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**Youth perceptions and practices of leadership:**

**The influence of structured leadership development  
programmes in a community context**

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of  
**Master of Educational Leadership**  
at  
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## ABSTRACT

There has been much research focused on adult conceptions and experiences of leadership and its impact on both individuals and organisations. What has not been investigated as fully, is youth leadership and the contexts within which young people's leadership experiences and emerging understandings are developed. Most opportunities for youth leadership are centred within educational contexts with traditional and hierarchical structures that limit access for all but an elite minority. This thesis presents findings from a research project involving a school-community partnership. It examines perceptions of leadership by youth participating in a 12 week experiential community leadership development programme, and the how involvement within this context influenced the leadership perceptions of nine participants involved in the study.

Youth voice was integral as participants actively reflected on ideas of leadership through youth-centric research methodologies. Findings indicated that the youth who participated in this study perceived leadership as relational and transformational actions experienced on a personal level by someone they have an on-going relationship with; they felt there is inadequate acknowledgement of extra-curricular youth leadership experience and perceived inequity in access to leadership development opportunities for youth within school contexts; they desired experiential leadership development opportunities that were authentic, challenging and inclusive; and that participating in an experiential youth leadership development programme in a community context provided positive benefits for all participants.

This research is of significance to those working with youth in experiential leadership contexts, youth themselves, and those with an interest in

leadership and youth development from a practitioner, or research perspective. Through representing a positive exemplar of a school-community partnership that broadens the context within which positive leadership development opportunities take place, it provides particular challenges to schools regarding the way that they perceive, acknowledge and grow leadership in youth. It will help to inform practitioners regarding effective practice when working with youth, and crucially, gives youth a voice as to the influence contextual experience has on their developing understandings.

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# GLOSSARY OF MAORI WORDS AND CONCEPTS

AKO	reciprocal teaching and learning
AOTEAROA	New Zealand
KAI	food
MANAAKITANGA	hospitality; kindness
MAORI	normal, usual; indigenous New Zealander
OTAUTAHI	Christchurch
PAKEHA	New Zealander of European descent
TANGATA WHENUA	hosts; local people; indigenous people of the land
TIKANGA	correct procedure or custom
WHAKAWHANAUNGATANGA	the process of establishing and building relationships with others
WHANAU	extended family; community

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## SETTING THE SCENE

It is society's job to prioritise and invest in the building of capacity in young people now, so they can be effective community leaders when they reach adulthood (Fertman & van Linden, 1999). There is lot for young people to synthesise on their journeys to adulthood. As well as the physical, emotional and moral developmental experiences of typical adolescence across time, for 21<sup>st</sup> century youth there are new intellectual, social, technological, and environmental implications for their engagement as effective and influential citizens both locally, and globally. The world is evolving and becoming increasingly complex in terms of technological development, culturally diverse populations, environmental challenges and global interconnectedness (Bolstad & Gilbert, 2012).

There is much discussion about what kinds of learning and thinking will be required in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Academics in future-focussed education such as Robinson (2010), Gilbert (2005) and Bolstad (2008, 2012) have identified the many skills seen as necessary to build in today's youth. These include: problem-solving, creative and critical thinking, design and collaborative skills, and also the development of environmental, ethical and cultural awareness. Consequently, the way educators think and act must also develop to meet 21<sup>st</sup> century learners' demands effectively. Developmental psychologist Howard Gardner spoke in 2008 of his "Five Minds for the Future" as being; the disciplined, the synthesizing, the creative, the respectful and the ethical mind. He purports that practitioners need to do more than assist youth to become experts at something, they need to assist them to grow a conscience and an awareness of who and how they are in the world, and how what they do can impact on others.

Prioritising social justice principles through teaching social and environmental literacies that nurture the moral, ethical and civic responsibility and capacity in young people is being seen by future-focussed educators as crucial (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004).

Many of the capacities mentioned above are also reflected in literature discussing key leadership characteristics required by youth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Aspects that are increasingly being identified as crucial leadership competencies for effectiveness include concepts of self-awareness, social intelligence, and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2006). Karnes and Chauvin (2005) also note that because of the increasing multicultural aspects of our society, future leaders must respect and positively interact with diverse populations and as a matter of social justice, will need to encourage and foster the participation of all groups while demonstrating humility and respect for others. As such, the relational nature of leadership is of paramount importance (Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, & Mainella, 2006).

This research takes the position that identification of key leadership characteristics for the future is critical for any practitioner currently working in the area of youth leadership development. Along with that comes the responsibility to ensure best practice when designing opportunities for youth that assist them to develop in meaningful ways. The research presented in this thesis has these considerations at the heart of its purpose as it aims to explore the perceptions of youth regarding effective 21<sup>st</sup> century leadership learning opportunities.

## **MY INTEREST**

My interest in youth leadership stems from my involvements in a secondary school context. Six years ago I created and implemented the

nationally unique Hagley Leadership Laboratory: a year-long, strengths-based leadership development programme where students from a diverse range of backgrounds and interests explore concepts of leadership. The programme builds skills and capacities through providing a range of experiential group and service opportunities both within the school context, and out in the wider community. Hagley is a second-chance learning community college that puts great emphasis on acceptance of individuality and diversity, and has no uniform, or traditional school structures such as form classes, houses, prefects and the like.

The course was set up to provide a curriculum-based leadership development platform that students could self-select into, rather than the more traditional context for youth leadership that usually involves extra-curricular settings such as sport/councils/productions etc. In addition, it deliberately set out to construct a less hierarchical approach to the provision of leadership opportunities for secondary students compared to traditional means where staff choice or peer popularity drives selection processes.

My anecdotal experience is that a wide range of youth who would not be viewed as leaders in more traditional school environments access The Leadership Laboratory course, growing in leadership understanding and effectiveness, personal confidence, and self-knowledge over the year-long programme. In addition, via the range of experiential opportunities they are offered within the context provided in our school environment, and through voluntary participation, they become positively connected with the communities around them. This professional experience, along with the reading I had done about leadership development as part of my study towards a Masters in Educational Leadership, led to me question how youth perceive leadership, the opportunities that currently exist for

leadership development in youth, and what improvements might be made to current practise in order to best meet the leadership development needs of youth.

## **AIM OF THIS RESEARCH**

This research explored youth perceptions of leadership, and how voluntary involvement in a structured, experiential development programme might influence the way youth saw themselves as leaders, and leadership in general. In the interests of meeting completion deadlines for my thesis, a more condensed programme than The Leadership Laboratory was necessary to conduct my research. The collaboration with a well-established local community youth organisation, and designing a new 12 week programme (WE Lead), provided an opportunity to foster positive youth development, facilitate participant self-selection, legitimise extra-curricular learning, provide an alternative forum to the more traditional and elitist programmes for youth leadership, and above all, an avenue for representing youth voice.

## **INVESTIGATION**

The key question that guided my investigation was:

1) How does participation in a structured leadership development programme influence youth perceptions, understandings and practices of leadership?

Sub-questions:

- a) What are participant conceptions of leadership and themselves as leaders, prior to embarking on a leadership development course in a community context?

- b) What is the influence of a community-based leadership development programme on how they perceive and practice leadership?
- c) What are participant perceptions regarding the teaching and learning of leadership?

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS RESEARCH**

There has been much research into and around adult conceptions and experiences of leadership and its impact on both individuals and organisations (Heifetz & Linsky 2004, Cammock 2003, Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach 1999). What has not been investigated as fully, is youth leadership and the contexts within which young people's leadership experiences and emerging understandings are developed (Dempster, Lizzio, Keefe, Skinner, & Andrews, 2010; Dempster & Lizzio, 2007; MacNeil, 2006; Whitehead, 2009).

This research provided scope to explore young people's perceptions of leadership and their own leadership practices. Most opportunities for youth leadership are centred within educational contexts with traditional and hierarchical structures (Archard, 2011; Conner & Strobel, 2007; McNae, 2011). In this study, the context of a local community youth organisation circumvents traditionally narrow leadership development structures such as those embedded in a secondary school, by bringing together youth from a diversity of backgrounds. The diverse nature of the sample makes this research of significance to all those working with youth in experiential leadership contexts, youth themselves, and those with an interest in leadership and youth development.

## THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis is organised into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the research. It provides a brief background to leadership learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, describes the motivation for the research, and gives some detail of my own background. It outlines the general aim of the research, presents the research questions, explains the significance of the research, and provides an overview of the thesis structure and chapters.

Chapter Two presents an overview of the literature related to youth perceptions of leadership, youth leadership development, and authentic contexts within which leadership learning takes place for youth. It highlights research examining the nature of constructive partnerships involved in this pursuit and outlines how this research fits within current knowledge in this field.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological basis of this research. It explains the theoretical framework of the research and places the research methodology within current paradigmatic thinking. It discusses the research context, and introduces the participants of the research. Data generation methods, ethical considerations and data analysis processes involved in the research are also described and contextualized.

Chapter Four presents the findings related to the group's initial perceptions of leadership prior to their involvement in the leadership programme. It outlines the research process before presenting the findings, which are organised thematically and reveal how participant perceptions were influenced as a result of participation in the programme.

Chapter Five discusses the research findings generated in Chapter Four that have specific implications for the delivery of youth leadership development opportunities offered within a 21<sup>st</sup> century educational

context. This chapter focuses in particular on youth access to, and the nature of, meaningful youth leadership development opportunities, and it addresses the significance of youth voice and the importance of collaborative partnerships.

Chapter Six concludes by offering several recommendations borne out of the research's findings, and in noting the limitations of the research conducted, looks ahead to possible avenues of study in the future.

# CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

## OVERVIEW

This chapter presents an overview of the literature related to youth perceptions of leadership, youth leadership development, and the ways in which leadership learning takes place for youth. The chapter begins by defining who youth are and what youth leadership involves, before presenting literature that reveals how youth perceive leadership. The fundamental issue of youth access to leadership development opportunities is covered along with an examination of how the related literature determines the authenticity of these experiences.

The chapter then highlights research exploring the nature of constructive partnerships between youth and adults, and schools and community organisations involved in the pursuit of developing authentic leadership learning for youth, and the importance of youth voice is acknowledged. Through focussing this literature review on the limited literature in existence examining how youth see leadership and how their leadership learning is currently designed, gaps that exist in both knowledge and practise are identified. This identification serves to legitimise the purpose and context for the research project at the centre of this thesis, and places it strongly within a youth-centric and future-focussed approach to leadership development for youth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## YOUTH AND LEADERSHIP

### DEFINING YOUTH

The term 'adolescence' refers to that in-between phase as children transition through their second decade of life into adulthood (World Health

Organisation, 2013). The nature of adolescent development means that this occurs at different times and in different ways for individuals and across different cultures and this is reflected in key international documents such as the human rights treaty, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990). Hence, the most popular way of defining adolescence, by categorising adolescence chronologically typically encompasses a wide age range from 12-24 years old (McLaren, 2002).

Key developmental transitions during adolescence include: sexual and physical maturation; a reduction in parental influence as independent decision-making increases; and increased autonomy in physical, financial and social terms (Fertman & van Linden, 1998; McLaren, 2002). Bird and Drewery (2000) however, note that in New Zealand, as in other Western countries, the divisions between who is an 'adolescent' and who is a 'young adult' are blurring as traditional points of distinction are elongating. Factors such as the early onset of puberty, and movement into employment and financial independence occurring later (as extended pre-employment study create longer dependence on parental or state support), are combining to mean that 'adolescence' can transcend ten years prior to the beginning of adulthood.

The way that young adults are perceived has changed over time. Raby (2007) is critical of the developmental approach that researchers have had in the past of homogenising adolescents across cultural, gender and economic locations, and how they have been constructed as passive and somehow inherently incomplete compared to a fully developed adult. Kress (2006) is also sceptical about traditionally held views of youth as being flawed, out-of-control or incomplete, drawing attention to the sense of comfort there is for adults in terms of their own sense of power and

control over adolescents when perceiving them as being “in incubation” as developed beings (p. 54). Checkoway and Gutierrez (2006) purport that youth absorb adult views of adolescents being problems, or deficient in some way, which in turn reduces their levels of participation and sense of agency to create change in communities.

This thesis shares the standpoint of current critical youth scholars such as Best (2007), and Heath, Brooks, Cleaver, and Ireland (2009) that outlines youth as needing to be considered as “reflexive social agents and producers of culture, active in complex negotiations of social life and contributing in significant ways to the social world, not as subjects in the making, but as subjects in their own right” (Best, 2007, p. 11). Accordingly, although adolescence is a developmental process, this thesis positions youth as the experts on their own experiences during this time, therefore their perceptions have legitimacy and need to be sought and acknowledged as such.

## **LEADERSHIP**

Early research has positioned leadership as residing in the influence of the individual and thus focused heavily on the charismatic qualities and traits of ‘a leader’ at the top of a hierarchy, rather than the act of leadership; its processes and necessary capabilities (Hodgkinson, 1996). More recently, organisational and business leadership has been seen as both transactional and transformational in nature. Transactional leadership focuses on *what* leaders do - the associated skills and tasks, while transformational leadership relates to the process of leadership – or *how* individuals use their abilities to influence others (Fertman & van Linden, 1999). Moreover, leadership has latterly become defined as a relational process “combining ability (knowledge, skills, talents) with authority (voice, influence and decision-making power) to positively influence and impact

diverse individuals, organisations and communities” (MacNeil, 2006, p. 29).

Along with many others, Karnes and Chauvin (2005) believe leadership to be “an observable, learnable set of practices” (p. 3) and that the required skills and attitudes can be developed and practised by a wide range of people with diverse sensibilities and experiences (Fertman & van Linden, 1998; Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999).

## **YOUTH LEADERSHIP**

Until recently the field of youth leadership has remained on the margins of educational theory and research, and adult approaches to leadership have dominated this area (Conner & Strobel, 2007; MacNeil, 2006; Ricketts & Rudd, 2002; Roach, Wyman, Brookes, Chavez, Brice-Heath, & Valdes, 1999). Roach et al (1999) state that youth leadership needs to be conceptualised differently from adult leadership and needs to move away from “individual, competitive, incremental” models of leadership that hold little relevance for today’s youth, or for future learning demands in organisations (p. 21). Fertman and van Linden (1998), argue that youth are traditionally encouraged to engage in transactional forms of leadership (‘doing’ leadership), but it is important that youth are also supported as transformational leaders who can communicate a vision and inspire action (‘being’ a leader).

Many researchers and practitioners hold the view that leadership is developmental (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007; Fertman & van Linden, 1998), and having leadership opportunities while in adolescence is a key part of that process (Des Marais, Yang, & Farzanehkia, 2000; Karnes & Chauvin, 2005). Bragg (2013) suggests that youth leadership should be conceived as a process of developing positive competencies and capacities including: self-knowledge, commitment to relationships, confident

communication, teamwork, initiative, independence and responsibility. An effective youth leader models participative and co-operative behaviour and has a shared sense of authority and the groups' common interests at its core (Fertman & van Linden, 1998; Roach et al., 1999; Zeldin & Camino, 1999). Such points suggest the importance of providing opportunities for leadership development that are relevant and responsive to youth perspectives and their position in our communities (Des Marais et al, 2000).

While most scholars agree that leadership is a developmental process, not all believe that *every* adolescent can learn about leadership, and has the potential to develop their capabilities Kress (2006), for example, states that it is an illusion that all adolescents can become leaders, and “while some youth truly have the skills, talent, and character to be exceptional leaders, [such] abilities are not equally distributed” (p. 51). Pfeiffer and Wechsler (2013) agree that not every youth can develop into a gifted leader, however they contend that “...almost any adolescent, if provided appropriate opportunities and adequately motivated, can learn new, and refine existing, skills and values which are associated with effective leadership” (p. 4).

