policies influenced the ways that learning could occur. For example, the students proposed a number of ideas to learn about leadership such as overnight camps, and visiting volunteer groups and people in the community, and guest speakers. However, often the school context did not allow for these ideas to become reality due to the lack of funding, assessment limitations and school policy restrictions for Education Outside the Classroom requests. Even though the structure of the programme was bounded by these influences, one significant difference was the regular nature of the programme (weekly as opposed to a one-off intensive full day).

School term dates and holidays, senior exams and study breaks impacted on the amount and allocation of time available for this research, and this resulted in the leadership programme having to be run over two half terms after the planning had been done. This was not ideal as the break for school holidays in between affected the momentum of the programme. Furthermore, the timing of the programme was not ideal as it took place at the end of the school year and this meant that there was no flexibility in creating extra time as once the students had completed the school term, they would not be returning to school until the following year. Some students believed the programme would be better suited at the beginning of the year so that they had a full year to engage the knowledge they had developed prior to being involved in more formal leadership opportunities. The timeline generated for this research required revision due to initial hold ups with gaining access to the school (such as waiting for teacher registration papers, gaining written permission from the Board of Trustees).

Other areas that impacted on the structure and design of the programme included the external commitments that the students had. Some students in the programme had

part-time jobs and this needed to be accommodated in the planning of the sessions. As Anna mentions;

Here [on the school grounds] is good because we don't have to go anywhere. We know where to get stuff from and it's easy. We need to finish by 4.45 so we can get away before the rush at 5.

The geographical location of the school also influenced the programme. The school was located in a busy city location and the students who commuted needed to ensure that the timing of the programme aligned with bus timetables and allowed them to avoid the rush-hour traffic. Consequently, creative ideas for learning about leadership were shaped to fit into the school context and its associated restrictions. The logistics of bringing a large group together, led the students to decide that they would meet on a Tuesday each week after school for two hours. This went for 10 weeks in total and was not ideal, as the face-to-face workshops were spread over the last two school terms in the year with a two-week break in the middle.

The findings indicated that although the process of co-construction was effective in developing a leadership programme and there were hopes for the programme to be significantly different, the influence of the school context was immense. Considering this, the students recommended the following changes for the future. Firstly, that more time was allocated to the initial planning processes. They felt that this aspect required more time than had originally been allocated and this resulted in them feeling rushed at the beginning of the programme. Some students felt that they could have done a better job at making the content exciting if they had more time to research? Secondly, the students wanted to negotiate the process timeline. They felt that if they were involved in this then they would have more motivation to stick to the timeline. It was unfortunate that this timeline was restricted by the school terms and timetable and the research timeline that I had worked out from the University. This aspect may have been able to be more flexible if the young women had actually been involved in the planning the research from its initial stages.

ENHANCED LEADERSHIP UNDERSTANDING

I believed that using the process of co-construction to design the leadership programme would ensure that the programme met the needs of the young women. It was therefore important to ascertain how effective the programme had been in developing leadership understanding and practice. From the initial stages of the co-construction process and within the leadership programme itself, both the participants and I were learning and developing our understandings about leadership across a number of contexts. This made it difficult to identify specifically what aspect was responsible for enhancing the learning and thus, the co-construction process was an integral part of the leadership programme. However, it became evident that by being involved in both the creation of the leadership programme and through participating and evaluating the leadership programme, many of the young women had experienced changes to the way they perceived and practised leadership. This next section gives an account of the impact of the leadership programme on the young women's leadership understanding.

More Developed Understanding of Leadership

The young women showed a developed understanding of what leadership could be. This understanding shifted from a focus on acquiring personal skills in order to complete tasks to a more explicit focus on the personal qualities and abilities of a good leader. Rather than leadership being about having skills, leadership became more about the actions and behaviour that guided a person. This was very different to their initial understandings which were shared at the beginning of the research. Evidence of this was in an activity in the final session of the programme where they were asked to describe what made a good leader. They revisited their previous list as a reference point, critiqued this and added new dimensions. After much discussion and negotiation the group came to a consensus of what a good leader could be. A good leader should have a vision of what needed to be achieved, be good at working with others by forming respectful relationships that benefited all. They should be fair and honest to all people and make use of the skills and ideas of others. They should show confidence in themselves and in those around them and be able to communicate clearly and be good at listening. Lastly, the young women felt that a good leader gained, held, and showed respect and gave hope to those around them.

This new understanding of leadership was less prescriptive than previous lists generated by the group. The qualities of a good leader were broader and more encompassing of specific concepts that focused on building leadership capacity in other people rather than holding a formal leadership position or completing a task. Some of the original qualities were present on the new list. However, rather than many of the pragmatic skills such as time management, there was more of a focus on working alongside others and not necessarily showing power over other people. The socially desirable characteristics such as being good looking and fun had been dropped off in preference for aspects that empowered others such as showing confidence in other people's abilities and valuing the ideas and skills of those around you.

Power was still an important aspect of leadership. However, this aspect was re-examined and the perspectives about power and leadership had changed. Firstly, their ideas about who should have the power were different and as a result the role and the location of the power had changed. The original ideas from many of the young women about the need for a leader to show power over others had diminished and rather than the leader holding power over people, it was important for a good leader to *make other people* powerful and pass on the ability to make change. As Catherine reflected:

I guess, before, like before *Revolution*, I thought you needed power to be a leader. Like, the more I think about it, you can't *make* people follow you. They have to want to...and a good leader is one that people want to follow...leadership sometimes happens, things get done and people don't notice the leader. To me, that is a good leader.

Similarly, Tania commented:

Like, for me...being a leader meant having control over everything. I realise now that you don't have to do everything and a good leader will let other people in...I mean, others might be better at doing something and this is good, so you get them involved, hand the power over...like pass it forward.

Involvement in the leadership programme resulted in some participants recognizing many of their existing actions as leadership. For example Mere acknowledged that

she now thought differently about leadership, “Like before, I was doing all this stuff, but I did not know it was leadership, not that it makes a difference...I’ll keep doing it. It’s just nice to know that other people see me as a leader, even though I did not”. This validation of leadership occurred mainly in those who were practising leadership outside the school context. However, an exception was Jenny and her tutoring, as mentioned previously. Another student came to recognize the work that Jenny did as leadership and outlined this to Jenny during a focus group.

Others called to account their previous beliefs about leadership and their perceptions of others as leaders. One example of this was Nerroly who had never seen Tania as a leader. After the programme she confessed that her initial thoughts about leadership placed Tania outside what she believed a leader could be. She was thankful that her understanding of leadership had expanded because in the past she judged people as not good enough to lead, and therefore, she did not want to be led by them. A small number of the students made connections to their lives outside school although there was not a significant level of transference between school leadership and leadership in other contexts. These students were more often the ones who had complex understandings of leadership in the initial stages of the programme.

Although there was a deepening and broadening understanding of what leadership could be, these shifts were related to the starting points. For example, shifts in understanding were small by Chelsea when discussing the topic of whether a leader was required to be good looking;

- Chelsea: ...Yeah, well it [being good looking] was important, I mean, you are not going to follow someone who is ugly.
- Anna: Why not?
- Chelsea; Well, because...just because...they aren’t popular, they like...won’t have people to help them get stuff done. People’ll mock them rather than look up to them. I mean...who’s going to idolize a fugly [slang for very ugly]? No one [she laughs].

Chelsea’s understanding of leadership had changed very little. She still associated leadership with power and getting tasks completed. Her understanding of being a leader still included being looked up to and idolized by those ‘beneath’ her. It was interesting to note that Chelsea did not gain any formal leadership position within the school the following year, except for peer group captain. She was aiming for Spirit

Captain but was out-voted. Being good looking was not included in the second group list when she put the idea forward for consensus. Tania articulated her shift in thought and reflected on initially perceiving leadership as having control over others. After participating in the programme she saw the possibilities of leadership being distributed amongst a group of people. Amy, who did not complete the programme, due to sporting commitments, also showed that even three weeks into the programme some of her beliefs of leadership were changing. For example, when asked what leadership was, she replied

...not just telling people what to do, like I used to see leadership as this thing that you got when you got older, like seventh form. But now I realize that its something much more, you can have it any time. And, it's not just telling people what to do, although that's part of it. You need to listen and relate. That makes you a better leader. I am not sure if I could do that!

Alongside an increased understanding of what leadership could be, the young women also showed an increased understanding of where leadership could take place. The students had originally identified formal positions within the school such as peer group captain, drama group leader and this had been extended. Examples for leadership opportunities were identified in their peer groups, tutoring, through the way they behaved, and in their interactions with others. This illustrated that the young women had begun to consider opportunities for leadership outside of the formalized positions at school. The following focus group conversation illustrated what happened when participants reviewed their original list:

Catherine: ...Pretty narrow. What about all the other stuff like your tutoring Jen?
Jenny: Yeah, could be, I didn't put it down.
Catherine: Why not?
Jenny: 'Cause there's heaps of us and I didn't think it was leadership then, it was just tutoring.
Catherine: But it's leadership, 'cause you're guiding, helping people.
Jenny: True...

Amy also illustrated a change in her understanding about what leadership could be when she stated:

Yeah, it's heaps different. I reckon I was thinking real small. Like, just about me and just about here [school]. This programme has made

me realize that leadership is everywhere, not just here and it's even about my family and my group [circle of friends]. I think I am a leader, not your 'out there' leader, but a behind the scenes person...like...I am good at getting on with people and making things happen. I like, respect them and they respect me. I am pretty humble too.

After the programme, students began to acknowledge different sources of leadership within the school. The young women also recognized that leadership did not have to relate to a formal position in the school and they noted they could "...be a leader in the background". Previously they had focused mainly on students as leaders but after the programme this was extended to include teachers. Teachers were a key focus point for showing what leadership could be and how this influenced the young women's perceptions of leadership.

Like our teachers show leadership, well some of them, you know who they are because they have this way of making you feel good, you know that they want the best out of you. I learn a lot about leadership from them.

Increased Ability and Confidence to Identify and Practice Leadership

The understanding of leadership practice and the sites for leadership had expanded to include areas outside the school grounds such as part-time jobs, families and youth clubs. These understandings also began to move beyond the school context as they began to critique their current experiences of leadership. Nerrolly summarized her understandings about leadership and at the same time critiqued how the school had initially shaped her understandings;

Like, to be a leader you don't need permission or a badge...but here it's like they make it something that you do [need permission and a badge]. I know now that you can lead anywhere and show leadership in heaps of ways, in yourself, in helping others, in your family...now that I know more, I will probably lead more too.

Although some students had already acknowledged this in their initial interviews (Anna, Frances), some did not until after the programme had finished. For example, Rochelle stated:

I've actually, kind of like, when we've been doing activities been trying to think, 'Okay, what is this relating to? What type of area of leadership can this be relating to?' So I've been kind of getting better that maybe would be relating everyday things to ... leadership. Like my job [retail assistant] and working with other people on the floor [shop floor].

For some, the experience increased their ability to identify leadership in themselves. After the programme some students spoke of how they could now see leadership in themselves, which in the past they may not have been able to do. The young women were initially willing to identify leadership abilities in others, but had difficulty identifying them in themselves. In one session, they were working in pairs to identify leadership attributes in each other. These were written down and shared with others in the group who added to the page. The young women felt it was difficult to reflect on their own skills as they felt that they were boasting and not being humble (a key aspect of what they defined as leadership). Moreover, some participants felt that they did not have any specific leadership qualities and it was not until someone else pointed them out that they recognized their leadership ability.

For some, the experience increased their self-confidence to show leadership in different contexts. After the programme some students spoke of an increased confidence to demonstrate leadership, which they did not have the confidence to do prior to completing the programme. Through the interaction with others, the new knowledge gained from the sessions on learning about leadership and from reflecting upon leadership practice, some students began to formulate a clear picture of their own leadership. For example, Mere shared that her understanding of her own leadership had changed. She spoke about how she showed her leadership in the past because that had been what she saw at home. However, by being involved in the programme, she came to realize that leadership could be different and that not all leaders lead in the same way. She believed this gave her the confidence to lead in a

way that she felt more comfortable with, by not being in the spotlight and by encouraging others to show their leadership.

There were also some exciting and unexpected outcomes that resulted directly from the *Revolution* leadership programme. Some students felt the need to challenge what existed within the school and made plans to bring the school on board with what was happening. Kate took it upon herself to write to the principal and ask for funding to support the programme. She received over four hundred dollars to buy resources for the following year to ensure the leadership learning was sustained for another group of students. In her discussions afterward she reported:

I know, cool eh? I just wished she had read my letter, she kinda went...skim... as she flicked through to the numbers...she didn't even read it and I had spent heaps of time on it...we even had a letterhead from *Revolution*...she just gave me a slip and sent me to the office.

The students illustrated a level of initiative as they attempted to address how they might sustain and share the programme with other students in the school. They designed a plan around sustained capacity building, which was managed by them, the graduates of the *Revolution* programme. Firstly, the initial participants in the research made the choice to evaluate, adapt the programme and facilitate it to another group of students. They took over the organization of the sessions, gathered the resources and wrote plans for sessions together. The *Revolution* programme ran again in 2008 for a new group of students, and these students were planning to run the leadership programme again for another group of students in 2009. The latest round of *Revolution* took place without my involvement.

I found out in some of the final interviews that the young women from *Revolution* continued to meet after the leadership programme had finished. The support networks for leaders stemmed from this group as they shared their knowledge with other students who had not been involved in the initial leadership programme. The ability to “learn and share with others helps the cause of making leadership mean something here” as Frances commented. Some students indicated in their interviews that with this support, students actively sought out leadership opportunities and began practising leadership in ways that had not been done previously. Students began to initiate leadership action within the school based on what they had learnt in the

Revolution leadership programme. They started a breakfast club to encourage other students to show leadership in the school community. This was a leaders' breakfast across all peer groups to link junior students into the leadership framework of the school. Graduates of the programme organized the breakfasts each month for peer group captains and leaders of clubs in the school. They brought along toast, spreads, fruit, cereals (covering the costs from the money provided by the request they made to the school) and borrowed milk from the staffroom. The meetings took place in the senior common room. The discussions took on a mentoring and pastoral care direction and focused on how juniors were managing their new leadership roles. Juniors shared the challenges they faced and issues they came across. These were still continuing nearly six months after the completion of the *Revolution* leadership programme. Other students who had been elected to many of the formal leadership positions also engaged in these meetings by choice. Students made informal comments about the network as the spoke of the benefits of being supported and being able to support others.

The young women felt it important to present an outline about what they had accomplished and been involved in to the school Board of Trustees and the principal of the school. The students met over lunch times and put their ideas together to draft a presentation. They emailed it to me for feedback and even made a short film to finish off the slide show. They booked a time with the secretary of the Board to make room on the agenda for the following month (after school had been released for the summer break) to share their developing leadership knowledge and show the Board what they had accomplished in the programme. All of the students returned a month later to give the presentation. This was after exams and some students travelled back to the school especially to participate in the meeting. The presentation itself was outstanding and better than anything I could ever dream of putting together myself. Their grasp of technology was evident as music played, theme songs accompanied slides and movies whizzed into screens as voice-overs described the programme themes.

During the presentation each of the students shared a slide and spoke to the information, detailing the experiences and the learning that had occurred. They even outlined how the school could better support them in the future when they would run

it the following year for another group of students. I received a powerful letter from the Board of Trustees after the presentation, which I passed on to the students. It detailed how impressed the Board had been with the work that the students had completed and how they would like to see *Revolution* continue in the school in the future. The letter commented on the professional presentation and the high level of ownership by the students [“it was exciting to see our students so passionate about leadership”], and motivation towards their personal leadership learning and the learning of others [“and to see their enthusiasm to be involved in helping others in the future”]. They pledged their support for the programme and their willingness to contribute financially to the running costs, as they were keen to see the programme continue and strengthen over the years. It was pleasing to read about such support and the participants were delighted to be recognized as leaders within the school.

Increased Ability to Critique the Leadership Culture Within the School

Although there was an increasing level of support from the school for the *Revolution* leadership programme, the developing understandings of leadership that the young women were experiencing did not fit within the existing school context and required the students to find alternative opportunities to show leadership. As their understandings developed, some students felt let down by the school when they reflected on their current leadership opportunities and obligations. As students perceived a lack of opportunity to show leadership at school, there was a sense of frustration as they began to feel empowered by their new understandings, yet they remained within a structure that did not allow them to demonstrate this new knowledge in the ways they wanted. Some sought to change the situation and wanted to address school-wide issues such as the culture of leadership, however, although these desires were spoken, the only evidence I saw of this happening was through the leadership breakfasts. This is not to say that it did not happen, only the fact that I did not observe it.

As a researcher and co-constructor/partner of learning, I felt guilty at times. I was showing this group of young women that things could be different. However, after the programme was completed, the students, many with new leadership understandings

went back into the existing and restrictive leadership context where they first shaped their original beliefs. In further contact with the participants after the leadership programme through email and interviews, the students shared how on some occasions, conflict arose between them and the school as they challenged the current leadership system and spoke of how it did not meet their needs. The students perceived the teachers viewed these voices as the complaints of troublemakers and consequently, the voices became silent through fear of repercussion. The students now had new perspectives about what made a good leader; ideas extending beyond servanthship and Christian faith which were supported by the school, yet the students perceived the current school culture did not support these new beliefs. Students continued to be allocated leadership positions and prescribed roles aimed to serve others that did not allow leaders to show these newly developed skills, beliefs or qualities. However, the findings indicated that the young women did actively create and seek further leadership opportunities which extended beyond these prescribed roles, for example the leadership breakfasts.

There were times that as a researcher I felt that because the action-research process had begun to have an emancipatory focus, I bordered on being a troublemaker. I wanted the young women to seek change and look at making a difference within the school, yet I felt that I was asking questions of a system that was highly valued by staff and some students. I was asking them to question or critique what already existed and see whether this met their developing needs. However, in doing so, I was also illustrating that what was happening at present might not be ideal for them as aspiring and potential leaders. This led to a dissonance between what the students knew and the opportunities they had to illustrate this new knowledge. An excerpt from my research diary illustrated some of the challenges:

...I feel bad, they are growing but the school is not. It's the design, we have gone too small and I did not realize. Where will they go [show their leadership]? How can we work with what we have got? Make a difference, knowing that we can do better? If only the school allowed us space. It would be great to have a blank slate.

My reflections illustrated a lack of connection between the programme and the school. I believe change had occurred at an individual level for many of the students, but because I had not focused on the context within which they exercised their

leadership, the students struggled to use their newly created knowledge in the existing formal leadership system. To address this issue, the school had acknowledged the need to make provision for more leadership positions within the school. However, in doing so it had created leadership roles that the students did not believe were able to show leadership. For example, Kate spoke of the newly created senior leadership role as being a Rubbish Monitor.

It's like a dressed up form of rubbish duty. We have to walk around and tell people to pick up rubbish...It's a leadership position in school and you even get a badge for it and it goes on your report...sometimes you feel stink, I mean you are made to do it and then you are forcing others and punishing them. It's kind of like a double punishment. The smart ones get out of it because they know it makes people hate you and then they don't vote for you.

The role of Rubbish Monitor became a designated senior leadership position. However, there was much ill feeling about these roles as they were not viewed as opportunities to show leadership, and had a negative influence on the young women's social networks. Moreover, rather than seeing opportunities such as this as leadership, these few extra opportunities were seen as tedious tasks and even as humiliating experiences by some which influenced their popularity and therefore, their potential to gain formal leadership roles the final year.

SUMMARY

This chapter has illustrated the co-construction process used to develop the leadership programme with the young women. It has illustrated the complexities of using such a process and highlighted the challenges and benefits of the process. This chapter has also reported on the findings associated with the structure and the content of the leadership programme and illustrated the powerful influence of the school context in shaping the development of a programme such as this. The findings indicated that the leadership programme that was created through the process of co-construction was effective in developing leadership understanding and contributed to an increased desire to practice leadership. However, the changes to individual understandings were relative to the points that the young women started their learning from and were influenced by the context of the school. The collaborative nature of the co-

construction process played an important role in the development of leadership understanding and was an aspect that could not be separated from the programme itself.

The final section of this chapter examined the impact of the leadership programme on developing the young women's leadership understanding and emphasized the effectiveness of the programme at broadening and expanding their leadership understanding and increasing self-confidence and their ability to identify leadership opportunities within and beyond the school context. However, the findings also highlighted that change occurred at the level of the individual, which resulted in frustration and disappointment for some students. In the following chapter I will discuss and interpret these findings in light of the current literature.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter draws on the findings from the previous chapter and makes comment on these findings in light of the relevant literature with regard to the original research questions. The two sections in this chapter examine firstly the co-construction process and leadership programme that was created and secondly the enhanced leadership understanding that arose from engaging in these two aspects.

The first section examines the value and complexities of using co-construction to create a leadership development programme with young women. The use of student voice within youth-adult partnerships is discussed and the leadership programme that was created is commented on, making comparisons with adult-generated leadership development opportunities provided for students to learn about leadership in secondary schools. Links are made to existing literature to theorize about the place of co-construction, youth-adult partnerships and student voice initiatives as a means of addressing young women's leadership development in secondary schools.

The second section discusses how the leadership programme and the co-construction process both contributed to developing leadership knowledge and understanding of the young women. Links are made to the literature to theorize about enhancing young women's leadership understandings in secondary school contexts.

In light of relevant literature, throughout each section I highlight the findings unique to this study, which as a consequence, extend the existing knowledge about young women and leadership development, and the broader context of educational leadership.

THE CO-CONSTRUCTION PROCESS

Within the process of action research, co-construction was used to generate a leadership development programme to meet the needs of a group of young women. Such an approach was non-traditional since, as noted in the review of literature in Chapter Two, there is an overwhelming trend in the area of leadership learning for programmes to be created from adult-based leadership contexts and use generic one-size-fits-all approaches to address youth leadership in secondary schools. This can be problematic as assumptions are then made about what young women need to know and how they want to learn it. Furthermore, planned learning opportunities may be disconnected from the contexts in which young women lead and lack relevance to their learning needs. The findings of this research challenge the use of these approaches and highlight first, the value of using co-construction to develop a meaningful and relevant leadership curriculum with young women and second, the complexities associated with the implementation of the co-construction process. At times these two areas intertwine, as the value of co-construction is also frequently a product of the very elements that create its complexity. However, for the purpose of the following discussion, the findings are discussed in light of these two key areas.

The Value of Co-construction

The findings demonstrated that co-construction provided a valuable opportunity for the young women and me to work in a youth-adult partnership to create a contextually relevant leadership programme. The process, although different from what the young women had experienced before, allowed us to share ideas, whilst at the same time, develop our understandings about leadership within this particular school context. Key themes in the findings that reflected the value of this process included: creating a relevant and meaningful leadership programme, providing opportunities for the young women to critique existing pedagogies and leadership development within their school, and

highlighting the importance of strong youth-adult partnerships within such a process to engage young women in leadership learning.

Co-construction created a relevant and meaningful leadership programme

Researchers acknowledge a difference between adult and youth leadership development, however, as noted earlier in the literature review, when leadership development opportunities are presented to young people, they are often designed with reference to research and models that are focused on adults who are managers or administrators and involved in the businesses or the management of a school (MacNeil, 2006; Posner, 2004). Klau (2006) posits, "...at worst leadership programs are described as an almost negative space into which practitioners project their own beliefs about what youth need" (p. 60). It was therefore anticipated that a co-constructed programme would be significantly different to traditional leadership programmes. However, it would appear from the findings that the generated programme had both similarities and differences to programmes that had been generated by adults.

Some similarities existed, but the findings indicate the reasons for these were not necessarily because of choice, but more because of the nature of the school context. Examples of this could be seen in the structural design of the programme. The findings highlighted that when the young women did have ideas about the structure and content of the programme, many of these were not able to come to fruition. This was because they did not fit into the structure of the school context, for example, the time available, or the access to resources. Consequently, ideas for content (such as guest speakers, high ropes courses and trips to local organizations) and the desire for certain structures (such as a series of week-long residential programmes and longer, more frequent sessions), were unable to be enacted due to restrictions in time, funding, Education Outside The Classroom policies and school timetabling. It could be said that although the content and the learning processes were negotiated, this happened within a non-negotiable framework. The power to make decisions was held by the school and it was teachers who were able to exercise it, rather than students, so the context was left unchanged. Upon reflection, it may have been more effective for the leadership programme to be

more integrated into the school systems so that the power to make decisions could be further distributed amongst the young women.

Although the programme generated showed some differences from that of a programme created by adults, it could be speculated that the programme may have looked even more different had the process occurred outside the school context. This perhaps extends the work of Sergiovanni and Corbally (1986) who emphasized the influence of the school context on the leader. In the case of this research, the influence of the school context also extended into the design of the leadership learning opportunities for the students.

A unique aspect of the programme designed by the young women and me was that the leadership learning began with a focus on the young women themselves. It highlighted the importance they placed on reflecting on their own leadership learning. This is very different to many adult-generated programmes where the initial reflection and learning about leadership frequently begins with reflecting on great leaders, who are more often than not removed from the contexts in which the young women practice their leadership. Examples of this can be seen in the work of MacGregor (2007) in her leadership development programme titled 'Building Everyday Leadership in All Teens', where the beginning sessions required the teen participants to "identify well-known individuals who exhibit overall qualities people generally look for in leaders" (p. 15). Similarly, Hawkes' (2005) leadership course for secondary students outlined that students were to examine historical case studies of leaders and list the traits of famous leaders. It is interesting to note that in many cases the examples of famous leaders were male (for example, Napoleon Bonaparte).

In the New Zealand secondary school context the Growing Leaders resource (SPARC, 2009) explores initial leadership abilities through the facilitation of discussions around superheroes. It could be speculated that this activity could send messages to young people that leadership is only for a chosen few and is not possible for everyone. Leadership is portrayed as only residing in those who do extreme things and are frequently in the view of others. It fails to acknowledge the view that everyone can be a

leader, as believed by van Linden and Fertman (1998). The belief that anyone can be a leader was an underpinning premise of this research. Consequently, the co-construction process accommodated and extended a wide range of leadership beliefs and understandings. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach to leadership learning, the findings indicated that co-construction took into account the broad range of leadership knowledge that the young women brought with them to the co-construction process. The design of the *Revolution* leadership programme was congruent with current good teaching practices in schools where learning begins with what the learner knows. It is therefore surprising that few schools or people designing leadership development resources are using this approach to teach about leadership.

The process of co-construction focused on both the designing of the structure and the development of content for the leadership programme. It therefore influenced the learning approaches that were utilized in each leadership session. The findings highlighted that the young women preferred to learn about leadership through active means where they could practise their leadership in applied situations. As a result, the content of the *Revolution* leadership programme was based on a high level of practical involvement and activities that required the young women to work collaboratively. Such a feature is not unusual in adult-designed programmes, for example, the Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC) Growing Leaders Resource (2009) provides a small number of opportunities for students to participate in and lead cooperative activities. However, a significant number of the activities in adult-generated programmes are based on theoretical approaches that required completing worksheets and written projects. A possible recommendation could be to increase the cooperative activities in leadership learning so that the participants are actively involved in working collaboratively and practising their leadership.

What was interesting was that many of the activities that the young women suggested as vehicles for the chosen content were activities that they had participated in before. This is one area where the value of co-construction was significantly obvious. As the young women only knew what they knew, it was not surprising that their ideas for content and

teaching approaches replicated their past experiences as they only knew their own minds (Boomer, 1992). My knowledge about leadership development approaches and my contribution of ideas for leadership activities became essential in order to provide a unique learning experience for them and also to ensure that the activities linked to the intentions for leadership learning. Such a finding shows similarities to the work of Sproston (2008). Her action research study explored effective ways to involve students in the negotiation of their learning experiences. Through implementing a process of action research she highlighted that negotiating curriculum allowed students to be involved in opportunities to be empowered and make decisions about their learning. This process in turn was supported, built upon and extended by classroom teachers to further enrich the learning that took place in the classroom. This underscores the importance of working in partnership with young women to design their leadership learning experiences. Within the partnership, the young women's knowledge can be extended but also remain contextually relevant. Further significance of this finding highlights the importance of guidance and partnership within the co-construction process. Leaving students to design their own leadership programme without this partnership may result in the regurgitation of what they already know and have experienced without any extension or adding of new ideas.