Unfortunately, it would appear that many existing leadership development opportunities for youth in schools are reflect exclusivist beliefs, with access to leadership development opportunities thereby restricted to only those who are already seen by adults to exude leadership potential. Given that leadership development is a process, it would be premature to deny some youth access to leadership development opportunities on the basis that they do not *appear* to be leaders. The research at the centre of this thesis supports both Fertman and van Linden's (1998) and Pfeiffer and Wechsler's (2013) assertions that all adolescents should have access to

structured leadership development opportunities as they can benefit from them. These ideas informed the decision for this research to take place within a community setting where it was anticipated discourses of exclusivity were less present, and more young people could gain access to the leadership development programme offered.

## **YOUTH PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP**

There is limited research exploring how youth perceive leadership and view themselves as leaders (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007; McNae, 2011; Whitehead, 2009). A common theme that has emerged within the existing literature though, is the idea that youth perceive leadership in quite different ways to adults.

In their extensive synthesis of related literature on youth leadership, Dempster, Stevens and O'Keefe (2011) observed that young adults, in contrast to adults, conceive of leadership as situational, non-hierarchical, relational, collaborative, informal and practical in nature. This contrasts with the actual contexts within which most youth leadership opportunities exist such as schools, where traditional and hierarchical leadership predominate and position young people as individuals performing transactional leadership functions (Bragg, 2013).

In their 10 year study of leadership in youth-based organisations, Roach et al (1999), discovered in that youth tend not to draw on personal experiences to contextualise their responses, associating leadership externally with being attractive, athletic, wealthy, bright and charismatic, and affording someone individual status and power. Few youth saw themselves this way, or had formal leadership positions, and thus, did not perceive themselves as capable of being leaders. Given also that very few young people are presented as leaders by the media, it is not surprising

that many youth do not readily identify as leaders or perceive themselves in this way.

In addition, youth frequently view their leadership contributions via an adult-centric perception of adolescence that determines them as being 'works in progress' until they reach adulthood (Kress, 2006). Therefore, leadership is perceived as a future 'adult' pursuit, rather than something they are presently engaged in. As Fertman and Long point out (1990), if adolescents believe they are not leaders, they are less likely to seek opportunities that develop their leadership potential, thus their belief becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Roach et al (1999) found that "group alliances matter to young people" (p. 18), and for many, their involvements are centred around specific group activities that share a vision, rather than individual pursuits, which means that the situational context for leadership is all important. Within such contexts, leadership becomes a process that exists within the group itself and is fluid and negotiated, rather than a formal, individual, static position (Dempster, Stevens & O'Keefe, 2011). It can also mean that youth display leadership only when they believe it is required of them, rather than an inherent tendency that needs a platform to be expressed (Komives et al., 2006; McNae, 2011; Roach et al., 1999).

Research has found that young people look to one another for different skills depending on situational needs and what they value are skills such as: self-knowledge, relationship building, accessibility and responsibility to followers and/or a group. These matter more than any specific talent or ability to motivate others (Dempster et al., 2011; Roach et al., 1999). Given the situational nature of how youth perceive leadership, it follows that they have a flexible definition of what skills are required to take on such roles, and when this occurs. Roach et al (1999) raise the point that

while experience and maturity is valued in adult leaders, young people pay attention to what may be termed “wisdom in spontaneity” (p.17), or the ability to assess situations quickly and act accordingly. In the eyes of young people, individuals who lose the constant awareness of group needs do not exhibit leadership (Roach et al, 1999).

Adolescents are aware that within school contexts, leadership opportunities are limited. Bragg (2013)’s study indicated that youth who are seen by adults to have exhibited leadership characteristics adults value themselves, are being hand-picked to partake in formal leadership roles. Their leadership roles confer them status, privilege and sometimes power over their peers who are not chosen or identified as leaders (Fertman & van Linden, 1998). In her study on the influence of school contexts on young women’s leadership perceptions, McNae (2011) found that their involvements can be met with suspicion by fellow students and that leadership opportunities can become commodified into a form of social capital from which the privileged few can gain further advantages or benefits that are withheld from others, such as popularity, adult acknowledgement and other extrinsic rewards.

Archard (2011) found in her work looking at peer influence on female student development, that youth see leadership influence as either positive or negative, and that the context of this leadership role influences how it manifests. In school contexts, particularly, youth can lead others into destructive behaviours with persuasive influence in an informal situation, or abuse a sense of power that they perceive they have from a formal position, and treat others detrimentally (Cox, 2011).

Within community contexts however, the power dynamic between peers who have and those who have not been identified as having leadership potential is not so clear-cut. Often young people have involvements

outside school where they demonstrate and/or grow in leadership potential because of the context of their activities. Some youth express frustration regarding the limited contexts provided by schools and choose to put their efforts in areas of interest elsewhere where they believe there may be more challenge, less hierarchy, and more opportunity to effect change (Conner & Strobel, 2007; McNae, 2011; Mitra, 2006; Wheeler & Edlebeck, 2006).

Although adults have a multitude of opinions about what constitutes youth leadership, the ones who are best placed to inform practitioner understanding of how youth see leadership and their particular leadership development needs, may be the young people themselves. Seeking their understandings and perceptions is a crucial starting point for any practitioner designing or offering youth leadership development opportunities.

## **DEVELOPING YOUTH LEADERSHIP**

### **EXISTING LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH**

Roach et al (1999) indicate that individual-centred, adult theories of leadership place youth at a considerable disadvantage in terms of leadership development opportunities. Although some youth participate in activities that pattern themselves on formal contexts for leadership, many more young people experience leadership within multiple informal and unstructured domains. These include amongst family and friends, and participation in community organisations that are not readily recognised as leadership contexts but still provide experiences for them to develop leadership capacity (Des Marais et al, 2000; Fertman & van Linden, 1998; Karnes & Stephens, 1999).

Conner and Strobel (2007) report that in the United States, high schools are offering elective courses in leadership and leadership-themed charter schools are dotting the landscape. Various foundations and youth development organisations also provide youth leadership programmes (Whitehead, 2009). In New Zealand, however, there appear to be few structured leadership development opportunities for youth (McNae, 2011). Instead, what seems to prevail are one-off, one-size-fits-all approaches such as National Young Leaders' days run by The Halogen Foundation, or Emerging Leaders Conferences co-ordinated by an individual school, where large numbers of selected students nominated by teachers sit passively in auditoriums and listen to motivational speakers.

Some researchers advocate offering leadership courses as legitimate curriculum classes. However, with overloaded timetables and stretched resources, current school structures struggle with the logistics of legitimising leadership development via a formal curriculum. Accordingly, there is a belief among some researchers that the current extra-curricular context for structured leadership development of youth is the most practical and authentic setting (Des Marais et al., 2000; Roach et al., 1999).

Unfortunately, adult perceptions of youth can also restrict their leadership development opportunities whatever the context. Des Marais et al (2000) argue that the adult-centric belief presented earlier, that youth are not fully formed or capable in their own right, and the associated assumption that leadership is something that one earns through being in apprentice roles, impacts negatively on opportunities provided. Also, a reluctance on adults' part to relinquish power and share responsibility fully with young people can reduce their leadership experiences to merely watching, or restrict them to being assistants who deal with menial transactional tasks that

merely support and maintain adult positions of power and influence. These patterns are in direct contrast to what we know are valuable learning experiences and best practice in terms of youth leadership development.

Roach et al (1999) warn that when working with untested concepts of youth leadership or approaches based on adult models, at worst, youth leadership programmes can be described as “an almost negative space into which practitioners project their own beliefs about what youth need” (p. 16). Practitioners “risk overlooking youth who may display potential outside academic environments and alienate young people who may benefit from a deeper understanding of leadership” (p. 16). There is an increasing call for schools to attend to developing leadership potential in all students by prioritising equality of access and opportunity (Archard, 2011; Fertman & Long, 1990; McNae, 2011; Whitehead, 2009). This poses a challenge for schools to look critically at who they see as leaders, how they constitute youth leadership and how they ascribe value to it (Karnes & Chauvin, 2005; Karnes & Stephens, 1999; McNae, 2011).

## **AUTHENTIC YOUTH LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES**

Given that youth leadership is not the same as leadership for adults, developing leadership practice in youth requires a different approach. Several practitioners have already designed leadership development programmes specifically targeted towards youth (Fertman & van Linden, 1998; Karnes & Chauvin, 2005; Komives et al., 2006; Ricketts & Rudd, 2002). In addition, others are beginning to evaluate the effectiveness of various youth leadership development programmes with a view to understanding best practices (Conner & Strobel, 2007; Dempster et al., 2012; Metzger, 2007; Roach et al., 1999; Whitehead, 2009; Zeldin & Camino, 1999).

Ricketts and Rudd (2002) maintain that some kind of formal leadership education is actually *required* in order for youth to acquire competency; without it, development is not thorough or complete enough to be maintained and transferred into multiple contexts or across time. Furthermore, MacNeil and McLean (2006) identify a difference between learning *about* leadership and learning to practice leadership. They contend that learning to practice leadership happens experientially, through involvement in opportunities to practise skills, experiment with approaches and actively try out various leadership roles. Further, Fertman and van Linden (1998) contend that since leadership is a relational process that occurs within groups, using educational groups focussed on leadership skill acquisition and development allows adolescents the opportunity to learn and practise their skills. They argue that facilitating a group environment is one of the most constructive ways to build leadership skills in youth because it adds intensity to the experience and over time, it becomes “a safe environment for receiving and giving feedback and practising new behaviours” (p. 127).

The idea that small group environments provide a supportive and authentic context is endorsed by others (McNae, 2010; Roach et al., 1999). Kress (2006) contends that providing an environment where youth are part of a supportive group, and where opportunities for active participation are facilitated, encouraged and valued by all, increases the likelihood of successful outcomes for youth and their communities. That being said, it has also been identified that although a group environment is desirable, collective experiences in and of themselves will not necessarily lead to purposeful leadership action by youth (Roach et al, 1999).

Whitehead (2009) argues that the delivery of authentic leadership pedagogy to youth requires specific methodologies that are in tune with

the contextual factors of adolescents' world and culture. For example, in order to achieve authenticity in current times where social networking, digital media, and technological influences such as Youtube, Facebook and smartphones are ubiquitous, practitioners developing youth leadership development programmes need to consider integrating these technologies into their methodologies in order to best meet the needs of young people.

Kress' (2006) definition of youth leadership as "the involvement of youth in responsible, challenging action that meets genuine needs, with opportunities for planning and decision making" (p. 51), demands authentic contexts rather than theoretical or pretend simulations for developing youth leaders, and this call is backed by many others (Dempster et al., 2011; Mitra, 2006; Roach et al., 1999; Sacks, 2009).

Fertman and van Linden (1998) also suggest that experiential learning opportunities that develop leadership in youth authentically need to be challenging. It is their contention that a crucial component in this process is the opportunity for youth leaders to integrate their experiences into their learning through structured reflection opportunities that are on-going and purposeful. They suggest that experiential learning is an active process that involves reflecting on such questions as, "What am I doing? Why am I doing it? And what am I learning?" (p. 135).

The importance of building reflective capacities in youth as a leadership development skill is recognised by many (Cohen, Cook-Sather, Lesnick, Alter, Awkward, Decius, Hummer, Guerrier, Larson, & Mengesha, 2012; Conner & Strobel, 2007; Dempster et al., 2010; Komives et al., 2005). Cohen et al (2012) contend that development of self-awareness through engagement in reflection and interaction is key to the success of student leaders. Similarly, Dempster et al (2010) assert "there is greater potential

to access young people's authentic understandings of leadership through inviting them to actively reflect on their lived experience" (p. 84).

The project at the centre of this research encapsulates features such as youth-centred methodology (for example: using Facebook as a main means of communication), experiential learning processes, and a small group environment, in the interests of the authentic provision of a structured leadership development programme. In addition, opportunities to reflect on learning experiences in youth-centric modes such as using Tumblr or a vlog, supported the developing self-awareness among participants of their individual leadership identity in an authentic way.

## **ACCESS TO AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH**

MacNeil (2006) argues that authentic leadership development experiences are positive for all youth. Others also note youth are not the only ones to benefit from their leadership development opportunities (Karnes & Stephens, 1999; Zeldin & Camino, 1999). Community organisations, schools, governmental agencies, families, and peer groups all stand to benefit from the influence of well-equipped and empowered youth within them, both in the present and in the future.

However, it is also important to remember leadership pathways for young people are not always linear as youth develop in different ways, at different times and access to experiential opportunities varies considerably (McNae, 2011; Roach et al., 1999). In addition, the researchers note that youth who do not necessarily present as having leadership potential, or who are classified as at risk, often gain the most benefit from leadership development programmes and recommend that recruitment processes should take this into consideration if they want to create maximum positive impact. In response, Conner and Strobel (2007) call attention to the risks

of relying on a single, static definition or context for leadership that may alienate youth who cannot or do not wish to be cast in that specific role.

There is a need to increase the visibility, applicability and inclusivity of available programmes, making them something to which all youth aspire to be a part (Cox, 2011, Fertman & van Linden 1998; Kress, 2006). Bragg (2013) discusses adult perceptions of youth from deprived backgrounds as having “cultural deficits” (p. 6), and the attribution of poverty to personal inadequacies (such as lack of education, skills, ambition etc). Such beliefs restrict access to opportunities and perpetuate inequities for youth. Along with class differences, Archard (2011) draws attention to the influence that leadership experiences in adolescence can have in breaking or reinforcing notions of gender and power also. She contends that it is important for educators to be mindful of how the understanding of leadership developed in adolescence may impact on students’ understanding of leadership in the future, as well as influence their thinking on who should take on such positions. She asserts for example, that teaching leadership to both boys and girls inclusively and deliberately could assist in changing societal assumptions regarding leaders and leadership.

To ensure a wide range of young people have access to leadership opportunities, programmes need to be offered in a range of contexts, to a broad catchment of youth, and need to provide a variety of experiences within which to develop competencies (Bragg, 2013). In an increasingly globalised world, acknowledgement of cultural identity and difference is a critical consideration in the development of youth leaders (Potaka, 1998). Appreciation of diversity, awareness of prior knowledge, and acknowledgement of experiences that may be relevant beyond traditional perceptions of what has traditionally constituted youth leadership are required (McNae, 2011).

It would appear that in order to provide a wide range of youth authentic, experiential leadership development opportunities, a broad, responsive and inclusive approach is required. This was a key consideration in the design of the leadership programme involved in this research. It was also important to consider the context within which these approaches would be situated. By positioning the leadership programme (named WE Lead) in a youth-centric, culturally responsive community context, and through offering the opportunity to a diversity of youth, this research provides an example of an alternative authentic leadership development programme with broad access and potential for impact.

## **COMMUNITY CONTEXTS FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

Fertman and van Linden (1998) purported that youth leadership development ought to be a community-wide initiative noting that it is also the community's responsibility to nurture young people. Leadership development for youth can give the community a new perspective on the valuable contributions that young people have to offer, as the positive things that young people do may be more readily identified and widely acknowledged than in a school context. In addition, any negative attitudes or stereotypical views of youth held by adults can be challenged in the face of strong youth-adult relationships and positive community involvement (Bolstad, 2011; Camino, 2010).

Providing leadership opportunities within a community context, particularly service related opportunities, can have significant meaning for the young people involved (Fertman & van Linden, 1998; Metzger, 2007). Des Marais et al (2000) describe the community as an "authentic and meaningful" context for learning about leadership, community, and self (p. 679). Situations that are considered to involve authentic leadership opportunities for youth include pro-social school, service and civic contexts

such as community volunteering initiatives, advocacy and local decision-making processes. These have been found to provide powerful learning experiences through which youth grow and develop both individual and community responsibility and efficacy as leaders (Dempster et al., 2011; Des Marais et al., 2000; Pfeiffer & Wechsler, 2013).

Obviously there are other factors that determine whether the context provided is a positive and constructive one for youth. Some researchers have identified the diverse nature of backgrounds, experiences and capacities that youth bring to structured leadership opportunities and the fact that a range of quality contexts is needed in order to meet the needs of such a diverse youth leadership population inclusively (McNae, 2010; Whitehead, 2009).