Interestingly, the content that was included in the leadership programme mirrored the age-appropriate youth development approaches in much of the literature. An example of this was when the young women included leadership content because they felt it was important to prepare them for their futures, for example, speaking in public. Therefore, although the leadership programme was relevant to the particular context, the future needs and requirements of the young women were also considered. Such a finding indicates the persuasive discourse at senior years of schooling when adults see youth as requiring preparation for the real world and much of this preparation occurs in the final school years. Such views, also held by the students, were influenced by the link between leadership being viewed as a formal position and the need to prepare for these roles.

Co-construction encouraged the young women to critique existing pedagogies

Even though a number of challenges related to the process of co-construction existed, overall the students enjoyed working in the youth-adult partnership. This became evident in the evaluation of the co-construction process in their final interviews. Many of the young women questioned why more teachers did not use this approach. However, the complexities of co-construction were lost on this group. They assumed that the programme that was created would be suitable for the next group of students. They did not recognize the power of the co-construction process and the key feature of co-construction which was involving student voice to ensure that needs of participants were met.

To attempt to gauge young people's understandings about leadership, there is an element of credibility and trust that needs to be addressed. Developing a learning community was central to the ease with which the students shared their voices. It took time for the students to open up and share their views. This may have been due to many reasons – firstly, as I was an outsider, a level of trust needed to be established. Secondly, the group that was brought together for the research was a group of students who did not normally mix together, therefore, the dynamics of the group needed to be addressed to ensure that people felt comfortable. As the size of the group was small, relationships were established quickly. Mitra (2009) suggests that “a youth-adult partnership can only be as big as it is possible for all group members to be known and to have the ability to actively participant [sic] as valuable members of the collective” (p. 328). Although it is deemed important to seek the voices of young people in regard to developing learning curriculum and approaches, I believe that this process is not unproblematic, and can be rather complex and sometimes, deceptive.

Co-construction requires a great deal of time and planning. Furthermore, some teachers may find it difficult to share the power within the teaching and learning relationship. Either they find it difficult to let go of the control or in fact the opposite, where they feel they need to ‘get out of the way’ (Camino, 2005). As sharing the power and control within the teaching and learning process was the premise of this research and was the key

aim of this youth development approach, I was ready for this to happen. However, surprisingly, as the findings indicated, it was the young women who were not ready for this to happen. Such a finding is interesting because much of the literature on co-construction addresses the challenges for teachers and the issues for teachers and there is a paucity of research illustrating the challenges of the co-construction process from the perspective of the young people. This finding reinforces the work those writing in the area of traditional roles of schools (Denner, Meyer & Bean, 2005; Mitra, 2006), where it is difficult to shift traditional understandings of the roles that teachers and students play in the teaching and learning process. I also believe that the young women were also simply responding to what they saw modelled in the school context. To deviate from this familiar model of teaching and learning would require a significant amount of trust and courage.

Youth-adult partnerships were essential for co-construction

The creation of this partnership with the young women had a significant impact on their involvement with the programme. The findings highlighted that the young women found co-construction personally rewarding and a source of enjoyment, with the majority of the reasons for this relating to the youth-adult partnership that was created. It could be suggested from the findings that students appreciated the opportunity to work alongside an adult and even the process of creating the leadership programme had its own rewards. Findings emphasized not only the benefits of youth adult partnerships within the co-construction process, but also the impact that this can have on the young women's future involvement to make decisions about learning and taking responsibility to design opportunities to make learning happen. These findings support key themes in the literature, such as the work of Meier (1993) who highlighted the need for connection, inclusivity, participation and collaboration. Furthermore, within the learning community and partnership, a sense of *agency* was required (Watkins 2005). This meant that by coming together as a collective, there was a belief from all members of the learning community that they can make informed choices and take action. By being a part of the learning community, there was also a sense of *belonging* through membership. Respect, inclusion, acceptance and support are key ingredients for this to occur (Watkins 2005).

Through developing a sense of belonging, there was a growth of commitment within the community, which can illustrate the *cohesion* between community members. This cohesion can assist in the creation of joint action when required. Lastly, recognizing and embracing the differences of others shows illustrated that *diversity* was a key facet in the creation of the learning community. This may have assisted in creating an inclusive community of difference as described by Shields and Seltzer (1997) in which culturally diverse viewpoints and practices are accepted and celebrated. I believe that youth-adult partnerships provide for new opportunities in youth development. Working alongside adults, young women have the opportunity to share ideas, develop their viewpoints and be involved in a productive relationship that aids their learning. The uniqueness they bring to the relationship adds richness and this diversity allows for greater impetus for future change.

The nature of the youth-adult partnership was highly complex. There were many layers to the relationship and these had to be negotiated with care. Camino (2000) states that youth-adult partnerships are

“...a multidimensional construct. They contain (a) principles and values, which actors use to orient the relationship and to guide behavior; (b) a set of skills and competencies through which the behaviors are focused; and (c) a method to implement and achieve collective action”. (p. 11)

Although I was aware of the challenges involved in creating respectful partnerships with young people, I was not aware of the need to formalize these aspects and make them explicit to the group. An area I found which lacked coverage in the literature was the aspect of motivation within these relationships. Of great surprise to me was the source of motivation for these students. The motivation to be involved in the leadership programme extended beyond the opportunities to plan and participate in a planned leadership experience. Evidence of this occurring was in the unexpected outcomes after the leadership programme took place. The young women provided a leadership breakfast for students within the school who considered themselves leaders. This was set up as an opportunity for them to meet and talk about leadership with other leaders. Interestingly,

in the context of youth-adult partnerships, Mitra (2009) speaks of the work of McLaughlin (1993) and the need for “visible victories” (p. 322), where the legitimacy of the relationship can be seen through the accomplishment of a set outcome. She believes that these victories help to legitimate the process and can help to establish credibility of youth-adult partnerships within the school. Furthermore, I also experienced a significant amount of learning. Within the partnership, I too developed my knowledge and understanding about leadership within a particular context. I also came to know a group of young women on a level that perhaps I might not have as a teacher.

Due to the nature of the learning community, the safe and supportive learning environment and the willingness of all involved to work towards a shared vision, it became clear to me that sometimes the visible victories actually make way for invisible strengthening of relationships. I believe this has significant implications for those working alongside students in partnerships. I have learnt that in relationships like this it is important to plan for and celebrate the visible victories but also acknowledge and understand that invisible victories are also important in enhancing motivation and increasing the young women’s desire to strive for leadership opportunities.

As the young women had been involved in the planning and creation of the leadership programme there was an increased sense of ownership. I believe this may have led to a greater motivation to be involved and attend the leadership sessions. This finding supports the work of Wallin (2003) who found in her work when identifying leadership opportunities for senior students within Saskatchewan schools, opportunities to be involved in making decisions about their learning kept the students interested and focused. Similarly, Close and Lechman (1997) acknowledged the benefits of including young people in the planning and implementation of a peer mediation programme. Their work highlighted the benefits of including young people in sharing their knowledge of conflict resolution with adults to enhance the adults’ understanding about issues that were important to them and the best ways to address them. The secondary school students in the study also indicated that opportunities similar to these encouraged them to take more responsibility for their learning and fostered more positive relationships with their peers.

In the case of this research, the findings indicated that the design of the youth-adult partnerships allowed opportunities for peer relationships to strengthen and provided opportunities for students to build new friendships. Such a relationship could also be viewed the other way where it was actually the developing relationships that provided the opportunity for the partnership to occur. Action research carried out by Sanchez (2009) with three young women highlighted the importance of “building relational knowledge” (p. 86). She found that through building trusting relationships she was able to “...foster and deepen reflective knowledge” (p. 86), and spent six months of the three years doing so. Similarly, in this research, although the time investment differed, these strong partnerships were foundational to the co-construction process because the process was heavily reliant on them. I feel it is important to highlight that this period of building relationships was not a finite process but continued beyond the planned ‘getting to know you’ time at the beginning of the research. As relationships changed and altered over time in the research, so did the interactions, and consequently the research process, however, it is these initial stages that are essential. All of these aspects required significant negotiations, planning, flexibility and organization. It is therefore not surprising that one important area warranting discussion that was an essential part of my learning was the fact that co-construction is extremely complex and people embarking on co-construction will learn as well as teach.

The Complexity of Co-construction

Co-construction, although useful and effective in generating a contextually relevant, needs-based leadership programme, was also extremely complex. The complexities of the co-construction process existed on many levels and this was unexpected and provided for many challenges throughout the research.

Co-construction was complex and multi-faceted

Co-construction is frequently presented as a tool used to generate new knowledge. In the case of this research, co-construction was a useful and engaging learning process that involved the young women and not only generated a leadership programme, but also

provided an opportunity for them to learn about leadership. However, in the literature, co-construction is often portrayed as an unproblematic and linear process. Hence, when embarking on this research, it was initially designed in a certain way to take into account this linear process. In reality, I found it to be anything but the uni-directional, mechanical and rational process commonly referred to in the literature (Datnow, Hubbard & Mehan, 1998). As the process of co-construction got underway, it became obvious that a linear process was not necessarily representative of true co-construction. I discovered that much of the literature failed to take into account the nature of relationships and the impact of the context on the process of co-construction (with the exception of Bishop and Glynn, 1999). Furthermore, although co-construction was touted as an approach that shared power and provided opportunities for all involved being active creators of curriculum, many of the complexities of relationships and processes are overlooked. From this research I have come to realize that those embarking on co-construction processes with young women need to be comfortable with chaos and be ready for the unknown.

The learning within the co-construction process was multifarious (Barker, 2008), and required significant planning and flexibility. Throughout the co-construction process the students often revisited their original knowledge and starting point in order to move forward in their leadership thinking. Moreover, while this process generated new knowledge, it also confirmed the existing leadership knowledge and beliefs held by the young women, thus, validating existing leadership practices. For example, Jenny did not realize that the tutoring that she was already doing was leadership until it was made clear to her in the group discussions around what leadership could be. This finding supports the work of Strachan and Saunders (2007) who, in their work focusing on women's leadership development, found that as the women co-constructed their leadership learning opportunities and developed their leadership understandings, the expanding views of leadership validated existing leadership practices which had previously not been viewed as leadership. What I learnt was that as the adult I did not have to be the sole provider of knowledge and answers. I believe this to be a strength of the co-construction process, especially when working with larger groups. Participants were able to draw on multiple

sources of information to develop their leadership understandings and validate their existing leadership practices. It was useful because the young women were not solely reliant on the teacher and others who had more contextual knowledge were able to make excellent contributions in this area.

Co-construction and learning were inseparable

Findings highlighted that the co-construction process and the learning process were closely linked and could not be separated. One could not happen without the other. It could therefore be suggested that co-construction was a powerful way of learning for both the young women and me and not solely about creating an outcome of a leadership programme. This process played a significant role in shifting leadership understandings from a skills-based approach to 'being' in leadership. Therefore, the leadership programme may not have been as successful with the next group of students as they were not involved in developing the leadership programme. This finding links to literature that focuses on co-construction and ownership. For example, in the work of Sproston (2008) it was found in her action research with young women that when they are involved in creating their learning experiences, the level of learning is greater and there is richness in the learning that could not have been produced otherwise. Emphasizing the importance of engagement, Hargreaves (2006) stated;

If students are engaged, they will begin to take more responsibility for their learning. When they assume responsibility, they will achieve a degree of independence in learning. With independence comes self-confidence and so greater maturity in relationships. And it is with such self-confident, mature learners that teachers develop the trust in students out of which a commitment to co-construction with students as partners can grow. (p. 11)

A large body of research highlights the importance of involving young people in decision-making about their learning (Fielding, 2004; Leitch & Mitchell, 2007; Martin, Lisahunter & McLaren, 2006; Mitsoni, 2006; Shallcross, Robinson, Pace & Tamoutseli, 2007). Yet only a small body of work focuses on the relationships which foster this process to occur. In their work with adults involved in youth development approaches, Zeldin, Petrokubi and McNeil (2007) identified practices that increase the success of

youth-adult partnerships. These included creating a sense of ownership and a shared vision amongst the group members. Furthermore, Hargreaves (2006) stated,

...when teachers display a readiness to treat students as active partners in the construction of their education, students respond with the engagement that sets in train a powerful spiral. In other words, when teachers behave as *if* students are co-constructors, this automatically stimulates a degree of engagement. (p. 11)

The co-construction process allowed for such practices within its design, however, further to this list the findings indicated that further practices were also worthy of comment. One of these included exploring ways that young people prefer to learn. This was an important aspect of the research as I believed that, although I was aware of current teaching practices in schools, I had not taught in a secondary school for nearly a decade. It was therefore important for me to find out the ways that the young women wanted to learn, and in particular, this group of young women. Wescott-Dodd and Konzal (2002) acknowledge that education is changing rapidly and believe it is imperative for schools to keep up with changing times pleading:

...if we want our children to live in a safer world tomorrow, we must look at how we are educating our children today. We need to recognize that education doesn't just happen in schools but is going on all of this time in all aspects of our children's lives (p.14).

From this research I discovered that the learning within the co-construction programme did not remain limited to the school context. Many of the young women drew on knowledge and skills which they used outside of the school context. However, it was important for them to feel comfortable in being able to offer these contributions. I learnt that students are restricted in the ways they want to learn and the school classroom has a significant influence in shaping their preferred ways of learning. When provided with innovative alternatives for learning, the young women were receptive to trialling new ideas and also very good at providing feedback on how to improve these.