In their work examining community based youth leadership programmes to support youth civic leadership, Wheeler and Edlebeck (2006) reinforce the importance of youth-adult partnerships as being a crucial predictor in the successful promotion of civic engagement. They contend that youth-adult partnerships are of particular significance in a community context as they demand understanding not only of youth perceptions of leadership, but also fundamental concepts of community leadership development in more general terms.

## **DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS**

### **SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

Key policy documents such as the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) identified the future educational vision that young people “will be confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners” that contribute and participate in their communities (p. 7). Similarly, the Ministry of Youth Development’s Strategy Aotearoa (2007) prioritized the

development of skilled people to work with youth in a range of community contexts, to create strengths based opportunities for them to actively participate and engage.

The Secondary Futures Project (2008) described this as “community connectedness” (p.18). The school of the future was seen by Durie (2005), and others such as Bolstad and Gilbert (2012), as a hub that has many links into communities, agencies, businesses, and homes, where legitimate learning also occurs. As described in Jennings’ work presenting schools as community learning centres (2005), the school becomes “an educational broker in arranging, facilitating, guiding and monitoring learning activities beyond its walls” (p. 6). Gilbert (2005) even speculates that the traditional classroom as we know it will disappear and be replaced by small group encounters, collaborative projects.

However, there are both challenges and opportunities that arise from collaborating with a community organisation to deliver programmes. Cole (2010) suggests that in terms of teaching and learning, community-based education aims to make learning more relevant and meaningful to youth by situating it in local and familiar issues, contexts and challenges. She also argues that school-community partnerships have the potential to enrich, expand, and authenticate learning environments for youth and benefits such as increases in student attendance, graduation rates, parent participation and community unity.

Strong school-community partnerships involve people holding a common vision, and sharing information and power (Wheeler & Edlebeck, 2006). Cole (2010) asserts that educators and administrators must find ways to remove traditional barriers between schools and communities, and allow youth to participate in active, authentic work outside school walls. The development of authentic learning opportunities moving beyond school

walls and out into the community is beginning to occur. For example, Wood's (2011) investigation into New Zealand youths' place-based perspectives on participation in society provided secondary school teachers and their students with opportunities to collaborate purposefully with their community that ways that encouraged meaningful participatory citizenship and broadened their contexts for learning. Such an exemplar demonstrates participatory, future-focussed educational values similar to the community partnership within which this research project is based, by providing an authentic, inclusive and innovative context for youth leadership learning to occur.

## **YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIPS**

Developing partnerships between youth and adults is a key component in 21<sup>st</sup> century education provision, wherever that learning takes place (Bolstad, 2008). Youth leadership development in a community context can facilitate respectful and productive partnerships between adults and young people. Finn and Checkoway (1998) suggest that one of the key components of exemplary community-based programmes is collaborative partnerships between a diverse community of youth and adults. This often means adults relinquishing power and actively sharing decision-making responsibility. Des Marais et al (2000) argue that contrary to the ageist, hierarchical belief that chaos will then ensue, "partnerships where young people and adults share learning and leadership allow them to become co-creators of community" (p. 680). Generating these partnerships ensures that leadership entails more than a simple relationship of dominance or influence, becoming instead a collective process of "meaning making" by a community engaged in a task (Roach et al., 1999).

Youth who feel valued, respected and effective while participating within community contexts report many positive impacts including: a sense of

purpose and agency to make a difference, self-efficacy, social responsibility, appreciation of diversity, and community connectedness (Metzger, 2007). Gambone, Hanh, Lewis-Charp, Sipe, and Lacoë (2006) note that promoting high quality youth leadership and community involvement experiences requires well-trained staff, time, and resources. They warn practitioners that it is important to have thought through key issues such as power imbalances between adults and youth, what roles youth can and should play in their organizations and community, the skills and knowledge that staff need, and the skills and support that youth need to be effective leaders within community contexts.

The issue of practitioner influence is all-important. Bragg (2013) asserts that in order to be effective, practitioners in the area of youth leadership development need to be inclusive, compassionate and competent. It is important that practitioners resist the 'adultism' of seeing themselves as experts (MacNeil, 2006). A crucial part of the competence required for leadership mentors and teachers is an awareness of how much agency youth are entitled to and the fact that they must resist the temptation to wield power - even when failure looms - since exercising power over developing leaders effectively shuts down the development process (Mitra, 2006). Such intervention can remove agency from youth by restricting opportunities and ownership for meaningful contributions or changes around important community issues that affect them. As McNae (2010) notes, this is a delicate balance, requiring skilled facilitation and practitioner self-awareness.

Quality youth-adult partnerships could be particularly important for youth who may be disassociated from their school community and/or family, or have cultural needs or connections that transcend the traditional contexts for leadership opportunities (McLaren, 2002). For example, within a New

Zealand context, a young Maori (or native New Zealander) who is a minority at school and feels disconnected from a traditional, individualistic and competitive Euro-centric or Western model of education and school leadership, may be more likely to become involved in a community context where the tikanga (or cultural values) align more with her/his own, and where notions of whanaungatanga (building relationships) and manaakitanga (collective wellbeing) take precedence over individual influence and success (Ware & Walsh-Tapiata, 2010).

Whatever the context, youth who participate in leadership development opportunities are seeking to build their capacities to be effective and engaged citizens in that context and that moment, and also for future roles and environments (Des Marais et al., 2000; Fertman & van Linden, 1998). Considering this, it is critical that the leadership opportunities they are afforded are purposefully designed in ways that respect and meet their developmental, personal and cultural needs. One way to mediate this is to engage young people in collaborative partnerships where their voices are sought as a means to best meet their needs.

## **YOUTH VOICE**

A crucial component in fostering youth-adult partnerships is the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of young people's voices. Dempster and Lizzio (2007) contend that there is little evidence of the concept of leadership being adequately described from the adolescent point of view. They purport that such knowledge is essential for practitioners when considering the best methods and approaches to use when designing youth leadership development opportunities. McNae (2010) echoes this viewpoint and argues that seeking conversation between adults and youth within a learning community can "enrich the planning and content involved

and ensure the experience is relevant to the lives of those involved” (p. 686).

Other researchers prioritise youth voice as a political act. Heath et al (2009) assert that much youth research is concerned with giving voice to young people in order to promote a better understanding of their worlds, but it is also linked to a desire among many youth researchers to empower young people. Groundwater-Smith (2011) goes so far as to describe the inclusion of youth voice in educational research as “a radical means of interrupting this dominant discourse where so many young people receive so little attention. Through its power they are no longer silenced and rendered invisible” (p. 55).

Beals (2012) notes that recent times have seen a rise in participatory research approaches that have transferred power and voice to young people within the research process. In terms of research practices, Grover (2004) says that allowing youth to be “active participants in the research process enhances their status as individuals with inherent rights to participation in society more generally and the right to be heard in their authentic voice” (p. 90). As such, listening to the voices of youth helps to make young people feel that they are valued as valid, contributing members of society (Mitra, 2006).

This research aimed to legitimise youth voice as not only a political act, but as a necessary mechanism that could assist practitioners to fill the gaps in our knowledge about youth perceptions of leadership and leadership development. The points raised in this section about youth-adult partnerships highlight the fact that there are ethical and methodological implications for the inclusion of youth voice within the research presented in this thesis, and these will be addressed in more depth in Chapter Three.

## SUMMARY

It is timely that the perceptions of youth are canvassed so that practitioners can help facilitate authentic and meaningful learning experiences that develop youth leadership capacity for the future. This involves understanding young people's perceptions of leadership, and what constitutes best practice in leadership development opportunities for youth from diverse socio-economic, cultural and educational backgrounds.

In accordance with 21<sup>st</sup> century learners' needs and the evolving educational landscape in New Zealand, a shift is required from traditional contexts for leadership development to move beyond school environments and out into communities. The building of dynamic school-community partnerships can help this shift in focus. Future-focussed programmes can be developed that prioritise quality relationships; include a range of experiential leadership opportunities that meet a diversity of needs; offer reflective learning processes; and acknowledge the legitimacy and agency of youth participation and voice. The hope is that the above aspects will combine to ensure that appropriate, meaningful and constructive leadership learning will help to build capacity for all young people to be effective, positive and engaged local and global citizens now, and into the future.

In response to the prevailing existing contexts for youth leadership, and to the challenge for practitioners to look beyond traditional school constructs of youth leadership opportunities, the research discussed in this thesis creates an alternative. By offering an authentic, community-based opportunity that was open for all youth to access of their own volition, a diverse range of young people could choose to become involved and gain benefit from a new leadership development context.

The paucity of research on youth perspectives about leadership, particularly in less traditional contexts such as community organisations, provides a further premise for my research. This thesis aims to add to the limited knowledge about youth perspectives on leadership by using surveys and interviews that seek their thoughts and reflections in an authentic, experiential leadership development situation. As a result, it is hoped that practitioner understanding and effectiveness will be strengthened in the provision of meaningful, future-focussed learning opportunities that transcend both school and community contexts, and that the findings from this research will encourage practitioners to reflect and respond to the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners effectively and purposefully in the design and delivery of structured youth leadership development opportunities.

# CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

## OVERVIEW

The research shared in this thesis explored the leadership learning journey of nine adolescents who participated in a community-based leadership development programme over a span of 12 weeks in 2013. This chapter explains the theoretical framework of the research and places the research methodology within current paradigmatic thinking. It discusses the research context, and introduces the participants of the research. Data generation methods, ethical considerations and data analysis processes involved in the research are also described and contextualised.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research at the centre of this thesis is qualitative in nature. Bogdan and Biklen (1999) define qualitative research as an inductive process that has the natural setting as the key source of data, and the researcher as the key instrument in the description and meaning of findings. This particular research originates from an interpretivist paradigm where, according to Mutch (2005), research design favours exemplary investigation using purposive sampling. It is bound in a particular context, in this case, a 12 week community-based leadership development programme for youth, and allows for participants' realities and interpretations to be explored and represented through seeking their perceptions as these are used as the key data source.

In accordance with the interpretivist methodology, it seeks to be reflexive and adaptive to youth culture in its communication and data generation methods, for example, using Facebook, Tumblr and Google docs. It also encompasses a values-based approach to research through creating a

safe and trusting environment that values the Maori notion of ako (teaching and learning being a reciprocal relationship), and prioritising building rapport between the researcher and the population they are researching.

The research design and methodology can be more specifically placed within recent constructivist and critical theoretical frameworks. Apple (2011) believes that we need to be both an excellent researcher and a committed member of society and blending these roles into socially committed research requires “a searching, reflexive, critical examination of one’s own structural location, one’s own overt and tacit political commitments and one’s own embodied actions” (p. 18).

This research is underpinned by the belief that young people are experts of their own experiences and their expression of personal perceptions and understandings have validity and authenticity in knowledge creation. While my own beliefs and perceptions as a pakeha, middle-class, female adult inevitably played a role in the research design, during its implementation and the analysis of findings, I have sought to be “self critical at every stage” (Ledwith, 2001, p. 608), in accordance with a values-based, participatory, emancipatory approach.

## **QUALITATIVE RESEARCH WITH YOUTH**

Historically, much research involving young people has treated them as objects of study and privileged adult interpretations of youth experiences, reinforcing power imbalances between young people and adults (Best, 2007). One way that youth researchers have attempted to circumvent these difficulties has been to “seek the replacement of research *on* young people, by research *with* young people” (Heath et al. 2009, p. 14) through the promotion of various forms of participatory research that allow young

people to actively co-construct knowledge by being able to tell their own stories in their own ways (Beals, 2012; Best, 2007; Grover, 2004). Recent examples include Wood's (2011) investigation into New Zealand youths' place-based perspectives on participation in society using café'-style focus groups and Photovoice with youth, and Chin's (in *Representing Youth*, A. Best (Ed), 2007) participatory action research project collaborating with children as anthropologists, researching ethnographic knowledge in their own community.

Grover (2004) asserts that in order to overcome adult-centric interpretations and power dynamics inherent in research with youth, "it is essential to employ a methodology that allows youth to speak from, and be appreciated for, their own perspective" (p. 90). This can involve moving beyond traditional data collection methods such as formal one-on-one interviews and written questionnaires, toward including more youth-centred methods of data generation that are more responsive and accessible for youth, for example: small group semi-structured interviews, visual methods such as Photovoice, and electronic and social media based data generation methods (Cahill, 2007; Dempster et al., 2010; McNae, 2011; Wood, 2011).

The research at the centre of this thesis was an intentional partnership between the researcher and youth participants toward discovery of new knowledge. In that respect, the young people, the researcher, and the community organisation they were a part of during the leadership development programme, were engaged as co-constructors and co-owners of any new knowledge that their collaboration generated. Hence, this research aimed to demonstrate a commitment to enabling the experiences, perceptions and voices of young people to be seen,

acknowledged and heard through its methodology, and in doing so, developed a constructivist, participatory and youth-centred approach.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This research took place in Christchurch, New Zealand, two years after a major earthquake devastated much of the central city, taking with it many organisations and places youth relied upon for connection with one another, and with their communities. Christchurch was in a prolonged phase of rebuilding damaged infrastructure, redesigning the central city, and creating relationships to reinvigorate community connectedness.

In response to the extraordinary physical and emotional circumstances facing youth in the city, this research was developed in collaboration with The White Elephant Trust, a community youth organisation in central Christchurch, founded on a strengths-based philosophy. This trust brings together youth from a range of backgrounds for a range of purposes, including: event management for youth, music production, care and protection at raves, CV workshops, and youth advocacy via the Otautahi Youth Council. The research design was an experiential youth development framework where participants actively reflected on their ideas of leadership, and their individual leadership identity before, during, and after the programme.

There are both challenges and opportunities that arise from collaborating with a community organisation to deliver programmes (Cole, 2010), but in terms of access to a diverse range of youth and opportunity to gather deep, rich data that reflects participant perspective, the community context is of significant value (Carver & Harper, 1999).

The following research questions and sub-questions guided this research:

1) How does participation in a structured leadership development programme influence youth perceptions, understandings, and practices of leadership?

Sub-questions:

- a) What are participant conceptions of leadership and themselves as leaders, prior to embarking on a leadership development course in a community context?
- b) What is the influence of a community-based leadership development programme on how they perceive leadership?
- c) What are participant perceptions regarding the teaching and learning of leadership?

## **PARTICIPANTS**

The participants for the WE Lead leadership development programme were youth aged between 15-18 years old. Recruitment of participants for the programme took place over several weeks prior to its commencement and via several methods. The main method of advertisement was a Facebook post advertising the programme on the White Elephant Facebook page. Information was also disseminated via email to several schools in the local area. Some participants were previously associated with White Elephant, some with my school, and others were encouraged by friends or adults to participate and recruited that way. There were 15 programme participants initially and this settled down to a core group of 12, with nine self-nominating to be research participants.

At the first meeting of programme participants, the research project being conducted alongside the programme was described and all potential participants viewed a brief power-point presentation explaining what would be involved. It was made clear from the outset that programme

participants could choose not to be involved in the research and still participate in the programme. This information was reinforced through a written Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix A). The participants were encouraged to take away a consent form and information sheets for them and their parents if they were interested, before deciding whether they consented (see Appendix B). Nine returned consent forms and all of these participants were involved in data generation for the research. All participants who chose to take part in the research were over 16 and consistent with methodological thinking and practise within critical youth studies, I considered this to be an age where they were autonomous in terms of their power to give consent for participation (Best, 2007; Heath et al., 2009).