Co-construction challenged traditional youth development pedagogy

The findings indicated that the complexity of the co-construction process extended into the pedagogical nature of the teaching and learning approaches. The youth-adult

partnerships that were utilized in the co-construction process were different from the traditional ways of teaching and learning that the young women were used to. The findings revealed that the process of co-construction contradicted the young women's existing beliefs about teaching and learning. Rodriguez and Brown (2009) acknowledge that collaborative work with young people can be difficult as many "...have never been expected to control the terms of their learning or collaborate with adults" (p. 27), and in the case of this research, the young women were not used to working in partnership with an adult, and even scarcer was the opportunity to be involved in decision-making about their learning. As noted by Boomer (1992),

Traditionally, there has been an 'apartness' in classrooms. Teachers teach and children learn. Teachers guide and children are guided. Teachers decide what is to be done and children usually try to comply. Teachers accommodate children and children accommodate teachers, but they have different roles. (p. 32)

The young women commented that adult-student partnerships were not frequently utilized in this secondary school setting; therefore, to engage students in this type of partnership challenged their current views of who held important knowledge and who should make decisions about learning. Mitra (2009) argues that the traditional roles of the teacher and the student in schools can restrict opportunities for youth-adult partnerships. In her work exploring the challenges of creating youth-adult partnerships in school she found that such a process "requires intentional effort to push against the institutional pressures that encourage a reversion back to traditional teacher and student role" (p. 318). I learnt that relationships are central to leadership development. I believe providing space and opportunities for the relationships in a learning community to flourish was effective in developing strong partnerships with the young women and this impacted on their leadership development. However, an essential part of this process was recognizing that the process itself did not necessarily fit into the structured and timetabled approach to this research and required a significant amount of flexibility. It could be timely to note that many adult-generated leadership programmes and one-size-fits-all approaches to leadership do not necessarily have the luxury of this time and flexibility. Outside providers are expected to meet delivery targets and timetables frequently inhibit opportunities for providing space and developing relationships. I

believe therefore that leadership development requires an investment in building relationships as a firm foundation for leadership development.

On many occasions co-construction shifted the responsibility for the learning from being solely the responsibility of the teacher to being a shared responsibility between the teacher and the students. This was not always the case as different people took ownership for different parts throughout the co-construction process. Anderson and Sandmann (2009) believe that the underlying concept supporting the success of youth-adult partnerships is mutuality. Within this mutuality, it is recognized that all individuals involved in the partnership have responsibility for the outcome and, therefore, their voices must be recognized and valued. For the partnership to be successful, “both parties must be considered valuable contributors to the decision-making process” (Anderson and Sandmann, 2009, p. 4). Within the context of New Zealand the Māori concept of *ako* is used to describe the teaching and learning relationship, where the teacher is also learning from the student. I found the co-construction process to be underpinned by this concept. *Ako* is grounded in the principle of reciprocity and also recognizes that “the learner and whanau cannot be separated” (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 20). Alton-Lee (2003) defines the concept of *ako* as involving the ability to both to teach and to learn. A key facet of *ako* is to recognize the knowledge that all people in the learning arrangement (in this case, the researcher and the students) bring to any learning interactions. This allows for new knowledge and understandings to be created from shared learning experiences (Alton-Lee, 2003).

Such a belief was integral to the design of the co-construction process. However, the findings indicated it took the young women time to get used to this process. Upon reflection, the fact that I had not initially made the roles within the youth-adult partnership as clear as they needed to be may have had some bearing on this. Larson, Walker, and Pearce (2005) note that in order for youth-adult partnerships to be successful, roles for both the adults and the youth must be justified and made clear to all involved in the relationship. Consequently, one aspect essential to creating a sense of

ako within this research was the provision for student voice within the co-construction process.

Student voice was an essential but also challenging element of co-construction

As the findings indicated, not all aspects of student voice were positive. I viewed the process of seeking student voice as unproblematic at the initial stages of this research. Hanvey (2003) argues that while quantitative data through surveys and questionnaires can be useful to gain a broad spectrum of information and can contribute to our understanding of youth as a developmental concept, individual interviews or focus groups using qualitative framework and asking young people what they think and what their experiences have been can add more richness and keep the context of young people present. This further enriches our understanding of youth (Hanvey, 2003). Holdsworth (2004) makes it clear that, although a range of language is used to describe the involvement of student voice in decision-making and change process, some descriptions are more limited than others – for example – consultation and involvement could be seen as less participatory than participation and action. I had originally only planned for the sharing of voice within the co-construction process; however, it also became an important part of the learning processes within the leadership programme itself. The findings indicate that such a concept was complex and not only was the sharing of voice important in getting messages across, but the withholding of voice was also an important aspect. Gunter (2001) states “voice is problematic as it connects with capability and capacity. Some voices are louder than others” (p. 125). Balancing student voice within the process required a significant amount of attention to ensure that all voices were heard. For example, the findings illustrated that some voices were more frequent or prominent in group discussions. What I learnt was that student voice was more powerful than I had initially perceived.

Furthermore, it became apparent that although I had planned for the inclusion of student voice within the research process, it remained situated as just that – within the research. When change was sought in terms of leadership structures and decision-making within

the school, the voices of the young women alone were not enough to create that change, with the only exception being when they requested money to support the programme. It might have been useful to extend the notion of student voice outside of the research focus and focus on furthering the young women's understandings about how they can make their voices matter in future decision-making within the school. Rodriguez and Brown (2009) see this process as shifting from simply having a voice, to being actual agents of change in areas that matter. In order for this to happen further critical engagement *within* and *of* the school context by the young women would have been necessary. I learnt that simply having a voice may not be enough to create change. When those sharing voices are not in position to make decisions, it is difficult for change to happen.

Co-construction required planning and time for future sustainability

No teachers were included in this research, so I turned to the literature to explore some of the challenges faced by teachers when attempting to implement co-construction processes within their classrooms. A recent and timely example from the New Zealand context, Mansell (2009), highlighted that many teachers found it difficult to utilize co-construction because of the extra time and energy required to make it an effective and meaningful process. Although there was a small amount of flexibility to do this within the context of this research, within the case of broader education, this may not be the case. Mansell found that the everyday requirements of teaching drew a significant amount of teachers' time making it difficult for them to commit to investing further time in new ideas about curriculum – for example, co-construction. One aspect of the findings in this research related to the needs for adequate time in order for the co-construction process to be adequately planned for and strong partnerships formed within the learning community. Mitra (2009) purports that in order for youth-adult partnerships to be successful, “sufficient time and space for relationships to develop and for activities to be designed and implement” is required (p. 319). However, as this research was bound by a research timeline, there was pressure to meet deadlines. This may have influenced the final outcomes of the co-construction process. What I learnt was that the research timeline needed to be flexible as it required adjusting so that more time could be spent creating a safe, supportive and productive learning community.

The co-construction process was far reaching. It not only shifted leadership beliefs and understandings, but also developed a shared sense of pride and belonging. This sense of belonging was so powerful that many students returned to the school the following year (after they had left the school) and ran the programme again for another group of students. The programme became self-sustaining in some ways through these actions of the students; however, the complexity of co-construction was lost on this group. They believed that taking the programme and delivering it to another group of students would have the same impact as they experienced. They did not realize the role that co-construction had played in the development of the leadership curriculum and the development of their leadership understandings. Moreover, there are some areas of concern from this research highlighting areas where the co-construction was not far reaching.

Throughout and even more so, after the *Revolution* leadership programme, there was a disconnection between the students and the school. Literature addressing learning communities makes comment on the need to involve the wider school community in the learning community itself (Stoll, 2003). However, there is no set boundary or requirement outlined as to who should belong to the learning community and who should be included in the process of group formation and knowledge creation. Therefore, as an outsider coming into a school, I was the sole adult engaging with this group. This, on one hand, was positive as it created an aspect of mystery and difference, as staff members whom the students knew had not initiated the programme. Speck (1999) envisions learning communities involving the whole school and community partners beyond the school gates. She also speaks of a school learning community as a community that values and promotes on-going collaborative processes, and recommends that such environments can result in collaborative action. There is dialogue between all stakeholders – the teachers, students, staff, principal, parents and the school community. Through the reflexive nature of this research I also came to realize that whilst I had built these relationships within the partnership, I still felt like, what Patricia Hill Collins (1991) describes as “an outsider within” (p. 35). However, I did not come to realize this until the final stages of the research when the young women returned to run the leadership

programme for a new group of students. I have learnt that although learning communities can be powerful in creating leadership programmes, in order for change to happen at a systemic level, the learning community needs to incorporate not just people who are capable of making decisions, but also people who are in positions of influence and can implement suggested changes.

The original design of the leadership programme was based around two contributing parties; myself (the researcher and facilitator), and the young women. The possibility of involving other adults in this process during those initial stages may have had a detrimental effect on the participants and their abilities to speak freely about their leadership aspirations, beliefs and the things that influenced these. However, this also provided challenges as the programmes struggled to gain credibility amongst the students and staff because it was unknown. Robertson (1991) concluded in her collated report titled ‘ACCO: Achieving charter curriculum objectives; a teacher development programme using a school development strategy’, that involving the wider community was paramount if sustainable change was to occur. She stated, “an inclusive approach to curriculum development is required”, and will be “more likely to overcome institutional barriers to change and sustain the direction of development” (p. 5). Similarly, Senge (1990a) highlights the need to acknowledge the broad context in which experiences sit. His seminal work on systems thinking highlights the need to have a good understanding of the whole context that we work within, and only then can meaningful and appropriate action take place. He speaks of the need to “see” systems and understand the dynamics of how key elements connect (p. 231). For example, in this research, once I had left the school I removed the essential ingredient of the ‘adult’ element from within the youth-adult partnerships. I consider this aspect was key to making the programme successful and motivating the young women to remain involved because the students frequently commented on how they enjoyed the youth-adult partnership relationship.

Although the learning community sustained itself once I had left, I believe it still required the adult-student partnership relationship to make it seem like an attractive proposition for learning. Tillery (2009) highlights the value of adult connections with secondary

school students and outlined how these relationships enhanced the sense of belonging with the school community. It may therefore have been useful to involve a school staff member throughout the process in order to mentor them through the process to ensure future involvement from the school and ‘buy in’ from the school. What I learnt was in order for change to occur more broadly, beyond the students themselves and more so in the school context, it would be essential for an insider who is placed in a key decision-making role to be involved. They can assist the students in creating sustainable change within the school based upon the needs of the students. Even though there seemed to be a lack of connection with the existing school system, it was evident that there were shifts in understandings about leadership. This was a result of both the co-construction process and the leadership programme. The aspects of enhanced leadership learning will now be discussed.

Enhanced Leadership Learning

The findings relating to enhanced leadership learning highlighted the importance of the co-construction process, not just the leadership programme, as a means to generate and encourage deeper leadership understanding and extend leadership knowledge. However, the lack of literature that examines young women beliefs about leadership and the impact of formal leadership learning opportunities on leadership practice and leadership beliefs may lead some researchers to believe that these aspects would be difficult to comment on. However, I believe this position shows the unique contribution that this research makes to the area of leadership development with young women.

The *Revolution* leadership programme and the co-construction processes used to create it clearly had a demonstrable impact on the young women who participated in it. The findings highlighted that both the process of co-construction and the leadership development programme played a valuable role in advancing the young women’s understandings about leadership and as the findings indicated, the views that the young women held about leadership were broadened and deepened as a result of their involvement. Such a finding was not surprising, as it could be expected that some change

might result from this learning opportunity. However, this change was tied to the individual and did not necessarily extend beyond this into the wider school community. The findings indicated that although the young women had extended their views of leadership, they returned to lead in a formal leadership system and school culture that had not changed to incorporate these developing beliefs. A similar theme was illustrated in the work of Strachan and Saunders (2007) who, in their work developing leadership programmes with Ni Vanuatu women, highlighted the need for change to occur at the systems level rather than at the individual level if change was going to be sustained. Similarly, Avolio (1999) acknowledged the need to address not just the leadership abilities of individuals, but also the leadership culture of an organization. In doing so, he believed a collective force could be sustained and the possibility for change would be greater and more easily embraced. I have learnt that for sustained changes about leadership learning to take place, leadership development needs to address more than the individual and must encompass the context in which the individual practice their leadership.

Some important changes in leadership understanding included students describing and identifying leadership in a less prescriptive manner. Many beliefs had shifted from believing leadership to be something that resided in an individual to more of a phenomenon that allowed power to be shared and created for and with others. What was interesting about this was the shifts in learning were closely related to the individuals' starting points from when they entered the programme. For example, those who had more complex views of what leadership could be made greater advances in their leadership learning and were more likely to show leadership in action and critique leadership contexts than those who initially held very basic or restricted understandings about what leadership could be. I have learnt that if the concept of leadership is reshaped so that leadership becomes about the self initially, then the possibilities of what leadership can be for the participants, and who can be a leader are considerable.

According to advocates and researchers of youth development, the developmental benefits of youth involvement in decision-making about these programmes are immense.

It is therefore important for them to be involved in decisions about their learning (Hart, 1992, Pittman et al., 2000), and essential for adults to listen to the voices of students, allowing them to help shape their own content, process, style and language. The findings indicated the shift in leadership understanding for many of the young women, and also how this was based at the individual level. Although this finding may not necessarily reflect the desired outcome of the young women taking their new knowledge back to their school context and making changes to the long-standing formal leadership structures within the school, this situation did prove useful in encouraging the young women to seek alternative opportunities to practice their leadership.

The findings highlighted the influence of the school context on the developing leadership understandings. Although the findings may have illustrated a significant shift in leadership understanding and what Friere (1970) describes as a raising of consciousness related to individual leadership, there were few formal opportunities for the young women to demonstrate this leadership knowledge in action. It therefore became important for the young women to find alternative ways of demonstrating this. As they were met with a lack of understanding about their leadership knowledge due to the formal structures within the school, many of the young women embraced the opportunity to seek alternative ways of demonstrating leadership. The restrictive nature of the school had inadvertently encouraged the young women to show initiative in contexts outside of the formal leadership structure. So without actually realizing it, the young women were involved in changing the leadership culture in the school at a subversive level. Was this an explicit part of the plan? It was not but it was an implicit result of their actions.

SUMMARY

The focus of this thesis was exploring young women's beliefs about leadership and engaging an alternative approach to leadership development with young women in a secondary school. More specifically, this research has investigated the use of student voice, within a co-construction process that utilized a partnership between an adult (me) and a group of young women.