## **PARTICIPANT PROFILES**

The group involved in this research were from a range of backgrounds and leadership experience. There were seven female and two male participants between the ages of 16-18. Two were Maori, one Asian, one South American, and five who identified as Pakeha. All but one research participant attended high school; six went to local urban schools, two attended semi-rural schools just out of the city (six different schools in total), and one had left school and was working/studying part-time. At the commencement of the WE Lead Winter Leadership Development Programme, every participant considered they had some previous or current leadership experience. Pseudonyms are used in the following section as participants are introduced:

Ariel – 17. Year 13 Pakeha student attending an urban co-ed school. Extensive leadership experience in multiple contexts included: White Elephant event organisation; Otautahi Youth Council; peer support leader; formal organiser.

B – 16. Year 11 Pakeha student attending a large rural co-ed school. Leadership experience with St John and a house leader at school.

Carebear – 16. Year 12 Filipino student attending a large city single sex school. Leadership experience included: a leadership camp at his previous school, and youth group.

Delilah – 17. Year 12 Maori student attending a large central city community college. Leadership experience in multiple contexts included: World Vision Organiser, Choir Leader, Amnesty Group at school; Youth Advisory Council for Megan Woods; Campaign for Marriage Equality.

Hine – 17. Year 12 Maori student attending a rural co-ed school. Leadership experience included: Youth Leader at Youth Group; work in a retirement home.

Megan – 15. Year 11 Pakeha student attending a large central city community college. Leadership experience included: Youth group, and Sharp After School Programme Helper.

MilkyBar – 18. Part-time Chilean student at inner city tertiary institute (only participant who is not a secondary student). Lives independently and also works part-time. Leadership experience of organising a drama production.

Proud – 17. Year 12 Pakeha student attending the deaf satellite unit at a large central city community college – partially mainstreamed. Boards at deaf school. Leadership experience included representing and working with the deaf community extensively: Youth Parliament; Board of Trustee Representative; Outward Bound; Sign Language Awareness.

Willow Rose – 17. Year 13 Pakeha student attending an urban co-ed school. Had extensive leadership experience in multiple contexts

including: Team Leader, Sergeant and National Cadet of the Year for St John [a New Zealand charity organisation that serves local communities by providing essential health-related services]; Learn to Swim tutor; house sub-group leader at school.

As a group, these participants represented a diverse population with mixed abilities and differing needs. In terms of growing leadership effectiveness and building experiential learning opportunities that would be authentically challenging at an appropriate level for all the youth involved, the programme was designed to grow leadership effectiveness and build experiential learning opportunities that would be authentically challenging, and included some elements of co-construction with participants to negotiate content they felt would meet their needs as effectively as possible.

## **LOCATION OF THE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

The 12 week White Elephant Winter Youth Leadership Development Programme (WE Lead) was facilitated by me, the researcher, at the high school where I am employed as a teacher. Programme design will be outlined more specifically in Chapter Four, however, it is relevant to address the choice of location for the WE Lead Programme here, because of its pedagogical and methodological foundations, and the post earthquake context in Christchurch.

Programme sessions took place in the whanau rooms at Hagley College. Several factors influenced this decision. The White Elephant Trust where the programme would have originally taken place, had been displaced after major earthquakes in Christchurch and were based temporarily in premises that are not able to accommodate large groups. It was agreed that Hagley College was a good alternative as it was near the bus

exchange, providing easy access for a range of people from all over Christchurch, and because of its curriculum based leadership programme, had excellent existing resourcing for all programme needs.

The decision to base sessions in a whanau learning environment was deliberate as I believed it could have several benefits. Practising culturally responsive pedagogies such as using a whanau learning environment is a key consideration within educational environments in Aotearoa (New Zealand) (Bishop, 2007). Firstly, it was important for this research because it acknowledged the tangata whenua as first people of our nation and honours Maori participants' rights to learn in an inclusive and respectful way (Ware & Walsh-Tapiata, 2010). It also prioritised Maori tikanga around learning, and in particular, the notion of ako, or the reciprocity of the teaching and learning process, and from my point of view also, reciprocity within the researcher and research participant relationship. In addition, it allowed for whakawhanaungatanga, or the development of relationships through shared experiences and working together, providing people with a sense of belonging. This was evidenced by the sharing of kai; emphasis on establishing caring relationships with all; and the recognition of, and respect for, diversity (Glynn, Cowie, Otrell-Cass, & Macfarlane, 2010). In this research, an communal whanau setting also helped to break down the traditional spatial barriers classrooms have and assisted with participants gaining a sense of inclusive physical and relational belonging and ownership through their participation in the programme in that context (Pere, 1982).

## **DATA GENERATION METHODS**

What follows is an account of the data generation methods utilised in this research, including specific details regarding how these were utilised within the research process undertaken. A range of data generation

methods was chosen for this research including online questionnaires, semi-structured individual and small group interviews, written or visual individual participant reflection journals and blogs, and researcher field notes. The data was collected between June and September 2013.

## **QUESTIONNAIRES**

Questionnaires are surveys designed by the researcher, which participants typically complete and return individually for the researcher to analyse, often along with other data generated during the research process (Tisdall, Davis, & Gallagher, 2009). They can include a variety of question types (open-ended, close-ended, multi-choice), and because they do not demand the presence of the researcher as interviews do, participant anonymity can have the ability to provide answers that are free from any researcher influence. Therefore, data generated via this avenue may be more honest and trustworthy than that of face-to-face methods (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

There are multiple ways questionnaires can be administered and returned to the researcher; in person, via post, and more recently, online. Heath et al (2009) note that a valuable feature of conducting surveys online is their capacity to be completed at a time, in a place, and at a pace that is convenient to respondents. However, they also point out that if respondents have any questions, there is no opportunity for them to seek clarification, and their interpretation of wording or meaning may differ from the intent of the researcher, which could influence the way they respond.

Young people are often familiar with the format of questionnaires, so it is a non-threatening method of data generation that works particularly well in canvassing the views of participants who may lack the confidence to express themselves verbally in an interview or focus group situation

(Kitzinger, 1995). For a questionnaire to work well though, attention needs to be paid to the provision of an age-appropriate literacy level so that comprehension is maximised (Tisdall et al, 2009). Clarity, brevity and simplicity in design are important components that, when executed well, mitigate against participant boredom or confusion, and the possibility of unwieldy data sets that take a long time to analyse and interpret.

## **USING QUESTIONNAIRES IN THE RESEARCH**

This research utilised on-line questionnaires both at the start, and the end of the leadership development programme in order to assist with gathering youth perceptions on leadership, and examine any shift in their perceptions after participation in the programme. Online questionnaires were favoured as a youth-friendly data generation method because of their non-threatening context; their flexibility in terms of timing, pace, and place completed; and through respondents retaining anonymity, they had the ability to share honest and unadulterated responses.

All programme participants were emailed a link to an anonymous online questionnaire via Google Drive prior to commencement of the leadership development programme. The questions were designed to get them thinking about key concepts such as who they consider to be leaders, where and why we need them, key characteristics of leaders etc (see Appendix C). All nine research participants completed the initial questionnaire. At this point in the data generation process, participants nominated a pseudonym that stayed with them throughout the research process. At the end of the programme, participants completed another online questionnaire that revisited some of the same questions and canvassed their leadership perceptions post programme completion.

The online format for distributing, answering and collating responses

seemed to be straightforward, and worked well, although some respondents did share later about how time consuming writing their answers had been, and expressed concerns that they felt they had to answer everything at once in case their answers were lost. Engagement with the follow-up questionnaire was slow, and fewer participants completed it. I sent several reiterations of the value and need of their responses via our Facebook group. In the end, personal reminder messages directed at individuals meant that seven of the original research participants completed both surveys.

## **INTERVIEWS**

Interviews are subjective by nature (Cohen et al, 2007), which can be limiting, but they are also reflexive as they are borne of a relational process that can build trust over time. In his 1996 book “InterViews” psychologist Steinar Kvale described the qualitative research interview as a conversation between researcher and participant that attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view and to unfold the meaning of peoples’ experiences, therefore becoming “a construction site of knowledge” (p. 2). They also provide what has been called ‘deep data’ or ‘thick description,’ rich in detail and authenticity (Palmquist, 2006). Semi-structured interviews were selected for use in this research, for several reasons, which are discussed below.

## **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

The qualitative semi-structured interview is probably the most widely used research method in youth research as it is generally regarded as a youth friendly strategy providing opportunities for young people to talk about their lives on their own terms (Heath et al, 2009). Semi-structured interviews tend to be more informal than their structured counterparts. The language and style is likely to be more conversational in nature, and the

power balance on a more equal footing (Eder & Fingerson, 2003). In a semi-structured interview the researcher is not, and does not, desire to be “an objective, neutral observer, but rather an integral and active participant in the interview itself” (Woofe, p. 51, 2009).

A major strength of semi-structured interviews is the flexibility that they allow with discussion process and content. For example, youth participants might take the opportunity to ask clarifying questions, or to discuss topics that they find pertinent but which the researcher may not have considered as applicable. In addition, the format also allows the researcher to be responsive and reflexive throughout the discussion, therefore building rapport with interviewees and increasing the likelihood that rich data will be generated for authentic knowledge construction (Heath et al, 2009).

Another advantage of using a semi-structured and participant responsive format is that they provide allowance for participant choice as regards to where, when and with whom the interviews take place. The informal structure and scenario of semi-structured interviews, although still a somewhat unnatural construction of conversation, is more conducive to natural discussion emerging, and provides the researcher with an opportunity to delve, probe and investigate further into relevant participant experiences and perceptions. There are some limitations with using semi-structured interviews that require consideration. Interviews are a time-consuming method both at the point of data generation, and then later, transcription. In a large-scale study the amount of time required could be prohibitive, but in this instance the afore-mentioned advantages in terms of rich data collection and the limited number of interviews required made it a compelling method to generate genuine youth perceptions on leadership.

There was also the risk, when interviewing young people, that they could perceive the situation as similar to that of traditional classroom questioning where adults hold power, where there is a 'right' or 'wrong' answer, and where there may be negative consequences for 'getting it wrong' – all of which can compromise the authenticity and depth of participant contributions (Heath et al, 1999). Using a semi-structured format, situated in small groups according to participant preference, and on-going rapport and trust developed between the interviewer and participants, all helped to mitigate against this possibility and legitimise responses during discussion as valid and honest.

## **GROUP INTERVIEWS**

Eder and Fingerson (2003) suggest that group interviews should be the default option when working with youth because they can reduce the power and influence of the interviewer and create a less threatening environment. They also believe that the group interview is a more 'natural' context for exploring young people's lives given that they "acquire social knowledge through interaction with others as they construct meanings through a shared process" (p. 35). The group interview format can be more empowering and emotionally supportive, and therefore less intimidating for young people. They allow for different points of view and a safe environment to voice dissent or critical comments from marginalised voices that may otherwise be reluctant to voice anything negative in a one-on-one interview situation (Liamputtong, 2011).

There is a distinction to be made however, between a group interview and a focus group situation. Parker and Tritter (2006) define the critical difference as being around the role of the researcher and their relationship with the 'researched'. Group interview researchers adopt an 'investigative role' – asking questions, controlling dynamics, engaging in dialogue –

replicating one-on-one techniques on a broader, collective scale. In a focus group, however, the researcher plays more of a peripheral role as facilitator/moderator of discussion between participants.

Using a group format also comes with some limitations. While having multiple responses can provide a richness and diversity of data, it can also make data analysis a challenging exercise. Confusion can occur during transcription as voices cross over and clarity can be lost in discussion (Tisdall et al, 2009). There is also the possibility that some participants dominate discussion and some voices can become marginalised through lack of opportunity to speak or voice alternative views (Fielding, 2001). In addition, the issue of confidentiality needs to be addressed with participants to ensure everyone feels safe and able to contribute without fear of any breaches of trust (Tolich & Davidson, 2011).

## **REPEAT INTERVIEWS**

Heath et al (2009) make the point that interviewing more than once (an approach this research undertook), allows for an engagement with change as it unfolds over time, and it also allows participants to reflect back on what they had said in a previous interview. McLeod (2000) found that “Analysing interviews conducted over time can illuminate, confirm or unsettle initial and tentative interpretations, alert us to recurring motifs and tropes in participant narratives as well as to shifts and changes ... and provide a strong sense of how particular identities are taking shape and developing” (p. 49). In the case of this research, repeat interviews were chosen as a mechanism to assist in examining how youth perceptions of leadership were influenced by participation in a structured leadership development programme.

Again, the issue of time involved in repeat interviewing and transcription needed to be considered. Similarly, the purpose of revisiting participants

needed to be clear and it was important that repeat interviews were designed to ensure that new data was generated reflecting that purpose, rather than repeating interviews for repetition's sake (McLeod, 2000).

Accordingly, the approach of conducting semi-structured interviews both at the start and the end of the leadership programme, and with participants choosing the timing, location and number of participants present during the interview, was employed. Because of its flexibility and responsiveness to participant preferences, this methodology was predicted to sit well alongside the other methods chosen as a valid way to fulfil the research purpose of discovering how youth perceptions about leadership shifted across the course of their engagement with the leadership development programme.

## **USING INTERVIEWS IN THE RESEARCH**

As with the questionnaire process, semi-structured interviews took place at both the beginning and the end of the programme. It seemed most convenient for participants to meet either before or after programme sessions and in the whanau rooms where they took place, with the exception of the last face-to-face interview, which occurred after the completion of the programme and at the participant's convenience, took place in a local café. All interviews were between 25-35 minutes, regardless of the number of participants.

In both sets of semi-structured group interviews there were two interviews with three (and in one case four) participants, then one individual interview. Both the single participant interviews and the on-line conversations occurred as those participants replied later than the others and there was no-one else to meet at the same time. One participant was clearly uncomfortable having a one-on-one interview as when the agreed time came for our conversation, he literally backed out of the door

requesting that we converse over Facebook instead. Most participants favoured a small group context as B's email indicates:

"I am up to doing it with a few others or in a group or what every else suits just not a fan of one on ones lol"

There was also informality and flexibility in the process, as people joined group interviews at the last minute and no-one expressed a strong preference regarding location or timing other than what was most convenient for all involved. The make-up of the groups altered between the first and second interviews, with different participants being available at different times.

The interviews were recorded using the voice memo app on my password protected smartphone. I reminded participants of the original questionnaire questions and then prompted discussion with probes (see Appendix C), facilitating turn-taking when there were multiple respondents, while also allowing the discussion to flow and be directed by participant's areas of interest.

Participants were asked at the completion of each interview if they would like to add anything, and the process of transcription and member-checking was outlined, and in the spirit of process consent, their rights regarding ownership of individual data generated were reiterated. Once completed, hard copy transcripts with their own contributions highlighted, were handed/mailed to participants upon completion for them to review and amend if necessary.

## **REFLECTION TASKS**

An essential element in the development of any youth leadership programme is the inclusion of opportunities for emerging leaders to reflect on and evaluate experiences and build self-awareness (Cohen, Cook-

Sather et al., 2012; Conner & Strobel, 2007; Fertman & Van Linden, 1998).

In terms of data generation for this research, task-based, participant selected methods of reflection were favoured. Heath et al (2009) advise that task based reflection activities give young people control over the pace and intensity, and that alternative methods to communicate their ideas can encompass different strengths and/or comfort zones for youth. They also make the important point that allowing youth to choose how they would like to respond can go some way toward addressing the power imbalances that exist between researchers and young people in traditional and hierarchical settings.

21<sup>st</sup> century youth use a variety of methods to communicate. Access to the internet, social media and the ubiquity of mobile phones and video recording devices means that youth may be more comfortable with these methods than more formal, structured and adult-centric methods that have traditionally been favoured by researchers (Dempster et al, 2010). With these points in mind, it was planned that for the reflection tasks, participants chose a format that they were most comfortable with. A range of possibilities was suggested, including a written journal/diary, a video blog, an online blog and an audio diary (these could also include visual expression such as photographs/ drawings/ collage/ brainstorming).