This research has provided a glimpse of young women's leadership beliefs and understandings which are often missing in educational leadership literature. Frequently, research on young people is absent within this body of literature, and when it is present, it is often presented as homogeneous without a consideration for gender. This research illustrates the significant influence of the school context on young women's leadership beliefs and practice and highlights areas that schools may consider in their own leadership structures and school cultures. This research has also investigated an alternative approach to leadership development with young women, emphasizing the benefits of involving young women in designing and evaluating their own leadership learning experiences. Whilst the co-construction process was effective in developing a leadership programme that enhanced leadership understanding, such a process was not without its challenges. It was the very aspects that generate the complex nature of this process which were also the unique features that played an essential role in creating the value of co-construction. These findings and important discussion points have implications for further research in the area of young women and leadership that I address in the following chapter.

The next chapter will conclude the thesis. In this chapter I present a summary of the research. Limitations to the research are acknowledged and areas that could be examined through further research are identified. Implications for practitioners involved in youth

leadership development, and those specifically working with young women are outlined. An epilogue is shared as a concluding reflection.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

This qualitative action research study was located in an urban girls' Catholic secondary school. The research examined the leadership perceptions and experiences of 12 young women and explored an alternative approach to leadership development within their school context. The research was motivated by my own personal experiences as a woman leader and my observations of young women 'falling into' leadership opportunities in schools with few occasions to progressively learn and develop their leadership capacity and understandings beyond the school context.

The young women were involved in an action research process. They participated in interviews and focus group discussions to share their leadership understandings and information about their leadership contexts. This provided an aspect of reconnaissance to the action research process. We then implemented an intervention strategy where we worked in partnership using a process of co-construction to design the *Revolution* leadership development programme which the young women then participated in. The young women were then involved in the evaluation aspect of the action research and reflected and provided feedback on both the co-construction process, the programme itself and their changing perceptions and understanding about leadership. They then modified the programme.

The research sought answers to the questions: what were young women's experiences and beliefs of leadership, how effective is the process of co-construction in creating a leadership development programme for young women and how effective would this programme be in developing young women's leadership? This final chapter summarizes the research findings and highlights aspects that may be considered limitations to this research. It also emphasizes the contributions that this research makes to the field of educational leadership and outlines implications for those working in the area of youth

leadership development, and more specifically those working alongside young women in youth development contexts. This chapter concludes with recommendations for future research in the area of educational leadership and youth development.

Summary of the Research Findings

The findings from this research indicated that exploring educational leadership from the perspectives of young women in a secondary school context is a complex phenomenon. The findings were divided into three key areas that reflected the research questions outlined in Chapter One.

The first area of findings highlighted the powerful influence of the school context on the young women's leadership beliefs and understandings, and also the opportunities they perceived were available to them to learn and practice leadership. As such, leadership was frequently described as something that helped with the smooth functioning of the school, and linked to the completion of tasks or fulfilling of a specific job description. Within the group there was a diverse range of leadership beliefs and understandings held. Some of these were highly complex and were linked to those students who had opportunities to practice leadership either inside or outside of the school context, supporting key themes in youth development literature, which espouses the need to provide meaningful opportunities for young people to practice their leadership. Interestingly, a level of self-awareness of their own leadership was lacking in many of the young women and even though they may have been completing actions or showing behaviour which could be described as leadership, they did not necessarily see themselves as leaders.

The school context had a significant impact on the opportunities to learn and practice leadership. Leadership was mainly recognized through formal leadership positions. The young women perceived there to be few formal leadership positions available and initially they believed that once these had been filled, there were no more opportunities to show leadership within the school. However, this did change for many of the young

women after they had participated in the leadership programme and they began to see leadership as a way of being rather than leadership being a role tied to a formal position within the school.

The students perceived the school as being the main provider of leadership education and they saw few formal opportunities to learn about leadership. The students viewed those that were provided as disjointed and lacking in relevance to their lives. There were restricted opportunities for aspiring leaders as much of the leadership learning opportunities were concentrated on the students who had been groomed for leadership positions within the school. Students turned to role models both inside and outside of the school as a means of informal leadership learning with students identifying teachers, other students and sports coaches as key sources for learning. Although students identified a number of barriers to leadership learning and practice, with the majority of these relating to school structures and processes and the lack of learning opportunities, students themselves were identified as gate-keepers to leadership and engaged in complex strategies to uphold traditions, enforce the of rite of passage and support the institutional prefect system, through voting systems and election strategies.

The second area of findings related to the process of co-construction where the process was found to be both valuable, and also extremely complex. The findings highlighted the value of co-construction, as it was an effective way to develop a relevant and authentic leadership programme that met the needs of the young women. This approach accommodated and extended a wide range of beliefs and understandings of leadership, enhanced feelings of ownership of the learning process and, above all, was enjoyable. The findings also indicated that this approach was complex. It challenged existing views of teaching and learning and was an active process that required significant efforts to balance input and share ownership between me as the researcher and the young women and also among the young women themselves. The findings highlighted the importance of spending time creating a safe and supportive learning environment within the youth-adult partnership. The process allowed the leadership knowledge of all involved to be developed at a number of levels, however, this was related to the initial starting points of

the individuals. Further complexity was illustrated in the process of co-constructing the leadership programme. The co-construction of the leadership programme could not be separated from the leadership learning that occurred within the programme itself.

The third area of findings related to the effectiveness of the co-construction process and the leadership programme to enhance leadership understanding. The findings illustrated that at the completion of the co-construction process and the *Revolution* leadership programme, the young women showed a broadened and deepened understanding of what leadership could be. This understanding had shifted from a focus on acquiring personal skills in order to complete tasks to a more explicit focus on the personal qualities and abilities of a good leader. Leadership had become about actions and behaviours that guided a person rather than the skills required to complete a task. This new understanding of leadership was evident in the discussions about the qualities of a good leader which came to encompass concepts of building leadership capacity in other people rather than holding a formal leadership position. For this group of young women power was still an important aspect of leadership. However, the original ideas about the need for a leader to show power over others had been replaced with the importance for a good leader to *make other people* powerful and pass on the ability to make change to other people. The research indicated that although the young women showed an increased ability to critique the leadership culture within the school, the developing understandings of leadership did not fit within the existing school context and this led to frustration and, at times, a sense of powerlessness. This required the students to find alternative opportunities to show leadership within their school and their community.

The research illustrated that the young women increased their ability to identify leadership ability in themselves. Prior to the programme, the young women were initially willing to identify leadership abilities in others, but had difficulty identifying these abilities in themselves. The findings indicated that they found it difficult to reflect on their own leadership ability as they felt that they were boasting and not being humble (a key aspect of what they defined as leadership). Moreover, some participants felt that they did not have any specific leadership qualities and it was not until someone else pointed

them out that they recognized their leadership ability. Involvement in the leadership programme resulted in some participants recognizing many of their existing actions as leadership. The young women also showed an increased understanding of where leadership could take place and what leadership could be. The understanding had shifted beyond formal positions within the school and extended to include peer groups, families and simply the way they interacted with others.

In some cases the experience of being involved in the research increased their self-confidence to show leadership in different contexts. After the programme some students spoke of an increased confidence to demonstrate leadership, which they did not have the confidence to do prior to completing the programme. Through the interaction with others and the new knowledge gained from the sessions on learning about leadership and from reflecting upon leadership practice, some students began to formulate a clear picture of their own leadership. This confidence was also apparent in the initiative they showed when they actively sought leadership within the school and asked for the school to assist with funding for the programme.

Potential Value of this Action Research Study

As illustrated in Chapter 2 (Review of Literature), there is a dearth of literature pertaining to students in secondary schools and more specifically young women. Moreover, when literature is present it is in the form of prescribed leadership development programmes, generated from the perspectives of adults. I believe this research makes a significant contribution to the field of youth leadership and specifically, young women and leadership in the following ways:

- This research contributes to the small but growing body of literature focusing on young women's leadership development in secondary schools.
- This research presents the varied perceptions and understandings that young women have about leadership and shows that amongst these varied

understandings there is a level of complexity and sophistication frequently overlooked or unseen by adults in school settings.

- This research highlights the powerful influence of the school context on firstly, the leadership beliefs and understandings of young women and secondly, the opportunities to learn about and practice leadership.
- This research provides critique and insight into an alternative approach to leadership development that acknowledges the importance of context and the knowledge that young women bring with them to the co-construction process.
- This research highlights the value of involving young women in action research processes which assist in creating and evaluating leadership development opportunities in secondary schools.
- This research highlights the value of co-constructing leadership curriculum in schools with students and although complex and challenging acknowledges that such a process provides a number of benefits for those involved.
- This research emphasizes the value of youth-adult partnerships and learning communities and the importance of including student voice in programme design, implementation and evaluation.
- This research illustrates that young women can be active change agents within their school communities when they are provided with support and opportunities to do so.

Limitations of the Research Design

In outlining the findings above, as with all research, questions could be asked of the research design and possible limitations that may have impacted on the research itself.

While in no way should they limit the value or worthiness of this study, there are several aspects to this research that deserve mention.

Within social research there is often a desire for data to be generalized (Bryman, 2001). The research methodology and the action research approaches reflected in this research were designed to meet the particular needs of the young women in this research. Consequently, the design was unique to this research and the sample size was small. Therefore, data cannot be generalized to other populations of young women in other schools. Furthermore, as the research was directed at young women and it must be recognized that young men in secondary schools may have different leadership experiences. However, though this could be viewed as a limitation, it is also a strength of this research. Kincheloe and Tobin (2006) believe that researchers who are cognizant of the complexity of research understand that “knowledge producers, teachers and students perceive the world from a centre located within themselves, shaped by the social and cultural context in which they operate, and framed by languages that contain within them tacit views of the world” (p. 9). Focusing on this small group of young women in a particular school context enabled me to explore in great detail their specific context and individual beliefs and perceptions with a richness that may have been lost if it had been attempted with a larger group. The small number of participants allowed for in-depth interviewing and interactive focus groups. These methods fostered the richness and personal nature required for the co-construction and action research processes. Such an approach has resulted in a detailed and rich account of young women’s beliefs and understandings of leadership and the contexts in which they exercised their leadership and brought young women’s voices into educational leadership theorizing.

This research was also bound by the context of the secondary school and this could be seen as a limitation. It could be argued that young people may experience leadership differently based on the cultural context, and this research focused specifically on one cultural context. The influence of the Catholic Church was evident in the young women’s responses and indicated unique features of this cultural context. Furthermore, due to the nature of the secondary school terms and holiday breaks, there was a need to

design the research and, therefore, the leadership programme to take certain school events within this cultural context into account. This included making time for exam weeks when students were off-campus preparing for study, and for school holidays. This ultimately shaped the structure of the leadership programme and did not allow for all of the aspects that the young women wanted included or considered to be integrated into the planned programme.

Some may view utilizing an alternative pedagogical model such as co-construction a limitation as it challenged traditional ways of teaching and learning. The findings highlighted the challenges and success of utilizing this approach to support leadership development. It could be argued that such an approach could be useful in a variety of contexts and have implications for leadership development for women at all levels. However, as indicated by this research, to embark on such an approach would require considerable planning and the allocation of adequate time to ensure that all voices were fairly heard and that the co-construction process was not rushed or unfairly dominated by group members. Furthermore, just as this research was contextualized within one school, the leadership programme that was created suited this particular group of young women. Consequently, if the research was to be repeated in another context or school, even, as illustrated with another group of students, the results could be different. This is what I believe to be the strength of such an approach – the ability to create *contextually relevant* and meaningful leadership learning.

Some may view the aspect of student self-selection into this research as a limitation because it was only those students who viewed themselves as leaders or desired to hold leadership positions within the school that chose to be included. This may exclude some other students from being involved. Interestingly, from the findings it was apparent that some students, although engaging in complex leadership practice, did not see themselves as leaders which may be problematic in processes of self-selection. However, for this research, self-selection was one of the directives made by the school and was stipulated in the conditions when the Board of Trustees granted permission for the research to be undertaken. This process of self-selection was also part of the random selection

procedures. The random selection processes mentioned above determined the diversity of the participants involved in the research. It is important to acknowledge that because of this the sample was not representative of the diversity of cultures that were present in the student population of the school. In saying this, it may not be possible to get a sample representation of the ethnicities of the student population through alternative selection processes.

Although students were involved in the action research process it could be argued that they did not necessarily see themselves as researchers, rather, they saw themselves as participating in the research. In retrospect, it may have been useful to outline the research differently, showing the young women how the process of action research was to take and the roles that they would play within it. This may have influenced how they viewed themselves within the research. However, as Grudnoff (2007) suggests, rather than viewing these aspects as possible limitations to the research, they could be seen as possibilities for developing and creating avenues for further research.

Implications for Future Research, Policy and Practice

Theorizing about educational leadership is essential if changes in practice are to be made. This research has the potential to enhance the understanding of those working with young women in the area of leadership development. I believe the findings have highlighted a number of key areas that create implications for schools, teachers and researchers.

Traversing the wide variety of leadership beliefs and understandings held by this group of young women has highlighted the significant role that the school plays in influencing what young women believe leadership to be. Young women have varied and sometimes highly complex understandings about leadership. This has significant implications for the ways that learning opportunities should be developed and presented to them in schools.

Adult designed leadership courses may provide an impoverished leadership development experiences for young women. The *Revolution* leadership programme in this research was designed in partnership with young women and marked differences in programme design and content choice were evident when their voices were involved and acted upon in the design process. Context has been highlighted as being an essential consideration when approaching leadership development with young women. Because of this, young women need to be involved in co-constructing their leadership learning experiences to ensure the experiences are relevant to their leadership needs and provides a signal to those designing youth development approaches to be cognizant of young people's experiences knowledge about their contextual leadership needs.

This research highlighted this alternative leadership development approach, co-construction was successful in generating a relevant leadership programme for young women. This research highlighted the complexities of using such a process which was important, as historically, co-construction has been presented as a linear process that is unproblematic. Furthermore, critique has been sparse within the New Zealand context. This research illustrated how this characteristic of complexity in itself was an element of its success. Schools need to invest time in developing such processes. This will include professional development for staff to ensure that change happens at a systems level and not solely with the individual students, and using processes such as co-construction in classroom contexts so that students may familiarise themselves with these non-traditional approaches to teaching and learning.

Schools and more specifically, teachers could be encouraged to enlarge their views about what young people can do in schools and create space for student voice to be incorporated in planning and decision making within the school context. However, as Hart (1992) has highlighted such actions need to be authentic and illustrate to young people that their ideas and suggestions are taken seriously. This increased understanding is essential to further inform processes which schools use to prepare young women for leadership responsibilities, not only within the school context but beyond the school gates.

This research also draws attention to the traditional youth leadership development approaches currently used in schools and illustrates an alternative approach to better meet the needs of young women in schools. Schools need to reflect upon the structures within the schools which promote and enable leadership, and also address those which may be barriers for young women to learn about and practice leadership. There is also a responsibility for both adults and students to critique the ways that leadership is presented within the school. Adults and students should be encouraged to explore and critique the messages young women receive about leadership which tend to marginalize young women in leadership contexts. This critique should extend to ensuring that curriculum and texts are gender inclusive and provide examples of strong women role models (Alton-Lee & Densem, 1997).

Shifting conversations about and actions of educational leadership beyond the principal's office and reconceptualizing educational leadership so that it moves beyond these traditional notions is essential for young people to being involved as active agents of change. To support this reconceptualization, educational leadership must therefore be viewed as an all-encompassing concept that expands to consider all educational settings and involves leadership in a variety of frameworks, for example, both within and beyond the school gates. This vision must also be seen in action by both the staff and the students within the school. In doing so, the valuable aspect of role modelling for young women can be reinforced.

With the concept of educational leadership changing and evolving to meet the changes in schools and communities, Harris (2005) believes that current theorizing about educational leadership is shifting and states;

...the traditional view of leadership as that associated within individual role or responsibility is gradually being replaced by alternative leadership theories that extol the virtues of multiple sources of leadership. (p. xi)

This paradigmatic shift is a prime opportunity to provide space for young women to enter the conversations about educational leadership and work in partnership with adults to firstly be involved in meaningful decision-making within the school and also allow them to create learning experiences that better meet their needs and extend their understandings of leadership beyond the confines of the classroom. However, also highlighted in the literature, the practice of distributing leadership throughout the school to include students in meaningful leadership roles which allow them to contribute to decisions about their learning are few.

Areas for Future Research

The findings from this research have highlighted some important areas for possible future research. These aspects are summarized as;

- Extending the process of co-constructing leadership development curriculum in schools to include both students and teachers. In this way, change can occur at the systemic level rather than at the individual level. By doing so, the process may be more sustainable and contextual notions of leadership can be addressed and critiqued.
- Investigating the role of young women as researchers rather than solely programme developers. Although as indicated in this research there were difficulties in this area due to the perceived power imbalance between the adults and the students, it may also prove to be insightful and add to our understandings about the active role that young women can consciously play within an action research process and the impact this may have on the implementation of leadership development opportunities in secondary schools.
- Investigating the impact of leadership development opportunities in schools through longitudinal research which examines the impact of past learning

experiences on young women and their leadership once they have left the school context.

In summary, it can be seen that the responsibilities that lie with school leaders, staff and the young women themselves are immense. Due to the significant influence of context on young women's leadership understandings and practices as educational leaders, we have an obligation to critique the traditional leadership structures of our schools that we present to them. We should aim to seek to model democratic practices within these structures that allow for young women to have a voice in planning their leadership learning and participation, an aspect not frequently planned for or actioned in many school contexts (Brooker & MacDonald, 1999; Cook-Sather, 2002). This involves reaching beyond formal leadership roles, and shifting leadership to transcend age barriers and traditional patriarchal school structures. It is by ensuring that young women are central to the planning of the leadership development approaches and that their voices are valued and acted upon that leadership learning experiences can be designed in ways that actually means something to them now and in the future. There must be a shift in thought surrounding the leadership of schools, with schools encouraging a distributed form of leadership which supports power-sharing (Bishop & Glynn, 1999) and the creation of dynamic working relationships within the school walls and beyond. Carlsson-Paige and Lantieri (2005) insist;

We need to insist that schools enable all young people to have their ethical, political, social and emotional selves welcomed; their spirits uplifted; and their capacity for active meaningful learning fully engaged. These exceptional practices need to become the norm. Compassionate, insightful, and committed young people and adults will learn how to tackle the profound political, emotional, social and spiritual issues of our time. (p. 102)

Schools and young women alike must recognize the need to break down the boundaries between traditional school structures and the leadership needs of young women. It is only when these boundaries are broken down that we will see an increase in the

participation of young women leading beyond the school gates, prepared and willing to share their voices and play active roles in the community on both a local, national and global scale.

What I believe is an essential learning point for educational practitioners is the recognition of how important it is to engage young women in the development of meaningful and progressive leadership learning experiences. Through seeking and valuing student voice, conversations between adults and young women within learning communities can enrich the planning and content involved in leadership learning opportunities. This can ensure that the experience is relevant to the lives of those involved yet still be grounded in essential leadership frameworks and knowledge that ensures leadership learning expands beyond the school walls. This will involve, on the part of many schools, a serious investigation into how they prepare young women to take on leadership roles both within the schools and beyond the school gates.

EPILOGUE

Reading the literature studies related to youth leadership development, the concept although complex, always seemed to be represented in the literature as a straightforward and linear process and frequently, the approaches reported on illustrated a clear beginning and end with the outcomes being obvious. However, in the case of this research I have found that this was not necessarily the case. With the initial research process over, unplanned events that happened after the evaluation of the leadership programme have further illustrated the complexities of addressing leadership development with young women. These complexities were associated with the end of the research process and the importance of developing a sense of continuity that was generated by the young women.

Although unplanned, these events are both exciting and challenging. However, in my aim to 'do myself out of a job' the process created a number of personal tensions. I have found it difficult to let go of being involved in the *Revolution* programme. Not just the programme, but also the whole process. Just as many of the students commented on the sense of ownership, belonging and responsibility, I too, had similar feelings. Nevertheless, upon reflection, it was important for the students to sustain and run the process themselves.

The year after the *Revolution* programme had taken place, a number of the students volunteered to teach the programme to a new group of students. This programme ran over two terms and involved 20 students. Potential students for the programme were selected to participate based on a small letter of application, which was made on a form generated by the original graduates. The graduates then selected students they deemed as 'suitable candidates' from the large number of applicants. Interestingly, the young women themselves acted in ways that could have been considered gate-keeping. They restricted entry to the programme to senior students only, even though the comments they had made in the research indicated that leadership learning needed to happen earlier in the school and should be open to all students, no matter what age. Now that they had

reached the senior levels of schooling, they had completed their 'rite of passage' and believed others should do the same.

My role in this second running of *Revolution* was mainly as overseer of sessions as I checked session plans for safety and cohesion. I was also someone to organize resources, bring the afternoon tea and manage the behaviour of any off-task students. It was not easy handing over the reins to the students and letting them teach the sessions, facilitate the discussions and plan the activities for the following week. Sometimes, I felt that I could perhaps do a better job, especially with questioning, probing and guiding the discussions. Although the graduates had increased their leadership knowledge from participating in the leadership programme the previous year, their knowledge was not necessary sufficient to effectively run in-depth discussions. Even so, as the time went on, my role even further diminished. Students began organizing their own resources; someone had even generated a roster for the afternoon tea. To follow is an account of the moment I realized that *Revolution* could carry on without me and I had done myself out of a job.

The Political becomes the Personal

The year after this research was completed the Revolution graduates were running the programme for a new group of students. Three weeks into the new Revolution leadership programme, I arrived at the school dragging a large bag filled with blindfolds, short lengths of wood (someone emailed me at the last minute for blindfolds and 12 pieces of wood to make a bridge). I walked into the hall and was taken back by the noise, the laughter, and the activity.

"We started early today Miss 'cause class finished after the senior assembly", a student yells out to me.

Students are milling around with jerseys covering their eyes. There's lots of laughter and shouting.

"No problem", I reply, feeling a little hurt that they had not waited for me.

With the blindfolds fashioned out of school uniforms, one group is underway enjoying themselves as they ask questions and sort themselves into order. On the other side of the hall another group is busy building a bridge out of chairs and rubbish bins. Shrieks of laughter punctuate the serious problem-solving discussion and questioning. The gear I carry in now seems redundant. Just like me really. I take a seat and watch the afternoon unfold. In one corner of the hall I see young women shyly offering answers to questions put to them and then turning these into a role-play performance. Another group solves problems and tries to construct a tower out of balloons and newspapers. The planning process is intense, students begin to talk over each other. A graduate reminds them, "It's important that everyone's voice is heard. Maybe we need a talking stick to hold so that the only one talking is the one holding the stick". I smile to myself. This statement was coming from the noisiest graduate; she catches my eye and grins.

I see graduates listening carefully to the younger students, sharing stories and encouraging others to do the same. A group is creating a poster on what leadership can be. "Like a thing you do, not just the position" I hear a voice say.

"Yeah, so what might that look like?", a graduate questions and I am surprised by this, as usually, the questioning lacks this depth.

"It might be just acting how you want others to act" someone contributes.

"Yeah, like a role model."

"So how do we show that in our poster?"

I hear them responding thoughtfully to offerings from the new students, making positive comments and smiling with a confidence I have never seen before. I watch friendships unfold and strengthen. I feel a sense of pride as I see a student who was previously quiet and shy playing a key role in running activities and facilitating a discussion.

I sense a place of belonging for these students. A group so diverse, so assorted it seems to work so well. This sense of belonging is strong for this group - but, now, not for me. I realize that I am not needed here. After that last session I walk out of the hall knowing more about myself and more about my research than I ever expected.

*I have come to realize how important it is to form respectful and authentic relationships.
I have experienced the powerful nature of collaborative learning
I know that young women are able to be active change agents when given the opportunity*

*I know that Revolution will go on without me
I know that there will be ups and downs, challenges and celebrations
I know that I will be sorry not to share these with them*

I did not know that Revolution would be so successful and become such a big part of my heart.

In further email discussions and chance meetings throughout the months following Revolution, many of the young women expressed how the leadership programme had been a significant event in their lives. Two students even selected their university studies based on the decision that they wanted to stay in the city and be able to return to the school the following year to assist with running Revolution for a new cohort of students. To me this was evidence that the impact of this learning opportunity ran more deeply than any research could ever highlight.

*They are young women
They are leaders
They know how it feels to be talked at, judged and measured
They now know how it feels to lead conversations, design learning and have agency
They do not know what the future may bring and know how society will continue to influence them when they leave this school...*

But perhaps they have a greater understanding of themselves as young women leaders and the significant role they can play both formally and informally working alongside other young women, in the future.

A FINAL REFLECTION

The personal becomes the political

A collection of small [in]significant moments that have shaped my leadership views

My involvement in this research has encouraged me to reflect upon my own leadership understandings and beliefs. Having being immersed in the leadership beliefs and understandings of the young women in this research, I feel it is timely to reflect on my own leadership journey and examine what has shaped my reasons for choosing to research leadership development with young women.

This is the first time I have stopped and reflected on my place as a woman in education, as a woman leading and showing leadership and as a woman empowering other young women to lead. It wasn't easy to work out what the main factors were that brought me here, to this moment, to now. I noted down notes the events, people and experiences that have punctuated my life. But I was frustrated by a lack of sense; my journey seemed neither easy nor logical. A collection of moments, and memories demanded my attention and created a stream of consciousness as I '*became conscious*' of being in leadership and ultimately my reasons for working alongside young women in the area of leadership development. The following events have been powerful in shaping my beliefs about leadership and my lenses in which I view leadership development and opportunities for young women and myself. Each story offers an element of reflexivity and emerging understanding to my own leadership foundation and draws attention to how I believe my past experiences have influenced my approach to this research.

The Beginning - I promise, on my honour – to never be like that

I knew it was wrong, the knife in the pocket of my uniform felt smooth and warm. Most people were outside now. I was alone. I wandered over, glancing around, seeing no one, I knelt down. Carefully, I etched in my initials, firstly the 'R' and then jerkily the bends

of an 'S', (looking more like a lightening bolt) into the white and red paint that was thickly lacquered over the wood. Adrenaline pumping, I skittered over the wooden floorboards to the cupboard. Opening it, the stench of damp hessian rope and burnt toast fill my nostrils. Pushing the sooty camp cookers to the side, I pick out a bottle of methylated spirits and a packet of matches and sauntered back towards my pile of wood shavings. Squeezing the meths from the bottle, I light the liquid pool I have created. Whhhhhoofff. Flames erupt out of nowhere. I run outside, breathless, frightened. With my back to the side of the building I wait outside. By now I am smiling.

I was expelled from Brownies at the age of 10. I think I was the first person in New Zealand to be expelled from such a benign service-learning, not-for-profit organisation. People made a really big deal and it was even written about in the small local paper that reported lost animals, advertised the secondhand goods sale at the retirement home. To me, all I had done was liven things up by carving my initials in the top of the wooden toadstool, dousing it with methylated spirits from the Scout cupboard and setting it on fire. Maybe it was because people from my 'type of family' did not do those sorts of crass and unrestrained things. Or maybe it was because the old wooden toadstool, painted in flaking red and white enamel, held some mysterious significance that I failed to understand. So significant and so powerful, that each week we danced around it singing and pleading, "Oh Lord our God, thy children call, grant us thy peace and bless us all". It was only years later I realized that the 'peace' we were pleading for was actually peace and not the 'piece' of cake we received for afternoon tea with watered down cordial, straight after we sang this.

The thing I remember the most was Tawny Owl, my Brownie *Leader*, interrogating me afterwards. Her porky finger wagging in my face, yelling, spittle landing on my cheek and her eyes disappearing behind her photochromic glasses. I knew I did not like her before that day. I watched her bully, manipulate, tease, isolate, torture. But I never knew the words to describe it. I just knew it was not right and knew I did not ever want to be like that. I later joined the Scouts, and became the first female Scout in New Zealand. I never looked back. At the age of 14, I was a Chief Scout – one of the highest honours

and I proudly led my troop to their first international Jamboree. I won the award for fire lighting and group safety.