By offering youth participants the opportunity to select their own method of recording their reflections in their own time and place, it was hoped that any potential researcher influence on data generated was minimised, that the data would remain rich and contextual, and an authentic youth voice would emerge (Heath et al, 2009). In addition, in keeping with a values-based, constructivist framework, through the acknowledgement of their preferred reflection methods, participants would experience ownership

within the research process, relational trust would be built, and hence, the trustworthiness of the data would be strengthened (Lincoln, 1995).

Clearly, ethical considerations come to the fore in terms of anonymity and the protection of identity when methods such as photography, video, blogging and social media interaction are used to generate data. The commitment to practising process consent, using pseudonyms, non-identification of others publically, and closed online communities helped to mitigate against potential harm, and in the event, no-one chose visual methods of reflection so this issue did not actually arise. It was reiterated that these were private and that it was up to them how much they shared their thoughts with me. Emphasis was placed on the reflection exercises being a valuable part of the learning process, rather than a necessity for my own data generation purposes. As these were selected by the participants, the University of Waikato Ethics Committee was notified part way through this research, as negotiated as part of the original ethics application process.

However, it is important to consider the mixed capacity of individual participants to reflect on learning and articulate their experiences. Levels of self-awareness, group dynamics and peer influences can impact on individual interpretation and shape responses (Fook & Gardner, 2007). Designing specific questions that relate to the experiential learning process helps to keep reflection relevant and focussed.

## **USING REFLECTION IN THE RESEARCH**

Structured reflection opportunities took place at several points during the programme as participants were prompted to reflect on their developing perceptions in specific reflection tasks. For example: after a problem-solving exercise, participants were asked to reflect on group dynamics, their own role in the group and leadership characteristics that emerged in

themselves and others during the process. They were also encouraged to reflect as often as they wanted informally in-between structured sessions, as the programme went on.

Time was limited during programme sessions, and considering multiple methods were employed for reflection and allowing for the fact that everyone processes learning experiences in different ways and at different rates (Heath et al, 2009), I chose to do small informal debriefs during sessions, then posted structured questions for reflection on the group's closed Facebook page for them to follow up with at a time and in a place that suited them. This had mixed responses. A number of participants chose either not to do the reflection activities at all or not to share their responses with me. There could be a variety of reasons behind this, eg: timing, competing commitments on their time and focus, lack of interest in reflection as part of the learning process, forgetfulness, and difficulty in expressing thoughts and perceptions.

I acknowledge that this matter deserves attention and is possibly worthy of further investigation, however, due to the constraints of this thesis, it is not discussed fully here.

## **FIELD NOTES**

Using the construction of field notes for data generation can add rich detail and information when it is fresh in the mind of the researcher, and also make explicit researcher interpretation of what they observe and perceive as taking place during the research process. Tolich and Davidson (2011) make a distinction between three types of field notes recorded: jotted field notes (immediate, scribbled observations/thoughts during process); mental notes (using short-term memory in short bursts recorded soon after); and expanded field notes (expansion of jotted and mental notes at a later time).

Note-taking can be done in a variety of ways; electronically, verbally (spoken into a recording device for later transcription), visually (with sketching or diagrams), or written by hand. However, immediacy of note-taking is seen to add to the accuracy of what is recorded (Cohen et al, 2007). It is also important that the researcher has sufficient self-awareness that they can create distinctions between what is interpretative/subjective, and what is factual/observed during the note-taking process (McNae, 2011). This distinction is important as it needs to be factored in during the data analysis and triangulation processes post data generation.

By their nature, field notes are prone to being shaped by the researchers own ontological and epistemological assumptions (Tolich & Davidson, 2011). As mentioned, reflexivity and self-awareness regarding the influence these have on what is recorded and how it is interpreted is essential. In addition, they provide only part of a picture, with much that is taking place either missed or considered irrelevant by the person recording their observations and thoughts. Thus they need to be considered in conjunction with other data generated and as one part of a wide, rich, methodological process.

## **USING FIELD NOTES IN THE RESEARCH**

Throughout the programme, I kept a research journal reflecting on several aspects of the process. When there was a visiting speaker, I observed and took notes during the session rather than afterwards as I did when leading the group, and keeping mental notes to record later. Expanded notes included my experiences of collaboration within a community context; my experiences as a novice researcher; my thoughts and observations of weekly programme sessions; and my ongoing connections between participant behaviour/perceptions as expressed, and the related literature on youth leadership development.

These notes were used to track my interpretations and observations, and work reflexively when analysing other data sources and interpreting findings.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

As stated, there were four main sources of data generation for this research: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews (occurring both at the start and end of the leadership development programme), participant reflections, and researcher field-notes. The intent in having multiple sources was to generate an authentic, rich, thick data set offering some degree of triangulation that would help to validate findings. Thematic analysis was exercised across all data sources and evidence grouped in relation to key concepts revealed in findings, for example: relational perceptions, access to leadership learning opportunities, and leadership learning. These were derived through using a colour coding process identifying and then grouping common conceptual threads throughout the data. Participant's voices were privileged by utilizing unadulterated, youth-friendly formats for communication, generated over sustained periods of time, with the hope of providing an authentic view of youth perceptions about leadership.

Survey results were collated using Google docs' grouping function for responses to open-ended questions, and graphs indicating frequency of responses for questions generating answers across a range. Participant reflections were looked at last and key themes identified, then grouped along with responses to the second survey and questionnaire to assist with identifying any shifts in perception. The graphs generated by Google docs for the questionnaires provided a helpful snapshot of any shift in participant perceptions in relation to the questions across a range between the start and the end of the programme.

Because of their individual and focused nature, the questionnaires set the scene for the interviews, helping participants to think about their perceptions of leadership or any shifts in perceptions, ahead of the interviews. Despite the interviews having the same question guide, each had some tangential discussion, and some repetition in responses between them and the questionnaires. They did, however, provide depth of response, and sharing of personal experiences that proved a valuable information source and offered data triangulation to strengthen validity of findings.

## **QUALITY OF RESEARCH**

The quality of any research is determined by its reliability and its validity (Cohen et al, 2007). When it comes to adjudicating the validity of research findings, Pyatt (2003) states, “in quantitative research, validity is related to accuracy, relevance, and reliability of measurement, in qualitative research, we seek not to measure but rather to understand, represent or explain something” (p. 1170).

Schnelker (2006) states that qualitative researchers need to be flexible and as well as inductive reasoning strategies, use “naturalistic and interpretative proof procedures (studying phenomena in the setting as they normally occur and recognising that researchers are the instruments), holistic investigatory procedures, and interactive data collection procedures” (p. 45). In terms of methodology, this means that to support the validity and reliability of my research process, I needed to practise rigor in such things as sampling, data collection and analysis, triangulation of data sources and methods, and through using thick description and member checking (Denzin, Lincoln & Guba, 2006). Accordingly, participants from a purposive, context-specific sample self-selected to take part in the research; four separate methods were used for data generation and analysed, compared and interpreted thematically in both

unadulterated and summarised formats; interview transcripts were made available for participants to check and alter for accuracy, and process consent practised throughout the research process.

Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) argue that validity is not like objectivity however, and that it is about interpretation and reasoning that is reflexive and rigor defensible. It is their position that reflexivity is the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher – “the human as instrument” (p. 124). It is a conscious experiencing of the self as inquirer, respondent, teacher and learner and a creative process of discovery of both the subject, and oneself. I endeavoured to enact continuous reflexivity and self-scrutiny as a way to validate findings as Pyatt (2003) suggests, by checking my methods, analysis, and using field notes to track my interpretations all throughout the research process.

I needed to be reflexive and particularly mindful of my ethical responsibilities as an adult researching youth. Guillenim and Gillam (2004) state that to be reflexive is to be “alert to and prepared for ways of dealing with the ethical tensions that arise” during the research process (p. 278). The idea that ethical research is an active, reflective process on the part of the researcher is also connected to concepts of collaboration and authentic relationships between researchers and participants. It pays close attention to the notion of participant voice through their ownership of the experience, which creates authenticity, and trustworthiness, increasing the validity of the research (Lincoln, 1995). When conducting research with youth, it means I needed to be aware of and responsive to power imbalances; have a commitment to a participatory approach which sought to address power imbalances; prioritise unadulterated participant voice; and interrogate my own ontological and epistemological assumptions and

expectations regarding concepts of youth, concepts of leadership, and the construction of knowledge.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE RESEARCH**

Working with youth creates specific ethical considerations particularly in relation to informed consent, confidentiality, and potential harm. All of the University of Waikato's Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations (2008) concerning access to participants, informed consent, confidentiality and mitigating possible harm were adhered to, and ethics approval given prior to the commencement of the research. It was crucial that I was mindful of these ethical considerations and as previously mentioned, responded reflexively to mitigate any possible harm. It was a priority to maintain strong links with participants so as to build trust and rapport. Exercising relational processes that Dempster et al (2010) call "respectful partnerships" that have a "clear ethic of care," when working with youth (p. 87), helped to assure ethical rigour. One key approach to assist with this was enacting "process consent", revisiting and checking levels of informed consent throughout the research process (Heath et al, 2009, p. 409).

The nature of group processes and discussion determines that within a group, confidentiality is not possible (Murray, 2006), but efforts to ensure respect for confidentiality remaining within the group environment were emphasized via establishing group ground rules. When using interview transcripts, participant reflections and field notes, confidentiality and anonymity was assured through use of pseudonyms, and all written and electronic files kept secure. Participants were cognizant of the fact via informed consent communications, and via on-going process consent practices, that their individual contributions and voices remained

anonymous, could be withdrawn at their request, and they had the opportunity to check transcripts for accuracy and interpretation.

To mitigate against any potential harm, and as part of gaining informed consent, participants were made aware that there was no negative consequence for refusing, withdrawing, or withholding individual contributions (eg: personal reflections) from the research. It was possible that secondary school aged participants could feel a power difference due to me being the researcher and programme facilitator, and a secondary teacher. This could have influenced them to perceive me as an authority figure, and/or impose expectations as to them somehow being required to respond to questions asked with the 'right' answers.

In addition, the possibility that they could choose to complete a Unit Standard assessment had similar implications that I aimed to counteract several ways. Engagement with the Unit Standard work was negotiated individually with participants and it was made clear that it was separate from any involvement in the research. Thus, it was not considered to be a coercive or incentivizing factor for recruitment. However, every effort was made to ensure that research participants choosing to do the assessment activity understood it was not connected to the research project and in no way expected/contingent on their involvement with it, and that they understood that while the researcher may be assessing them in relation to the standard, she was not assessing their contributions to data generation for the research. In order to avoid both any potential perception of favouritism on my part, or coercion for participants to respond in particular ways, an external moderation process was instituted for any assessed work to protect all parties involved.

## SUMMARY

This chapter has outlined the methodology of this thesis. It places the research within a values-based, constructivist paradigm, utilising an approach that aimed to privilege previously under-represented youth voice through a relational and reflexive youth-friendly research process. The research focus was described and research questions presented.

The chapter provided information about the participants and location of the research. It presented relevant literature describing the data generation methods used in this research, discussing their benefits and limitations, and the way each was utilised throughout the research process. Data analysis methods were presented and the elements of rigorous qualitative research were discussed, with particular attention on reflexivity and validity. Ethical considerations for conducting research with youth were shared, and examples of how these were managed throughout were highlighted.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **OVERVIEW**

This chapter presents the findings related to the participants' initial perceptions of leadership prior to their involvement in the WE Lead leadership programme. It outlines the research findings, revealing how participant perceptions shifted and were influenced as a result of participation in the programme.

Key findings will be considered thematically and include: perceptions that leadership was a relational and contextual process of transformational influence; that leadership could be learnt; that school provided more limited leadership development opportunities for youth than community contexts; and that these youth had developed understandings about the leadership learning process and recommendations for practitioners about how best to meet a diverse range of leadership learning needs.

After participation in the WE Lead programme all participants indicated they had an enhanced understanding of leadership generally and personally; greater appreciation for shared leadership learning and for the design of leadership development programmes; and increased motivation and expectations for further meaningful leadership learning opportunities.

### **INITIAL YOUTH PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP**

Initial survey and interview data highlighted that the group, prior to the commencement of the leadership development programme, had diverse, and at times, complex understandings about what leadership is. The key perceptions are discussed in the following section.

## LEADERSHIP INVOLVED POSITIVE TRANSFORMATIONAL INFLUENCE

All participants perceived that leadership was a positive, transformational process of influence over others by someone who inspires, guides and helps groups or individuals to achieve their potential, and who affects change through wanting to make a positive difference.

A number of participants identified the concept of a leader being someone to “look up to”, or who is “at the front”, suggesting a sense of hierarchy, but this was tempered with the developed understanding that they had this role because they had won respect through their influential actions. Actions mentioned included “sharing a vision and creating engagement” and “building people’s ability above their normal limitations”. This perception sat alongside the regularly mentioned notion of a leader being a positive “role-model” or “guide” providing “help” that inspires and supports others. Participants’ sense of being guided, pushed, listened to and encouraged by someone they have an on-going relationship with, indicated that relational investment on a personal level seems to have a strong influence on who these youth perceive as leaders.

In terms of desirable leadership actions, again, the notion of positive influence for the good of others came through in many participant responses, with passion, inspiration, taking control, making good decisions, role-modelling, “wanting to help people achieve their goals”, and “making a difference in their community” specifically identified. The attention expressed by most participants on strong actions and communication skills commonly associated with leaders such as public-speaking, delegation or time-management, also indicated that the young people involved in this research saw leadership as a transformational

process of influence, rather than predominately an organisational or managerial task-based position.

## **LEADERSHIP WAS A RELATIONAL PROCESS**

For all these youth, leadership influence was experienced mostly through informal and on-going relationships with people such as teachers, parents, youth workers and mentors they “look up to”, rather than those in formal positions such as business leaders or politicians. Two participants, however, mentioned local politicians with whom they had on-going youth advocacy based relationships. The participants also made no mention of looking up to current celebrities, high-profile sports-people or political leaders. According to Milky Bar, “I wouldn’t trust anybody on TV because they’re always looking out for their own good.” These examples point to their concept of leadership as a relational experience of being led by someone who invests in them on a personal level as a positive guide or support, and within an everyday context.

The participants identified the societal belief that leadership meant “bossing others around” and being controlling, and needed to be challenged as false. Willow Rose, a participant with extensive leadership experience and recognition, suggested that young people were hesitant to seek leadership opportunities because they saw these as intimidating and isolating. It was her experience that “everyone needs help at some point” and “you can’t be a leader on your own.” She specifically identified examples from her own experience illustrating a leader who garnered the respect of followers and developed trust through demonstrating effective communication and relational skills, being visible and present, and getting alongside those he was leading, rather than positioning himself at a distance or “above” followers. The sharing of such personal examples of leadership relationships reinforces the significance for these youth of

feeling respected by and developing rapport with those who lead them in an on-going way.

Initial data sets revealed limited recognition and understanding of the role that followers had in the leadership dynamic. It appears that at the start of the programme, following was not a concept that had been considered by most participants in terms of leadership. Several participants associated the concept of following with that of being passive or easily influenced in a negative or weak way, clearly linking their interpretation with scenarios involving peer relationships. Delilah and others, however, noted that following involved a choice to support leaders in different situations.

Qualities that were identified by participants to be key leadership characteristics included “friendliness”, “caring”, “listening”, “being easy to talk to”, “respectfulness” and “open-mindedness”, and supported the finding that participants conceived of leadership as involving the building of quality relationships through enacting positive relational skills. This suggests that for these youth, demonstration of leader integrity that elicits respect and trust was necessary before they would follow that person. It is therefore not surprising that they reported a cynical view of politicians and celebrities as leaders, as there was no perceived positive, relational connection or investment on a personal level from them.

## **LEADERSHIP WAS CONTEXTUALLY BOUND**

Overwhelmingly, youth participants perceived that leaders were “everywhere”, all around us, and an everyday influence. They specified a range of community and business contexts where leadership takes place such as schools, sports clubs, councils, companies and community organisations. Reflecting the age and experience of youth involved in the survey, school context was most commonly identified as a place where leaders are found. However, what came through distinctly, and echoing

the nature of whom they perceive as leaders, was attention on personal examples from their own experiences, rather than historical/global/public examples removed from their own contexts, as Carebear illustrated;

“I personally think that leaders are all around us. I’m not talking about high-ranking politicians, officials, CEO’s or generals. I’m talking about everyday people like supervisors, teachers, team captains, coaches, scout leaders, parents, priests and so on. They work hard, they care about their people, inspire, motivate, coach and are role models for the rest of us.”

Within the context of the wider community, many of these young people believed that few youth were presented as leaders in a public way. They also identified how valuable it is to be exposed to seeing young people in leadership roles within their communities. Examples cited included two young service orientated leaders who have had a significant local impact and large community following in post-earthquake Christchurch: Sam Johnson (Student Volunteer Army) and Coralie Winn (Gapfiller). Delilah also suggested that seeing younger politicians “...would raise lots of people’s interest, because it would show that the country’s not only run by old people that don’t really have any idea about anything to do with us.”

The group considered having a youth perspective in both local and central government decision-making process was important. The unique context of Christchurch, where decisions about the post-earthquake rebuilding of the city inevitably impact on youth, has both raised awareness and provided new opportunities for young people to involve themselves in civic planning and representation. Megan illustrated this stating, “I think it’s important how we’re creating a new city and young people have a fair percentage of their views on what’s going to happen.” This perception transcended the personal contexts previously identified by participants and revealed an awareness of the wider community benefits of positive influence and change-making capacity leaders can have.

All of the young people who participated in this research defined themselves in initial data sets as a leader with experience in at least one, and in most cases, multiple contexts, and in a variety of roles. Not surprisingly, many reflected school contexts, being house or team captains and the like. There was also a wide range of community leadership involvements across the group including sporting, deaf advocacy, event organisation, St John and musical leadership, with Ariel having “so many I can’t even write them all down or remember them.” Such a diversity of involvements is consistent with the perception that leadership is taking place “everywhere,” in a wide range of contexts, including a variety of purposes, and flexibility in terms of roles and actions, rather than being static and pre-determined in terms of time, place or position. These young people purposefully choose where and how they demonstrated leadership, and this is connected to how they perceive themselves as leaders, as the next section in this chapter will reveal.

## **YOUTH SELF-PERCEPTIONS AS LEADERS**

When reflecting on their own leadership experiences and what they believed were their key leadership qualities, many of the participants commonly identified “communication skills” in general terms rather than noting specific skills such as active listening or public speaking. Qualities that underpinned the ability to form and sustain relationships were specifically identified by most. Relational qualities such as “patience”, “trustworthiness” and “respect” were mentioned, as were attitudinal approaches such as “positivity”, “passion” and “confidence”. Organisational and decision-making abilities were less commonly noted. Overall, these examples are consistent with the finding that this group of young people experience leadership as a relational process, and show that they can identify such qualities within themselves.

Interestingly, when reflecting on leadership qualities they desired to enhance, despite the prevalence of communication skills being identified as a characteristic they currently possess, a number of participants nominated “public speaking skills” as something they also wanted to develop. In addition, more than half the participants believed that they needed to develop inner confidence as leaders such as: “self-belief”, “ability to stand my ground”, and “not to second-guess my own decisions”.

Transactional, task-based leadership skills barely featured and relational qualities dominated perceptions of characteristics they wanted to develop in themselves. A number of the group aspired to increase the level of positive influence they have over others to motivate and inspire. Again, this links with previous findings in terms of what these youth constitute as desirable leadership qualities and connect to the perception that leadership is relational in nature.

However, in contrast to the way they viewed the people who lead them as inspirational, motivational and influential, none of the participants identified these leadership qualities specifically as ones they already possessed, and few nominated them as qualities they desired to acquire. Given though, that most participants expressed a motivation to effect change and have a positive impact, this anomaly raises questions as to where and how they glean their perceptions of themselves as leaders, and indeed, where and how they see their future leadership involvements. These issues will be considered in the discussion chapter that follows.

## **YOUNG PEOPLE’S MOTIVATION FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

There was a range of motivations behind seeking leadership development opportunities. Initial applications (18 in total) indicated that most of the young people who applied to do the leadership development programme

for personal benefits such as wanting to “gain leadership skills”, “grow in confidence” and “learn to communicate more effectively”. Some were motivated by extrinsic rewards such as gaining Level 3 credits or being able to put their involvement on their CV. The majority of participants stated that they wanted to give back to their communities and have a positive, change-making influence. Several cited relational goals such as learning how to work as a team and meeting like-minded people, and even identified attributes they could offer to the group, for example, “I offer a great attitude, empathy, an open mind, and a willingness to learn” (Hine).

Youth with prior leadership experience and who identified goals in terms of building relational skills were more likely to engage with the programme in an on-going way, whereas those who identified little or no experience in their initial application either didn’t start or dropped out early. Interestingly, these were the same people who in their applications had identified what they stood to gain from the programme, rather than what they could bring to it.

There appears to be a connection between previous leadership experiences of these young people, and a relational perception of leadership, both influencing their level of engagement with further leadership development opportunities such as the WE Lead Programme. This draws attention to the access youth have to meaningful leadership development opportunities, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for involvement, and notions of self-agency that will be explored further in the discussion chapter.

# ACCESS TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

## SCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES

Access to leadership development opportunities was an important consideration for all of the young people involved in this research. Not surprisingly given their age, experience and social status, school was most frequently cited as the context within which participants perceived leadership opportunities existed for youth. But overwhelmingly, nearly all participants criticised access to these opportunities, the role of adults in provision of these opportunities, and the nature of these opportunities.

All of the participants identified limited formal opportunities for leadership in schools. They believed that only those identified as “good” at something (sport/drama/music/culture/academia), or popular, high profile students were given access to leadership positions; and the process by which these people were selected caused frustration for some participants. There was a commonly held perception amongst the group that adults were the gatekeepers in terms of these opportunities and many attempts to involve students in decision-making was tokenistic. Hine expressed frustration that adult choices were in some cases unjust;

For example, one of the deputy head students at my school, she is extremely racist and just has a lot of characteristics that I would never want. She’s favoured by teachers because she is a jokester. At the end of the day it was the teachers’ decision.

Similarly, Ariel spoke in frustration of a head student who was chosen because she was popular with teachers but stopped attending school and subsequently had no input into the school community. Having ineffective leaders in these roles meant others were excluded from opportunities to make a contribution, and as stated by Ariel, “I just find it really frustrating that when I see someone who’s put into a leadership role that doesn’t

actually do anything with it. I look at her and I'm like, I could do so much better than you!"

The number of leadership opportunities offered within school contexts was perceived by some participants as very limited. Both Delilah and Willow Rose noted how in a large school it is difficult to be high profile enough to be "noticed" by teachers, and also how few formal positions exist for youth to access as there can only be "one head girl and one head boy" (Willow Rose), "So to be the head of the school the teachers pick you – you are the chosen one" (Delilah).

Carebear changed schools part way through his secondary schooling and it was his belief that this disadvantaged him by automatically excluding him from leadership roles. Being part of the junior executive structure in the school was considered the starting point or necessary apprenticeship for gaining the credentials for a leadership position in the senior school. These examples suggest that the young people in this research perceived that access to leadership development within schools was restricted because of existing traditional, hierarchical structures, and unfair, inflexible approaches excluded some students from selection for these opportunities.

Some of the youth represented in this research perceived that schools had a narrow view of what they considered as relevant leadership experience and this further restricted their access to leadership opportunities. Willow Rose, Ariel and Hine all spoke of a lack of recognition for their wide-ranging community leadership involvements and the belief that it counted for nothing within the school context. Ariel's depth of feeling at being overlooked by her teachers and her sense of injustice at their poor selection processes and limited view of leadership was profound. She was almost in

tears as she spoke with anger and frustration of the leadership selection process eight months prior, saying,

“I think they shouldn’t discriminate. I think to be put into a head student team role - they’re meant to grow and I think that they shouldn’t just choose the top... because they don’t need any more help to believe in themselves. So when they cut it off it really hurt me and I was really really upset about it and my mum came in and she went and talked to the principal and everything and I’ve forever been... I always look at the back of my mind and be like, ‘I didn’t get into the head student team,’ that’s crushed me.”

Hine was more philosophical of her position at school, stating,

“For me, I think that almost any leadership things or anything along those lines that I’ve done or have effected my opinion on leadership have been out of school, because school probably had more of a negative opinion on me because of past things...”

There was also a commonly held perception that because of the restrictions mentioned, leadership experiences in secondary schools were high stakes socially, requiring popularity and social resilience among peers. The perception that it was safer emotionally and socially to participate and contribute as leaders in a more inclusive and less judgemental context came to the fore for several of the participants in this research. Willow Rose, a quiet and reserved person, revealed her preference for taking leadership roles in a community context,

“In St John I know a lot of people and I know that I’m more comfortable about being around them and taking leadership roles ‘cause people don’t really judge. Whereas at school there’s all the different groups of the popular kids and the not popular kids and all that sort of thing so it’s a lot harder to be a leader in that without stepping on people’s toes is the big thing. I would never get up and speak in front of class at school, but I will get up in front of a room for St John and talk to everyone.”

Interestingly, it became clear that across the group there was a variety of processes enacted within schools to engage youth participation in decision-making, and some schools seemed to be more inclusive of student voice in their provision of leadership opportunities. B recounted a student driven selection process for head student roles that other participants expressed approval for, and even envy of, where teachers' input was limited and student opinion privileged.

There was some awareness of choice and ambition identified in terms of accessing leadership development opportunities too. Willow Rose thought it "depends on people's willingness to do things to become leaders," and Carebear identified that "...goal oriented youths who already have a straight road planned ahead of them tend to go take these leadership roles." Such comments highlighted contrasting perceptions on behalf of these youth to the more commonly expressed view that adults wield all the power around who gets to be a leader in a school context. Instead, they acknowledge self-agency on behalf of youth in terms of their authority to make choices about when, where and how they participate in leadership development opportunities.

## **COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES**

Restricted access to leadership development opportunities within schools resulted in some youth actively searching outside school contexts for leadership opportunities and to feel a sense of belonging. They found the level of acceptance, along with the structures and sizes of community organisations, offered more and broader opportunities for them to develop their leadership skills.

These community engagement opportunities were spoken of with animated positivity. Willow Rose expressed loyalty and indebtedness that has grown from her connection with St John stating, "Once you get

involved it's easier to stay in it and do things well because once you start getting the opportunities you don't want to leave - like I'd never leave St John now because of what it's given me." Proud also spoke passionately of her commitment to the deaf community in Christchurch, "It's about helping your community...I'm the youth leader for my youth group that we are setting up for deaf youth to get all the deaf people to come back after the earthquakes. So that's really positive."

Several participants appreciated the fact that they were challenged to grow and develop through their community involvements. Ariel, talking about the White Elephant Youth Trust, identified that "Feeling wanted and knowing that your presence is actually valuable is important to start off with. And then to be able to be challenged to be able to move up the ranks is good." Willow Rose acknowledged the fact that she has authority over her own involvements in choosing a challenging community context when she stated;

"We're there because we want to be, rather than being at school because we have to be there, so I think that it makes a big difference... It's constantly changing... It's amazing to have the challenges out in front of you... And so it's a different challenge rather than school. And it gives you more opportunities than what school does" (Willow Rose, talking about St John).

Every participant mentioned their desire to build their skills and grow leadership potential. In contrast to school, community contexts were clearly identified as positive environments where this takes place for the young leaders in this research.

## **LEARNING LEADERSHIP**

All of the youth in this research overwhelmingly acknowledged the ability of leadership to be nurtured, learnt experientially/contextually from others,

and for skills and capacities to be grown. An awareness that they were on a personal leadership learning journey was clear and they revealed this in comments such as; “I consider myself to be a leader in progress, I believe there will always be room for improvement” (Carebear), and “I am still a student with other leaders on how to be a better leader” (Ariel).

The commonly expressed idea contained in initial data that these young people are collecting experience, knowledge, skills and mentors through their involvements illustrated an awareness of the experiential benefits of seeking, accepting and participating in available leadership development opportunities. It also has strong connections with previously mentioned findings regarding what motivates them to engage in leadership opportunities, and importantly, with their perceptions of leadership being a relationship of transformational influence, as illustrated by Hine; “The people around you mould you and inspire you to be the person you want to be” and Carebear; “People from school, church and home have helped shape and sculpt me as a leader.”

Along with the understanding that leadership can be learnt, was an awareness of the teaching and learning relationships that this learning took place within. Many of the young people were quick to identify a diversity of learning styles and needs and shared a range of ways in which leadership could be taught and learnt. For example, Megan commented “I think it depends on the type of learner you are, whether you’re visual, kinesthetic, or like listening, reading, doing.” Similarly, Hine stated “Not everyone has the same style of leadership [learning] especially and some might be an academic one where they need to be taught and others it might just be natural or more hands-on and practical....there’s things that you just learn from experience.” This demonstrated that these youth were

aware that a one-size fits all approach to teaching leadership may not be as effective as one involving a variety of approaches.

Several participants clearly expressed that learning is a reciprocal relationship of influence, and that adults are not always leadership experts. For example, Hine stated, “They don’t often realise that they can get things back from youth as well and that it’s a two way thing and that everyone can learn from each other.” Ariel also reinforced this awareness of ako (reciprocal learning) when she said, “Yeah, we can definitely learn from our elders, but our elders can learn from us as well. And we can be leaders to them.” Such comments point to an awareness of the nature of worthwhile learning opportunities, and how significant relationships are for learning needs to be met effectively. These key points will be discussed further in the following chapter.

## **AUTHENTIC/MEANINGFUL LEADERSHIP LEARNING FOR YOUTH**

Many of the young people in this research had some clear ideas as to what they considered to be authentic leadership learning opportunities for them prior to their participation in the WE Lead programme, and had suggestions for adult practitioners as to how to best meet their learning needs in this area. As previously discussed, they saw leadership as something that can be learnt, and showed an awareness of differing learning styles. All the participants involved in this research felt that it was important for adults to consider the different ways young people liked to learn and suggested that catering to a range of learning styles (eg: kinesthetic, experiential, visual, aural) in the provision of leadership development experiences would be beneficial.

They desired adults to hold a broader, more inclusive and more developmental approach to leadership development, especially in terms of

who should have access to leadership development opportunities. Delilah offered the suggestion of youth self-selection into leadership positions rather than adult shoulder-tapping;

“I think they should have more roles that aren’t that you have to be accepted into them, or like competitive entry. They should have roles where people can volunteer, but also like, you might have to write why you think you’d be good at it, but you don’t have to have a selected list of all the things you can do. Because if they’ve already got an idea of what they want in their mind, and you don’t really fit it, that’s not really helping you grow...”

Experiential opportunities were identified as the most valuable learning experiences as students believed they provided the provision of opportunities to get involved in areas of interest or passion, rather than pre-prescribed, narrow, curricular areas. Milky Bar discussed it this way;

“The opportunity to do whatever you like, if you have a good idea and you think you could develop it, like create a whole project. It could be anything that anybody could think of, not necessarily even a subject of school.”

Several participants identified adults role modelling, and explicitly sharing knowledge and skills about leadership, as valuable learning opportunities. Also mentioned was the provision of leadership opportunities that challenged and pushed youth along with their evolving skill-base, while at the same time supporting them to be successful by backing their ideas and providing structures to support their learning. For example, Proud stated, “Like sometimes they can teach the young people and then let them go and they can learn it by step by step.”

It was clear that most of the participants came in to the WE Lead programme with strong perceptions regarding what constituted meaningful learning opportunities for leadership and ideas about how adults could provide these for them.

The following section outlines the WE Lead leadership development programme design, before sharing findings revealing shifts in participant perceptions about leadership after their engagement with the programme.