I am valued by others

I am valuing something that is real to me

I am in my element

I am insightful

I am using my experiences

I am sorry about the toadstool

The Middle - Blind leading the blind

“Go for it, you’d be great”, Jen said.

I had only been at my new school for three days and I was being urged by a new friend to try out for a prefect position. “Nah, I dunno, I’m just new, no one even knows I exist”, I replied, “I wouldn’t even know what to do”.

I did not know what a prefect was or what they did. We did not have them at my old country school. Someone said, you get a badge, you run meetings, plan stuff. I had 5 minutes to write a speech on why people should vote for me as a student leader. Time passed in an instant, my pen did not work, I borrowed a piece of paper and a pencil to scratch some notes down. Before I knew it I was standing in front of the biggest crowd I have ever seen. A sea of faces, senior students, over 400 of them sitting in the gym, teachers lining the seats on the edges. Words tumbled out of my mouth. Who was the new girl? I saw people whisper to each other. My face was hot, I knew I was sweating. Staff nodded in agreement at my statements, students laughed at my jokes. I did not know what a prefect did; I had no formal knowledge about leadership. No one had taught me to lead...but based on what I had experienced and seen around me, I shared my ideas on what I could offer, passionately, honestly.

I can’t remember what I said, but I was voted in, over five others. I had no idea that this was going to be one of *those* opportunities that opened doors for me throughout life. If only this happened for everyone. There have been many serendipitous events like this

that have allowed for this pathway to appear. I have grown up in a family where education and achievement was important. Independence was valued. My parents supported me to stand by my own beliefs and make sense of the world in a way that meant something to me. At secondary school, leadership ‘came to me’ by default through sports teams, class captaincies and prefect roles. But when I reflect back, I realize no one ever formally taught me about leadership. I learnt about leadership from the people around me. I have been lucky enough to have fantastic role models.

It seems at each turn on my life’s pathway, at each chapter, for example, childhood, school, university study, motherhood, there has been someone who has been important in my leadership journey. Some walked alongside me, some were there constantly, others faded in and out. I have been blessed to have wonderful strong women role models in my life, who I believe have shaped the way I see leadership and the way I show leadership. They have taught me that I have a choice about who I am and what I can be and do in the world. They have modelled an amazing level of kindness, nurturing, caring, knowledge, friendship, morality, gentleness, strength, passion and desire for fairness and social justice. Some have saved my life, some have saved my soul, and others just saved me the last biscuit on the plate. It made me realize as I started reflecting on my leadership, that I have been in a truly privileged position and not all young women have these opportunities or role models. That has shaped my work into researching young women and leadership development in secondary schools. In seeing such wonderful women in action, I have also come to question some aspects of how I now view the world and view leadership, how I want to lead and be lead. It has been these experiences, both positive and not so positive, that have taught me about my leadership.

I am grateful

I am privileged

I have been lead

I have been taught

I hope I do the same for others

The Present – Tensions of my own leadership in action

The metal gate swings open. In one hand I clutch a tin batman lunch box, a raincoat, a schoolbag shaped like a crocodile. I hold a crumpled signed permission slip for allowing peanut consumption at meal times [OMG what is this world coming to??] between my lips. It's stained with coffee on one end where my cup overturned that morning (and now has lipstick on the other). I inhale the caffeine through my teeth, feeling like a drug addict in need of a fix. Oh well, they are lucky to even get it back today, I think to myself. It's been sitting on the floor of the car for over a week now. In the other hand I hold the soft, warm hand of my son, Benjamin. His flesh presses into mine. He skips along beside me, "Heeeellooooo Leeeeee", he calls out to his friend. Shrieks and yells get louder. I feel a little like I am visiting a zoo. Not so much because of the animals jostling for a space at the gate, but more so, because we have become the attraction, just for that moment.

Ben heads off with Leo in the direction of the paint table. I watch him go, getting taller each day (apparently, but it's hard to tell). His blonde head bobs behind the playground in search of a bike to ride (they say he is the fastest here on the bikes). Turning, I head inside and deliver food supplies to the fridge, replenish nappy stocks in the change room, sign rosters to say Ben is there, catch up with a teacher about sleep times and request they lay off the face painting for a week or so in order for Ben's rash to clear up.

I head back outside to say goodbye. He runs over and clutches at my skirt, begging me not to go. Tears well [mine], tears fall [his]. He hiccups 'mummy stay with Ben'. I reply 'mummy has to go to work'. A crèche carer comes and picks him up [my heart hurts - that should be me]. She waves goodbye and says 'mummy will be back later'. The gate shuts behind me. I can still hear him crying as I cross the road. Ten minutes later, I am standing in front of a class of 160 first year pre-service teachers giving a lecture on building relationships with students and the importance of the ethic of care.

I have a wonderful job, great friends and a beautiful family. I am considered a role model for young people by many community groups and enjoy working alongside youth

to assist with their leadership development. But recently I have experienced a tension. My ability to show leadership in action has been greatly influenced by the many choices and sacrifices I have made, and the opportunities I have been presented with. Since when did I want it all? How and why did I make this choice? Am I trying to hold my own, prove myself in a career frequently dominated by men? Have I, am I, doing the right thing? I ask myself these questions most days, sometimes more than once. From my office I can see the crèche building and playground. I watch my son catch and throw, run and jump, dress as a lion and explore the garden. He falls, someone picks him up. He pushes someone off a bike, someone reprimands him. What is it that makes me feel that my work, my role modelling for others is worth so much more than caring for my son during the day? How much value do I place on this aspect of my life? Reflecting on this situation I feel a tension. I have been brought up to believe I can be anything and do anything I chose to. The support from family, the role models throughout my life have reinforced this message. However, sometimes, the contexts I am in do not allow for this. As a woman, the decisions I have to make about family, work opportunities and lifestyle can be difficult. I do not see many men having to make these decisions. I also see most of these decisions relating solely to the individual. I reflect and see that systems have not changed enough to support me.

I feel like a fraud.

I feel guilty.

I feel heavy in my heart.

I wish to God things were different.

The aim of providing this collection of stories is to highlight the celebrations difficulties and challenges I have faced as a woman leader. To share these stories has allowed me to make known the different facets of my life from childhood through to adulthood which have influenced my leadership opportunities, my leadership development and, overall, my view of myself as a woman leader. My intent when writing these stories was to share some moments that have influenced my life and then to bring them all together into some wonderful thematic representation - cleverly connected, awe-inspiring, provoking, and

challenging to form a foundation on which to launch this thesis. The flaw in my plan is just this. I cannot bring them together. There is no logical, overarching theme. No obvious threads. No comparative analysis. Perhaps *this* is the theme. The diverse, sometimes chaotic nature of my leadership as a woman.

As it stands this story represents the complexity of leadership and the challenges one woman has experienced and continues to face. Cathartic as this writing has been, the tensions remain, the experiences forever shaping interactions, perceptions, and visions for my leadership in the future. As I completed this research, I came to realize it was these stories, which influenced my starting point, my choice to work with young women. My aim was to empower, to help them become conscious of their leadership and the possible challenges they may face. These stories also influenced my research approach and the lenses through which I viewed the happenings and events within the research process. This research also created a starting point to seek and *'become conscious of'* my own leadership.

I am a woman

I am a leader

I know envy, what it feels like to seek and crave.

I know guilt, the weight of a heart, a tear in an eye and a hand in my hand.

I know influence, what not to do, a shifting identity

I know experience, privileges, pathways, what opportunity provides, takes away

I did not know that writing about these things would be so hard.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Letter to Board of Trustees

University of Waikato
School of Education
Department of Sport and Leisure Studies
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton

20 March 2007

Dear Board of Trustees Members and Chairperson,

My name is Rachel Saunders and I am currently completing my Doctorate of Education at the University of Waikato. My areas of interest for research are young women's perceptions of leadership and utilizing students' voices in the construction of leadership programmes. My ultimate aim is to work alongside students to develop a leadership programme that meets their needs and deliver this within a secondary school.

I am writing to ask permission from the Board of Trustees to have access the senior students at the [school] for a series of 6 one-hour focus group meetings with volunteer students in Year 12. The purpose of this contact is to work alongside these students to develop a leadership programme suited to their needs, which they will then run in year 13 for year 12 students in 2008.

The following account is the proposed details of my study stating the title, the purpose and the ethical considerations that will be made.

The Co-construction of Youth Leadership Programmes: An investigation into how youth leadership programmes can be developed through using students' voices.

My research interest is focused on the co-construction of a youth leadership initiative for young women. My previous experience in this area stems from being contacted in 2003 by the Principal of girls' secondary school, to work as a mentor and develop a leadership programme for senior students. This programme was developed because it was observed that the students entering the senior school that year, lacked leadership skills and it was thought that they did not have the positive role models amongst past students to assist in the development of these skills. However, when presenting the leadership programme that I had created to this group of young women, I learnt that adult perceptions of leadership and leadership programmes may not meet the needs of young people (Saunders, 2005). A possible solution could be to involve the students in the planning of

the leadership curriculum. The programme developed from an initial one-off discussion forum about leadership, through to a half year programme that addressed individual leadership abilities, perceptions and certain goal setting projects. It was during this time that I met with students on a fortnightly basis in the format of an informal focus group to share ideas about leadership, develop some leadership skills, encourage students reflect on their own abilities and contribute to the wider school community. I used a variety of strategies, many revolving around the process of adventure-based-learning, allowing students to develop team and group skills and personal/group reflection processes.

In summary, my interest which began as a curiosity of how to enhance leadership has developed into something more structured, an academic interest grounded in theories of co-construction and action research. By listening to the voices of students, the process by which young women can learn about leadership, can be tailored to further meet their needs. I believe that using co-construction process, young people and adults can work in partnership to create leadership programmes that meet their needs and address the contexts in which they exercise leadership.

Objectives of the Project

- To explore the perceptions that young women have of leadership within the secondary school environment.
- By using the process of co-construction, students and researchers will develop a leadership initiative that meets the needs of the student population.
- To support and develop community/ professional links relevant to the researchers teaching and research areas.
- To generate research knowledge and share findings through publication

Why is this project important?

In the past young people have participated in leadership training programmes, grounded mainly in the theories, views and ideas of the adults delivering the programme. Through group discussions and individual interviews, this research will explore the perceptions of leadership from the views of young women. This study will contribute to our understanding of the effect that co-construction may have on the development of such an initiative and the use of students' voices in future project design. Using a combination of face-to-face focus groups and individual interviews with student participants, the study aims to gain a better understanding of how the process of co-construction can contribute to the development of a leadership initiative that meets the needs of this particular group of students today.

Who is involved in this project?

15-20 Year 12 students

Procedure for recruiting participants and obtaining informed consent

- Initial info meeting with Senior Management of potential school

- Official letter to Board of Trustees seeking permission for project
- Parents informed in school newsletter
- Initial meeting with senior students requesting their voluntary participation, and sharing of information (Appendix C). Students have the right to decline or not be involved in the co-construction process.
- Students will complete a consent form to participate in the project (Appendix D). This will also require the permission from their parents.

What Procedures will the students be involved in?

Focus group discussions (5) (Schedule -Appendix E)

The sorts of themes might be explored through these procedures are individual perceptions of effective leadership skills, perceived opportunities for leadership activity and how leadership skills can be best developed and used within the school/boarding hostel environment. As themes start to emerge from the discussions and are analyzed, this information will be shared with students to confirm accuracy. From these six focus group discussions, students will be involved in three themes - sharing ideas about how they perceive leadership roles and their own experiences, discussing opportunities to learn leadership skills and be trained to be a leader, and eventually constructing a programme that they feel best meets their needs.

The focus group discussions will be held in a classroom on the school grounds on Tuesday evenings after student preparatory time. This will be from 3.30-4.30.

Individual Interview (2) – Appendix F and G

Each participant in this study will be interviewed at the beginning of the leadership programme and again at the end. During this time, interview schedules will be used. These will be shared with the students prior to the interview so that they know what questions will be asked and what areas will be addressed. The interviews will take approximately 30 minutes each.

How will information and materials produced in the course of the research be handled?

Data entry and analysis will be conducted with pseudonyms only. All information gathered in focus groups will be held in a locked filing cabinet the office of Rachel Saunders at University of Waikato. Any computer-generated writing will be kept in a password-protected file within my computer.

What are the ethical issues?

Access to participants

All participation is voluntary and students will be approached after the Board of Trustees of the nominated school has granted permission for the project to take place, placing them in the position of loco-parentis. Parental permissions will also need to be granted.

Informed consent

Sought in the cover letter (attached) for the focus groups and reiterated at any follow up contact. A letter of introduction to the project outlines the participant's rights to not participate; student participation is requested on a volunteer basis and not a forced requirement, and if involved the students will again be reminded that they have the right to withdraw up to the writing of the first draft. This is built into the consent protocol and into any communications with participants. There will also be contact details for my supervisor Noeline Alcorn if they have any concerns that they feel uncomfortable expressing to me directly.

Confidentiality

All participants' confidentiality will be respected with each being identified by an assumed name, with no direct link to their identity or the school involved.

Participants' right to decline

This right is stated and reiterated at the beginning and throughout the project. Negotiated ground rules will be created during the first group sessions (for example – having the right to pass during any group discussion). This is to ensure that participants feel confident and safe expressing their opinion and experiences.

Arrangements for participants to receive information

Participants will be kept informed through a transparent process. This process will include: initial contact and information sharing sessions, details of what will be happening in the group discussions, the encouraging of students to bring along their own ideas, the researcher being present on site to guide students and answer questions. They will receive information at the group workshops.

Use of the information

For completion of Dissertation for Doctorate of Education
Development of youth leadership initiative for the school involved
Research output in national and international journals

Potential conflicts of interest

It will be made clear to students the time that is required to be involved. It will also be made clear that there will be no advantages/disadvantages/ill effect placed on the individuals for taking part or choosing not to take part. Group confidentiality will be a stated guideline.