## **WE LEAD WINTER LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME DESIGN**

Data generation via the initial survey and interviews took place at the start of the WE Lead Winter Leadership Development Programme. Following this was an initial full-day introductory workshop, then 12 weekly sessions of approximately 1 hour 45 minutes each, where a range of leadership topics, skills, theories, exercises and group tasks were explored. Content for the programme was generated based on my extensive experience gleaned from six years of teaching a year long leadership programme with year 13 students in an urban secondary school. This programme had been honed and modified based on student feedback each year. This programme was redesigned based on the needs and experiences of the group, and also adapted to fit a condensed time frame. In addition, some content was negotiated along with programme participants in response to their learning needs and what they identified as important leadership learning for them (eg: public-speaking, problem-solving.) Over the 12 weeks examples of key topics included:

Definitions of Leadership, Leadership styles, Leadership traits, Leadership theories, Situational leadership, Personal leadership strengths and preferences, Values, Personality types, Active-listening and Rapport, Conflict, Public-speaking and Problem-solving sessions run by participants, Co-operative team problem-solving exercises, Communication exercises, Decision-making techniques.

Experiential activities were designed by me to address these topics and then distributed into a cohesive and shortened programme outline. Sessions took place on a weekday in the early evening in the whanau

space at Hagley College. Most sessions were practical and interactive in nature involving discussion circles, brainstorming, practical tasks and reflective debriefing. There were guest speakers at different times to provide variety and specific expertise, and in order to cater for mixed ability in terms of experience and learning needs, a range of learning styles were deliberately catered for. For example, a deaf interpreter was arranged for some sessions; theory was reinforced with brief experiential exercises; visual, kinaesthetic and aural teaching methods were employed; and participants were grouped purposively to promote interaction, appreciation of diversity, and a supportive yet challenging learning environment for all.

## **ADDITIONAL FEATURES WITHIN THE PROGRAMME DESIGN**

In addition to the interactive weekly sessions there were 3 additional experiential components offered for participants to voluntarily engage with: group challenges, reflection tasks, and a unit standard assessment.

### ***Group Challenges***

Early on, the group was randomly divided into 4 and each team was given an organisational challenge to deliver something for the rest of the group. Teams were given some time to meet during the group session, and assistance was available throughout, but the onus was on them to largely plan and organise meeting their challenge independently of our weekly sessions.

Despite participants overwhelmingly identifying that what they needed most from adults in order to develop as leaders were opportunities with increased responsibility and challenges, there was mixed success with the tasks. Those involved with the successful planning and delivery of these sessions expressed a great deal of satisfaction and pride in the experience as Megan explained;

“I quite enjoyed the planning and public speaking thing that we had to plan and run. I thought it was cool cos it kind of taught us everything’s not put on a plate.

However, for a variety of reasons neither of the two more organisationally challenging tasks were seen through. While there was no blame or failure attributed, a group debrief took place where there was opportunity for reflection, and everyone in the group was asked to reflect on their experience with the team challenges as part of the experiential learning process.

Milky Bar expressed her shock at the lack of follow-through by the other groups in her individual interview...

That’s when you tell how good you are. When you don’t get pushed and you just have to do it. It was such a challenge – like no-one would get organised. I’m very surprised on how uncommitted the people were.

On reflection, I recognised a distinction in complexity between the successful tasks and those that were not completed, and a range of ability within participants. This highlighted the necessity for strong adult support and guidance when providing more complex opportunities for leadership responsibility, not in order to rescue young people from failing, but to ensure a positive and constructive experiential learning opportunity.

### ***Participant Reflection Tasks***

During the course of the Leadership Development Programme there were several points at which participants were encouraged to reflect on particular tasks or processes they had been involved with during a session. As part of the experiential youth-centric programme design, reflection questions were handed out on pieces of paper, and posted on the group Facebook page for participants to engage with at a time and place, and in whatever way suited them best.

My intent with this process was to encourage reflective experiential learning and development (as introduced in Chapter Two), and also to offer youth-friendly options for them to express their perceptions in ways that felt most comfortable. In addition, it allowed me to be responsive and amend programme content according to their developing needs. Engagement with reflection exercises was low, with most participants either choosing not to show their reflections with me, or not doing them.

### ***Unit Standard Assessment***

Another added aspect to the Leadership Development Programme was the inclusion of the opportunity to participate voluntarily in their local community and be assessed against a Level 3 Unit Standard worth 6 NCEA Credits.<sup>1</sup> It involved participants seeking out and putting in volunteer time to contribute to a local project, group or cause over 6-8 weeks, and submitting the associated paperwork for assessment at the end of that process. Despite most participants being highly enthusiastic about this prospect early in the programme, in the end, only two completed the requirements and were assessed against the Unit Standard. Those who completed the volunteer project expressed high degrees of personal satisfaction and achievement. It is interesting to note that these two individuals had specific learning needs in terms of literacy that this opportunity catered for. One is deaf and the other is a second language English speaker, so the flexibility to produce their work

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<sup>1</sup> This terminology refers to New Zealand's National Certificate of Educational Achievement. Level 3 credits are usually attempted in one's final year of high school. 60 Level 3 credits are required to complete the Level 3 certificate, so 6 credits is a substantial amount. However, Unit Standards are considered more practical than academic in nature, and result in either an Achievement or Non-Achievement grade, without the opportunity to show either Merit or Excellence, as can be found with the more academically considered Achievement Standards.

practically and present it in visual and oral formats meant this assessment gave them an opportunity to be acknowledged.

The opportunity to be able to reward young people for their community contributions and acquire recognition through engagement with a qualification offered in a community context (rather than a school context) was considered both a positive and unique enhancement to the Leadership Development Programme by both The White Elephant Trust, and myself.

These extra programme components all had mixed levels of engagement and success for participants. It was important to consider their inclusion and the way they were structured to ensure effective programme design. Aspects needing consideration included: the nature of voluntary opportunities on offer; the levels of challenge and support offered in conjunction with those opportunities; and the perceived relevance of those opportunities for participants. Aspects of effective programme design and the nature of meaningful leadership learning opportunities are discussed in the following chapter.

## **IMPACT OF WE LEAD PROGRAMME ON PARTICIPANT PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP**

Participant perceptions of leadership appeared to become broader and deeper after participation in the WE Lead Leadership Development Programme. There were shifts in relation to: how they defined leadership, how they saw themselves as leaders, how they viewed leadership learning, and what they perceived as valuable learning opportunities and experiences.

## ENHANCED UNDERSTANDING OF LEADERSHIP AS A CONTEXTUAL AND RELATIONAL INFLUENCE

The programme was effective in enhancing youth participants' perceptions of leadership. Definitions of what leadership is, who are leaders, where we find leaders and what characteristics leaders have were broadened due to participation in the programme. Comments such as Carebear's that "The course has widened my view of what people can be considered leaders" indicated participants' perceptions being influenced in a way that allowed them to reflect upon and adapt their own beliefs about leadership.

After participation in the WE Lead programme there appeared to be an increased awareness of the contextual nature of leadership and the need for a repertoire of skills and qualities that can be adapted according to situational need. For example, Carebear stated, "I've come to realise that there are no set qualities to be a leader, but rather the leader must be flexible enough to understand what qualities are needed for that environment."

One key perceptual shift involved the concept of following. There was recognition of the element of choice involved when Milky Bar said, "Sometimes you gotta be a leader and sometimes you gotta be a follower. It was nice that we saw the follower's side as well because it's clearly important but it's never talked about too much." Other responses indicated a new understanding of the willing reciprocity needed for leadership/fellowship to occur successfully as Delilah demonstrates;

"Before the start of the course I had never really thought about the idea of being a "good" follower whatsoever, but now I'm more aware of the fact that a leader can be as good as he/she wants to be but they won't be able to do a lot at all without a group of good followers who are willing to do what is asked of them to achieve a common goal."

Part of this understanding about following involved loyalty. Several participants noted that loyalty was necessary in effective leaders and Willow Rose suggested the need for them to be “appreciating and recognising” the followers around them. These examples point to an increased appreciation of the reciprocal and relational nature involved in the leadership dynamic.

Participants expressed appreciation of their peers as influential leaders after involvement in the WE Lead programme. Exposure to other like-minded youth leaders provided inspiration and motivation for some participants to continue to seek leadership opportunities. For example, Milky Bar identified the solidarity she experienced through participating in the leadership development programme;

“After meeting them and talking with them [other participants] I recognize that we definitely need leaders like them/us because otherwise changes won't ever be made and things won't happen!

By participating in the programme, these young people were exposed to a diverse group of peer leaders and this increased their appreciation of the ability of youth to have an impact through their involvements.

## **ENHANCED SELF-PERCEPTION AS LEADERS**

Shifts in perception regarding the situational nature of leadership and the need for a variety of leadership characteristics were also commonly expressed in terms of individual skill bases, for example, “I've learnt that my leadership style needs to be adapted to different scenarios and what type of leadership is appropriate for when” (B).

On an individual level, the way participants perceived themselves as leaders also broadened as a result of taking part in the leadership development programme. Delilah explained, “I think that learning about

different types of leadership in different places has made me think that people might be seeing me as a leader now,” revealing an increased awareness of her ability to influence others through her actions.

All participants identified positive shifts in self-perception between the beginning and end of the programme, including; gains in confidence to speak in front of a group of strangers or peers; increases in problem-solving confidence; increased self-awareness; and in particular, increased confidence to take control of a situation. Improved perceptions of themselves as leaders were described in a variety of ways. For example, Carebear stated, “My perception about myself as a leader has improved. I feel that I’ve matured and therefore am more confident in classifying myself as a leader.” Willow Rose felt she gained a “better understanding of my type of leadership since participating in the course”; and B felt he had “improved because I’ve learnt to develop desirable leadership qualities such as communication and problem-solving.” These comments illustrate that the WE Lead programme enhanced participants’ perceptions of themselves as leaders.

After reflection, some participants also expressed improved self-perception in terms of specific personal leadership characteristics. B stated “I think I now possess a more in-depth and broad range of qualities”, and Willow Rose commented “I think I can accept that I don’t display every single quality of a leader more now, and that you can still be a good leader without being the best at everything.” Their statements indicate enhanced appreciation of their personal repertoire of specific leadership skills after engagement with the WE Lead programme.

## **PRIOR LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE IMPACTED UPON GAINS FROM THE PROGRAMME**

Every young person involved in this research experienced increased levels of individual self-efficacy, agency, and self-knowledge as a result of their participation in the community-based leadership development programme at the heart of this research. However, these gains were relative to the initial starting point for leadership development. It seemed that more experienced participants could not identify distinct shifts in the way they perceived leadership or themselves as leaders due to their involvement in the leadership development programme. As Ariel discussed;

“Yeah, I think it’s had a subtle impact, but once you’ve done all the games once, it’s like, yeah I know what to do here, and this is the point of this, and you’re just kind of like going through the steps. I think you’d be able to see yourself differently if you’d taken up a new position but I think we’re still doing the things we do constantly, so there’s nothing really to...”

Ariel’s point was reiterated by other more experienced youth leaders in the group, which raises the issue of programme design when faced with a mixed ability group and how best to offer experiential learning opportunities that cater for a range of needs, and this will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **ENHANCED APPRECIATION FOR SHARING LEADERSHIP LEARNING**

There was increased appreciation for the value of learning leadership collaboratively within a structured programme. Participants who had less opportunity to experience leadership, such as Proud, could identify many benefits in terms of new knowledge, “I’ve learnt a lot of things that I didn’t know about leadership and I think the most important is to learn to go on a course, then carry on passing it onto people.”

Others also appreciated that knowledge gained can be passed on to influence others through engagement in a structured leadership programme, as Willow Rose explained, “Because if a group of the same amount of adults did this course, then there’s that many people who could then teach it to the same amount of people, so then you’ve got it going out more and more and more, so that more people are getting the opportunity to do these things.”

The leadership programme heightened awareness among participants of a variety teaching and learning methods. Along with others, Willow Rose mentioned taking her experiences within the programme to use within her own leadership roles as teachers; “I guess with the way I’ve been trained there’s kind of ‘This is how you do things, and just deal with it and do it that way’. It’s just more knowing that there are different ways of doing things now. AND teaching things.” She, and some of her fellow youth leaders, found benefit in experiencing leadership development first-hand and found new ways of transferring knowledge within their own leadership contexts beyond the WE Lead programme. For example, B took an activity we did on personality types and used in his leadership role with a group of St John volunteers.

In addition, the leadership programme allowed participants to see relevant examples of leadership in action. Rather than gaining learning from specific exercises or activities, Milky Bar identified motivational benefits from being exposed to the example of other leaders as role models; “A few of the people there inspired me somehow because they are leaders already and it makes you be like, ‘I am not the centre of the world, there are some other cool people out there,’ and you gotta learn from them and then try and be the leader.” Her comments illustrate the benefits of learning alongside others and in a collaborative context.

## **ENHANCED APPRECIATION OF WHAT IS NEEDED IN THE DESIGN OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

Participants identified several preferences for how they like to learn leadership, and included some advice for practitioners to assist with the provision of authentic leadership learning opportunities.

Some participants noted specific features of leadership development programmes. Willow Rose stated that for her, the 12 week programme was not long enough to embed the leadership learning on a practical level; “If we had a chance to put what we’ve done into practise for a certain amount of time, I think that would change things. Like 6 months from now if everything we’ve learnt we were putting that into practice every week it would change.” It was also clear that participants embarked on the programme with differing levels of experience and these needed to be catered for in programme design. For example, Ariel desired a “higher level” of tasks that built on her already well-developed leadership experience than what was on offer.

The opportunity for reflection on previous practise was identified by some as a valuable learning tool within programme design. Carebear highlighted the benefits of reflection saying, “I’ve learnt that the best way to improve is to compare yourself to your old self. That way you can see how much progress you are making.” Proud also spoke of the value of being able to learn from experience, “If you make a mistake, then next time you might be better, you don’t have to be perfect.” These examples illustrate that the youth involved in this research developed an enhanced understanding of how authentic leadership learning opportunities could be designed after their engagement with the WE Lead programme. They perceived that leadership can be learnt, and identified it as an experiential process, pointing to the benefits of experiencing a range of learning opportunities

across time. However, they also indicated that a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching leadership did not cater for mixed ability groups containing diversity of experience and learning needs.

### **GREATER MOTIVATION FOR FURTHER INVOLVEMENT IN OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP LEADERSHIP**

Participants reiterated their desire for increased opportunities, identifying the kinds of experiences they felt would allow them to continue to grow their leadership capabilities. B was keen on “anything that challenges me out of my comfort zone and is new”, whereas Megan specifically desired experience “organising more things and running more groups. The commonly held desire to “participate in as many opportunities as I can” (Willow Rose) indicated an increased motivation in participants after their involvement with the WE Lead programme, and suggests both an appreciation of previous experiences, and a hunger for more leadership learning.

Participants also had specific suggestions for adults as to how they could best support youth to develop leadership through raising their expectations and providing authentic experiential opportunities. Ariel’s point that “Giving a young person responsibility is a really good feeling!” along with B’s suggestion that “Delegating us certain things we could do, that could help us improve on what we’ve already learnt” illustrate a desire for more opportunities that assist them to grow in leadership capacity. Megan reiterated this, saying “I guess some adults just need to step back and look at different jobs and roles that are filled by adults that could be filled by young keen youth wanting to learn.” In addition, Delilah identified that “maybe adults don’t know how or where to create those roles.” Her comment, along with the suggestions listed above, illustrate that these young people are aware that their perceptions could be of benefit to

practitioners in terms of assisting them to provide meaningful leadership learning opportunities. They also suggested that these youth are prepared to be active partners in the leadership learning process through their willingness to co-construct authentic experiential learning opportunities for leadership development.