A proposed timeframe could be as follows:

Permission and ethical considerations

March	25	Contact school Principal / about initial project thoughts
April	20	Contact school Board of Trustees for approval for project
April	23	Contact school with information for parent newsletter
April	25	University of Waikato Ethical Consideration Application

Co-construction and creation of the leadership programme:

May	22	Initial Group Meeting – information sharing and informed consent
May	29	Focus group 1 Lunchtime Interviews X 2 X 3 days (6 in total)
June	05	Focus group 2 Lunchtime Interviews X 2 X 3 days (6 in total)
June	12	Focus group 3 Lunchtime interviews X3
June	17	Focus group 4

Delivery of the programme

July	17	Session 1
July	24	Session 2
July	31	Session 3
Aug	07	Session 4
Aug	14	Session 5
Aug	21	Session 6
Aug	28	Session 7 Interviews 2 X3 days (6 in total)
Sept	04	Focus group 5 - Evaluation of programme + 3 interviews
Sept	11	Interviews 2 X 3 days (6 in total)

In summary, [name of school] is a unique environment that is ever changing and dynamic in its entity. With the introduction of Hostel Prefects this year, it may be a prime opportunity for senior students to gain an insight into the wider world of leadership, in order to successfully work together and contribute to the wider school community. I eagerly await your reply.

Kind Regards

Rachel Saunders
University of Waikato
School of Education
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton

07 8384500 ext. 7731
rachs@waikato.ac.nz

Appendix B – School Newsletter Brief**School Newsletter Information Brief - Student Leadership Learning**

A group of year 12 students have been invited to be part of a research project with the University of Waikato. During this project the students will work with a researcher to co-create a leadership programme. The students will participate in the leadership programme during term three and then evaluate it. After the evaluation, students will recommend and make changes and improvements before they run the programme for another group of students. The aim of the project is to create a relevant and meaningful leadership programmes for secondary students that meet the needs of today's youth.

Appendix C – Student information Sheet

University of Waikato
School of Education
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton

20 March 2007

Dear Senior Student,

My name is Rachel Saunders and I am currently completing my Doctorate of Education at the University of Waikato. In the next six months I am working towards the completion of a research project. The purpose of my research is to explore young women's perceptions of leadership and work alongside them to create a leadership programme.

I am inviting you to be part of this research project. It will involve us working together as a group to explore your ideas, views, beliefs and perceptions of your own abilities and training in the area of leadership. The ultimate purpose is to work together to generate a leadership programme that best meets your needs.

If you choose to volunteer to be a part of this project, you will become a member of a focus group who will participate in a series of five meetings. You will also be interviewed at the beginning and at the end of the project. These interviews are about 30 minutes each.

These will be on:

May	22	Initial Group Meeting – info sharing and informed consent
May	29	Focus group 1 3.30-4.30pm
June	05	Focus group 2 3.30-4.30pm
June	12	Focus group 3 3.30-4.30pm
June	17	Focus group 4 3.30-4.30pm

In term three, we will then run the leadership programme and evaluate it.

Delivery of the programme

July	17	Session 1	3.30-4.30pm
July	24	Session 2	3.30-4.30pm
July	31	Session 3	3.30-4.30pm

Aug	07	Session 4	3.30-4.30pm
Aug	14	Session 5	3.30-4.30pm
Aug	21	Session 6	3.30-4.30pm
Aug	28	Session 7	3.30-4.30pm
Sept	04	Focus group 5 - Evaluation of programme	
Sept	11	Interviews	

The five focus group meetings will run from 3.30pm to 4.30pm in the senior student lounge. The purpose of these meetings is to explore your perceptions and beliefs about leadership, share ideas and address how programmes can be structured to best address your needs.

Complete confidentiality will be ensured throughout the study by assigning you a pseudonym. At no time will either you or the schools name be recognized or used and if you choose to be involved in the study you will be asked to sign a consent form prior to these sessions. The findings of this study may be presented at education conferences and submitted to professional education journals for publication. If this happens your confidentiality will be maintained.

You may choose not to be involved in this study and can withdraw at any time up until August 28th 2007. It is after this time that the writing of the study will begin.

If you have any questions, please contact me at any time on (07) 8499188 or 027 2266762. I will be pleased in answer any questions that you have. My project supervisor is Professor Noeline Alcorn, at the University of Waikato, School of Education and she can be contacted if you have any further enquiries on 07 8384500. Thank you for your time and interest.

Kind Regards

Rachel Saunders

University of Waikato
School of Education
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton

07 8384500 ext. 7731 rachs@waikato.ac.nz

Appendix D – Student Consent Form

Youth leadership in the secondary school: Co-constructing leadership programmes with young women for leadership within and beyond the school gates.

Contact numbers of Investigators:

Researcher: Rachel Saunders (07) 8499188

Dissertation Supervisor: Professor Noeline Alcorn (07) 8384500

Student and Parent Consent Form

I, _____ (print full name), agree to participate in the study, *Youth leadership in the secondary school: Co-constructing leadership programmes with young women for leadership within and beyond the school gates*.

I understand that my participation in this study will require the following processes. I agree to these as stated:

One 20 minute information session and five focus group interviews, lasting approximately one hour, in which I will be asked to explore my beliefs and perceptions on leadership.

Field notes and digital tape recordings will be taken through these meetings and any worksheets or group notes which are completed will be collected by the researcher

My confidentiality will be maintained in this study by the following procedures:

I will be identified by a pseudonym in all field notes and in the dissertation and in any presentation or publication of this study.

The researcher, Rachel Saunders, is the only person who will know both my identity and my pseudonym

Field notes will also be available to the supervisors/examiners, however, they will not be aware of my identity. All information gained from the focus group sessions process will

be used for illustrative purposes only. Any quotations used in publication will not be able to be identified to me personally. I have the opportunity to withdraw from this study any time up until August 28th 2007.

If I have any queries or would like to be informed of the research findings I can contact Rachel Saunders on (07) 8499188. If I have any concerns regarding my rights in this study, I may contact the overall supervisor of this study:

Noeline Alcorn
University of Waikato
School of Education
PO Box 3105
Hamilton
Phone: 07 838 4500

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

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Parental permission

I have read the information sheet above and agree that my daughter can participate in the mentioned research project. I understand the requirements and acknowledge that my daughter can withdraw from this project any time up until August 28th 2007.

Signature of Parent _____

Date _____

Appendix E – Interview Schedule 1**Individual Student Interview Schedule****Preliminary statement**

As you know from our briefing, I am interested in studying how youth leadership programmes can be developed through using students' voices. What I want to use the study for is (a) to complete my studies, and more importantly (b) to help create a leadership programme that addresses the present needs of young women. My research involves working with senior students in focus groups and interviews and involving them in the process of co-constructing a leadership programme.

What I would like to do is hear your voice and your ideas about leadership and some of the issues, opportunities and situations that the role brings up for you within this environment.

The plan for this interview is to spend between about 30 minutes together discovering your thoughts, views and personal beliefs and perceptions about leadership. I see these running sort of like informal conversations, where I ask some questions to get you started on the discussion and then just sort of steer the conversation along by asking some more when I need other information. The key is there is no right or wrong answer as it is your 'voice' and thoughts that I am seeking. Your voice will be completely anonymous and you will be allocated a pseudonym. As a result of these meetings, from topics we discuss, and from our focus groups, some themes will emerge that will help us to construct a leadership programme that meets your needs.

Permission to record on audio tape

I will record your voice on a tape recorder and I will listen to your words to write them up on paper – but your identity will remain anonymous and you will be given a pseudonym. You can stop the tape at any time and have parts erased if you wish.

Introductory question/s

How long have you been a student here at this school?

How would you describe the school environment?

What changes have occurred in the role that you have played here since your arrival as a year [] student?

How would you describe a leader ?

What sort of qualities would a good leader have?

What opportunities for leadership are available here?

What leadership roles have you had the opportunity to be involved in?

Are there any you would like to be involved in but have not been given the opportunity?

Do you believe that every gets the opportunity to be leaders here?

Were these voluntary positions or set by the school?

Did you feel prepared to take on these roles?

What sort of preparation were you personally involved in to be a leader?

Do you feel that this helped you do an effective job and fill this role?

What do you think would have improved this preparation?

What areas do you feel are key focus points when being a leader at [this school?

Themes

Student attitudes towards leadership roles and opportunities

- Opportunities
- Differences/Similarities
- Dominant/Oppressed Groups (who gets to lead or not)
- Preparation and training

School practices

- Reflection on practices for preparation - effectiveness
- Expectations of behaviour
- Expectations of participation
- Expectations of ability to lead
- Selection of activities to facilitate learning leadership roles

Prompts

- Can you give me another example of that?
- Does this happen all the time?
- Really!
- Go on!
- Tell me more!
- I don't understand, can you elaborate?
- Could you be more specific?
- When?
- How?

Appendix F – Interview Schedule 2

Individual Student Interview Schedule

Preliminary statement

Congratulations on completing the leadership programme. As you know from our focus groups, a key part of designing this leadership programme has been the way that you, as a student have had the opportunity to share your voice and ideas about what should be included.

This interview is going to look at this process and how effective it was.

What I would like to do is hear your ideas about leadership now, how they might or might not have changed and look at how the programme went.

Like our last interview, the plan for this interview is to spend between about 30 minutes together as you share your thoughts, views and personal beliefs and like before, I see these running sort of like informal conversations, where I ask some questions to get you started on the discussion and then just sort of steer the conversation along by asking some more when I need other information. The key is there is no right or wrong answer as it is your 'voice' and thoughts that I am seeking. Your voice will be completely anonymous and you will be allocated a pseudonym. As a result of these meetings, from topics we discuss, and from our focus groups, some themes will emerge that will help us work out whether the processes that we used to make the leadership programme were worthwhile.

Permission to record on audio tape

I will record your voice on a tape recorder and I will listen to your words to write them up on paper – but your identity will remain anonymous and you will be given a pseudonym. You can stop the tape at any time and have parts erased if you wish.

Introductory question/s

Share with me some of your ideas about leadership. What is a good leader? What qualities do they have? How and where to people at this school lead?

How about you, have you displayed leadership? How, where? How do you know it was leadership?

Have you had the opportunity to be involved in any new leadership roles?

Let's talk about the leadership programme. Tell me about how you felt during the co-construction processes.

What was it like to work as part of a team?

What did it feel like to be given the opportunity to co-create? Fears? Celebrations?

How did the programme go?

If you had to make any changes to the programme for next year, what would they be?

Do you feel confident about running this programme for others?

What role would/could you play?

Themes

Student attitudes towards leadership roles and opportunities

Opportunities

Differences/Similarities

Personal leadership development and understanding

Programme DesignDesign processes

Content of the programme

Delivery of the programme

Effectiveness of the programme

Future changes and involvement

Expectations of ability to lead

Prompts

Can you give me another example of that?

Does this happen all the time?

Really!

Go on!

Tell me more!

I don't understand, can you elaborate?

Could you be more specific?

When?

How?

Appendix G – Focus Group Schedule

Focus Group Interview Schedule

Preliminary statement

I am interested in studying how youth leadership programmes can be developed through using students' voices. What I want to use the study for is (a) to complete my studies, and more importantly (b) to help create a leadership programme that addresses the present needs of young women. My research involves working with senior students in a series of focus group discussions and individual interviews and involving them in the process of co-constructing a leadership programme.

The plan is to spend about an hour together as a group discussing views and personal beliefs and perceptions about leadership on five separate occasions. I see these running sort of like informal conversations, where I ask some questions to get you started on the discussion and then just sort of steer the conversation along by asking some more when I need other information. I will tape record these and make notes so I can go away and listen to them and pull out important themes. I will share these themes with you in the next meeting and you can let me know whether I have understood you correctly. You can make changes. The key is there is no right or wrong answer as it is your 'voice' and thoughts that I am seeking. Your ideas and thoughts will remain only known within the group – outside of the group, all focus group discussions will be confidential. During the writing process, your voice will be completely anonymous and you will be allocated a pseudonym. As a result of these meetings, from topics we discuss, some themes will emerge that will help us to construct a leadership programme that meets your needs.

Introductory questions and leaders for the focus group discussions

Tell me about the word leadership.

What are some of the feelings that the word conjures up?

What does leadership mean to you?/ how have your thoughts changed?

What are some examples of leadership here at school amongst the students?

What are some examples of 'leaders'?

What are some qualities of what you believe an effective leader to be? Skills?

Why do you think they need these qualities?

Are we taught these qualities as senior students? How?

Do you think that all students view leadership the same way?

What do you think a leadership programme should include?

What ways do you like to learn? What are some examples?

Themes

- Students attitudes towards leadership roles – both labelled and non-labelled within the present school environment

- Personal Experiences and Perceptions

Differences/Similarities

Expectations of behaviour

Expectations of participation in leadership roles

Expectations/perceptions of ability (may be in a variety of settings)

Skills occurring naturally or taught

- School practices

Present practice that prepares students for leadership positions

Expectations that are placed on students to be a leader

Levels of preparation

Challenges that may be present/barriers

- What preparation is required in order to meet expectations placed upon them
- How is the best way for this preparation to occur?

Prompts

Can you give me another example of that?

Does this happen all the time?

Really!

Go on!

Tell me more!

I don't understand, can you elaborate?

Could you be more specific?

When?

How?

Appendix H – The Research Timeline

Permission and ethical considerations

March	25	Contact school Principal / about initial project thoughts
April	20	Contact school Board of Trustees for approval for project
April	23	Contact school with information for parent newsletter
April	25	University of Waikato Ethical Consideration Application

Co-construction and creation of the leadership programme:

May	22	Initial Group Meeting – information sharing and informed consent
May	29	Focus group 1 Lunchtime Interviews X 2 X 3 days (6 in total)
June	05	Focus group 2 Lunchtime Interviews X 2 X 3 days (6 in total)
June	12	Focus group 3 Lunchtime interviews X3
June	17	Focus group 4

Delivery of the programme

July	17	Session 1
July	24	Session 2
July	31	Session 3
Aug	07	Session 4
Aug	14	Session 5
Aug	21	Session 6
Aug	28	Session 7 Interviews 2 X3 days (6 in total)
Aug	29	Session 8 Interviews 2 X3 days (6 in total)
Sept	04	Focus group 5 - Evaluation of programme + 3 interviews
Sept	11	Interviews 2 X 3 days (6 in total)