### **INCREASED EXPECTATIONS FOR MEANINGFUL LEADERSHIP LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

There was a clear indication from all participants that context and purpose for a leadership learning opportunity needed to be meaningful in order for these youth to be motivated and engaged. With regard to her group's lack of success with the team challenge in the WE Lead Programme, Delilah reflected, "I would've been much more inclined to do it if I was organising something I'm really interested in." Some participants also found a lack of incentive in the opportunity to achieve Level 3 Unit Standard credits as they did not allow for Excellence to be acknowledged in the way that Achievement Standard credits do; "I totally would've done it if it was an achievement standard, hands down" (Ariel). These comments suggest that in order for these youth to be motivated to engage in leadership development opportunities, they need to be perceived as relevant and meaningful.

Extrinsic rewards enhanced some participants' motivation to engage with opportunities on offer, and allowed for expertise to be recognised and rewarded. In the case of the WE Lead programme, extrinsic rewards varied from a simple completion certificate to gaining an external unit standard worth 6 Level 3 NCEA credits. Receiving concrete recognition acknowledgement for leadership involvements and community participation was significant, as Milky Bar explained; "I think I feel good about this (*points to certificate*). It always makes me feel good. This is like

a reward that I feel. It's really nice to have that. Like when you do a volunteer job and they give you something back from it, it makes you feel good." To increase engagement and attribute value to leadership learning opportunities, the provision of various ways to acknowledge youth participation appears to be an important consideration within programme design.

Follow-up data also showed a shift in focus for more experienced leaders from learning leadership to doing leadership, and involved them stating future goals that encompassed recognition of their well-developed leadership capacity. Both Ariel and Willow Rose reflected on the injustice of being passed over for roles by adults with less experience.

Ariel: We kind of get put in lower positions.

WR: Even when you've had more training than some of the adults. I see that quite a lot. You get people who have done tons and tons and tons of leadership training but someone who's older will get picked over them just because they're older so they've probably done it already.

A: That's the most frustrating thing ever. Probably because older people also get paid. Sadly.

WR: But it's true, it happens all the time.

They both spoke of a desire to be paid for their efforts as they transitioned beyond school, meanwhile still expressing a willingness to continue in unpaid roles, for example, "I'll keep doing what I do [with St John] but probably more because now that I'm 18 I kind of have to step it up a notch and help with a lot more. And then next year, if I don't get into Uni I want to do Camp America" (Willow Rose).

For these young leaders, as they move beyond school and out into tertiary education or employment, acknowledgement of their extensive skills and

experience becomes important. In order for youth like Ariel, for whom “It’s like in my fingerprint doing community stuff,” to feel like they continue to be valued, challenged and nurtured to grow as leaders, authentic opportunities need to be provided that also recognise and reward their significantly developed agency as leaders to effect change.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter has presented findings regarding the leadership perceptions of nine participants before and after their participation in an experiential community-based leadership development programme. Findings shared suggest that the participants in this research further enhanced developed understandings of leadership, themselves as leaders and the leadership learning process. They also suggest that access to leadership learning experiences provides critical opportunities for enhancing understanding and building capacity. In addition, these young people have diverse needs and expectations regarding the provision and design of leadership development opportunities. Through sharing their perceptions, they have contributed to the limited knowledge that exists about youth leadership development, and their contributions have potential to assist practitioners in adapting the design and delivery of leadership learning programmes so they are more responsive, relevant and equitable in the provision of authentic leadership learning opportunities for youth.

The next chapter will discuss the findings with specific implications for the delivery of youth leadership development opportunities offered within a 21<sup>st</sup> century educational context. Discussion will specifically concentrate on four central themes that need further consideration in connection to the provision of socially just youth leadership development opportunities, including: the issue of access to meaningful youth leadership development opportunities; the nature of meaningful youth leadership development

opportunities (or what constitutes a meaningful youth leadership development opportunity); the significance of youth voice in the development of meaningful youth leadership development opportunities; and the importance of collaborative partnerships in the provision of meaningful youth leadership development opportunities.

# CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

## OVERVIEW

The research presented in this thesis aimed to contribute to the limited literature presenting youth perceptions of leadership by investigating young people's perceptions of leadership generally, and of themselves as leaders; and how those perceptions were influenced after involvement in a community-based, experiential youth leadership development programme. The programme embodied a youth-centric approach that engaged the participants in processes that encouraged them to share their views and privileged them as experts on their own experiences and understandings of leadership.

## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY EDUCATION

This chapter will discuss several issues revealed in the findings from this research that are pertinent to the design and delivery of socially just youth leadership development programmes in a 21<sup>st</sup> century educational context as presented in Chapter One.

A review of the future-focussed principles that Bolstad and Gilbert (2012) identified as being core to effective 21<sup>st</sup> century education delivery includes:

- Personalising learning
- New views of equity, diversity and inclusivity
- A curriculum that uses knowledge to develop learning capacity
- "Changing the script": rethinking learners' and teachers' roles
- A culture of continuous learning for teachers and educational leaders

- New kinds of partnerships and relationships: schools no longer siloed from the community (p. 3-5).

The re-identification of these principles is relevant as they relate specifically to the four key themes being discussed in this chapter and they have direct implications for the provision of socially just, meaningful youth leadership learning opportunities now and into the future.

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY EDUCATION**

It has long been acknowledged that educational systems and practices have often served to entrench existing societal inequalities by privileging particular social groups, for example: pakeha middle class New Zealanders, and further disenfranchise students who are already disadvantaged or marginalised by their social or cultural status, for example: Maori or Pacific Island Peoples, working class New Zealanders (Bishop, 2007; Bolstad & Gilbert, 2012). Discussion is more recently focussed on notions of social justice in education; how to address inequities in educational delivery in ways that engage and build success for all students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Black, 2007). As Sandretto (2007) points out, social justice is a slippery term, but in educational contexts, one view of social justice is that it “is primarily concerned with the development and maintenance of an educational system committed to meeting the needs of all students in order to assist them in reaching their full potential” (Sandretto, 2007, p. 3).

Black (2007) identified three models for deeper change to create educational environments that are socially just. They include; student centred schools where learning is personalised and culturally responsive; schools as learning hubs that create partnerships and collaborate with groups and organisations in the community; and shared community responsibility for young people’s welfare and learning. These strategies

echo Bolstad and Gilbert's principles and serve to concentrate attention on notions of collaboration and personalisation.

Leadbeater (2008) too, identifies that schools need to become increasingly, networked, collaborative and open in order to build networks of relationships. He asserts, "A 21st century agenda for learning will involve radical changes to school" (p. 25). In his view "The route to a more socially just, inclusive education system, one which engages, motivates and rewards all, is through a more personalised approach to learning" (p. 70). Facer (2011) purports that future-building schools recognise that "the capacity to effect change in the world is achieved through the networks, partnerships, relationships and systems with which the individual or institution is connected" (p. 105). She describes a "wider educational ecosystem" (p. 106) where students, schools and communities work together to build equitable and sustainable futures for all.

The acknowledgement that schools and practitioners can do more to create socially just educational environments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is important. Identifying the key future-focussed principles of personalising learning, and building effective collaborative partnerships between a range of people and organisations is a valuable starting point for anyone wanting to design and deliver inclusive and authentic leadership learning opportunities, and hence, forms the foundation upon which this discussion is based.

In this chapter, a case is put for changes to be made in current practices to enable the provision of more socially just leadership development opportunities for youth in the future. The significance of four themes in particular will be discussed in relation to the context of a future-focussed, 21<sup>st</sup> century educational environment, including: the issue of young

people's access to meaningful youth leadership development opportunities; the nature of meaningful youth leadership development opportunities; the importance of collaborative partnerships in the provision of meaningful youth leadership development opportunities; and the significance of youth voice in the development of meaningful youth leadership development opportunities.

## **ACCESS TO MEANINGFUL YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

As presented in the previous chapter, this research found that the majority of the youth participants had a negative view of how schools approached leadership development, and a more positive perception of community contexts for leadership learning. These perceptions are key considerations for practitioners who are willing to be responsive to youth voice, and to enact Bolstad and Gilbert's (2012) principles for the delivery of effective education in a 21<sup>st</sup> century context.

Given that school is the most common context for youth leadership development (Fertman & van Linden, 1998), the frequency and depth of perceived injustice and inequity surrounding opportunities in school environments articulated by the youth in this research is cause for question and concern for practitioners in schools. If young people actively seeking leadership development opportunities experience exclusion and a lack of recognition within school contexts and are looking instead to community contexts to provide meaningful leadership opportunities, there is an implicit challenge to schools to consider how to better meet their needs.

Participants' unanimous endorsement of the WE Lead programme's inclusive nature suggests that school-run leadership opportunities are less successful in this respect. Every participant specifically attributed value to

the inclusive nature of the community context, as reflected by Willow Rose, when she noted “I got an appreciation for a range of people from different walks of life.” The experience of the youth in this research is in alignment with Dworkin, Larson and Hansen’s (2003) finding that community based youth activities “appear to be a context for adolescents to meet and learn about peers who are different from them in ethnicity, race and social class” (p.18), and highlights the need for schools to consider a change in practise and enhance opportunities in order to make this happen.

### ***Increasing Inclusivity***

The fact that participants in the WE Lead programme unanimously endorsed the inclusive nature of the community context within which the programme was run as a positive contrast to the restricted access to leadership opportunities provided by schools, identifies that schools are not currently meeting their needs. The implications of this finding could suggest that schools need to reflect on the provision of leadership development opportunities, and possibly redesign opportunities that are more inclusive, more authentic, and more supportive in order to engage students effectively. This will mean challenging traditional practices that privilege selection of high profile, popular and successful students into formal leadership roles, and discarding them in favour of practices that celebrate and include a diversity of students from different backgrounds and with a wide variety of community connections, skills and aspirations.

Prioritising strong youth-adult partnerships and building collaborative relationships with a range of community organisations could positively assist with the creation of more inclusive opportunities. Until this occurs, many students desiring to grow and contribute through experiential leadership opportunities will continue to go elsewhere to be challenged

and nurtured as leaders, and both the school's community, and the students themselves will remain limited by the nature of opportunities on offer.

Practitioners need to think about how to create contexts for youth leadership development that are more inclusive, and it is important to consider both how that could occur and why it should occur. Libby et al (2006) discuss youth leadership development contexts in terms of "Inside" mainstream and dominant systems and institutions such as schools and government, and "Outside" groups, such as community organisations, projects or social movements (p. 14). It is their contention that youth themselves who lead within *inside* systems tend to represent and uphold the status quo and reinforce traditional power dynamics in terms of who is privileged by their race, gender, class sexual orientation and ability, whereas youth leaders in *outside* groups are often involved in questioning, challenging the status quo and advocating for marginalised voices to be heard. The authors suggest that in order to be socially just, resourcing and attention needs to be given to create linkages between the two and that youth leadership development practitioners must, as a matter of equity, create more opportunities for marginalised youth to contribute in *inside* settings because "youth whose needs have not been met by their schools and other youth-serving systems have an expertise that is critical to transforming these institutions" (p. 22). The experiences of the youth who participated in the WE Lead programme offer a clear example that collaboration between the two can provide benefits for both individuals and communities as they learn about how to be more inclusive and share power more fairly.

Kress (2006) asserts that "a different elitism, not tied to talent or ability but to who has access, has emerged" in relation to youth leadership

development opportunities (p. 53). She identifies that income, race and gender all influence participation and high-achieving, middle-class youth are often over-represented among youth leaders, while those from low socio-economic communities have less access to a well-supported and wide array of leadership development opportunities. Kress's (2006) key point that "To have the opportunity of youth leadership, one must first participate, and the reality is that programmes must be attractive and relevant to target audiences" (p. 53) supports this research's findings and throws down a challenge for more equitable practices and diverse opportunities to be offered in a range of contexts in order to provide socially just leadership development for youth.

### ***Increasing Access***

The WE Lead programme encompassed future-focussed principles within both its context and design to provide an exemplar for a new way forward in the provision of inclusive leadership learning opportunities. It sought to provide a diverse group of young people with access to a leadership learning opportunity in the wider community. In practise, increasing access meant abandoning approaches that only targeted specific youth who are already privileged high achievers; it meant acknowledging a wider range of contexts for youth leadership contributions to be recognised within; and it also meant reaching out beyond traditional structures and programme designs to invite, include and engage a diversity of young people in leadership learning opportunities.

The areas identified above demonstrate a 21<sup>st</sup> century educational perspective that values the principles previously highlighted. In particular, at the heart of increasing access to meaningful leadership development for youth is a commitment to the principles of personalising learning and inclusivity.

Bolstad and Gilbert (2012) maintain that personalising learning aligns with the idea that educational systems and delivery needs to move away from the Industrial Age “one-size-fits-all” model (p. 17). Future-focused educational practitioners need to take more account of who learners are, where they are, and to what and whom they are connected in order to “build the experiences and networks that strengthen every learner’s capacity” (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 2). A commitment to supporting every individual to develop their full potential benefits those individuals and also the society they live in, because it both prioritises equity and values diversity.

In the New Zealand context, there are major social groups whose learners’ and communities’ needs have not been well served by our education system in the past, and according to Bolstad and Gilbert (2102), this has contributed to current social inequities. A commitment to inclusivity as a key principle in the provision of 21<sup>st</sup> century education, institutes a mechanism to better address the needs of a diversity of students from different backgrounds and cultures and with a range of learning needs. This priority also enacts a commitment to socially just educational provision which, in turn, has the power to reduce disparity not only in access to educational opportunities, but it can improve educational outcomes and create higher standards of living for all learners, no matter where they are from, or where their learning takes place.

Through its context and its programme design, the WE Lead Programme demonstrated that one way to broaden access to leadership learning opportunities for New Zealand youth, is for schools and community organisations to collaborate in the creation of socially just and culturally responsive educational opportunities that are inclusive for all. If more schools actively seek collaborative community partnerships of the kind that

Black (2007), Leadbeater (2007), and Facer (2011) promote, it is possible that more youth will have access to leadership development opportunities, and wider school communities will gain benefit from their increased involvements.

## **THE NATURE OF MEANINGFUL YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

As well as broadening access to leadership development opportunities for youth, it is essential that programme design meets participant needs and the nature of opportunities provided is considered by them to be meaningful. Findings shared in Chapter Four illustrated that the young people in this research had clear ideas regarding what kinds of opportunities for leadership learning were meaningful, and could identify ways that practitioners might more effectively meet their needs in the future.

## **CREATING SUSTAINABLE, AUTHENTIC OPPORTUNITIES**

Raising practitioner awareness of what is required for the successful provision of meaningful youth leadership opportunities is critical if they are to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. In order to be meaningful, leadership development opportunities must have “true impact and consequences,” and in order to be authentic, they must involve “real” rather than simulated opportunities for learning (Maclean, 2006, p. 33). They also need to be sustained across time and cater to building capacity in youth with a variety of needs, capabilities and backgrounds.

Wheeler and Edlebeck (2006) stated, “often youth leadership is perceived as a one time opportunity for a young person to contribute. For many educators the toughest part of youth leadership development is creating structures for ongoing growth and pathways for the application of the

learning in action” (p. 91). They identified five specific strategies essential for effective and sustainable programme design:

1. build young people’s connections to their own identity, culture and community
  2. recognise they are assets to experts on their own communities
  3. create developmental opportunities that are sustained and supported over time
  4. engage young people in issues that matter to them
  5. bring adults and young people together to work as equal partners
- (p. 90).

These strategies uphold Bolstad and Gilbert’s (2012) principles for effective 21<sup>st</sup> century education delivery and also serve to provide socially just provision of learning opportunities by prioritising the building of positive, safe learning contexts that allow a diversity of youth to create learning partnerships and contribute in meaningful ways.

Findings from this research illustrated that the youth had awareness of both the necessity for, and benefits of the strategies outlined by Wheeler and Edlebeck (2006). They identified a desire for relevant and real learning opportunities that recognised their ability to effect change in contexts that they felt connected to, and where they felt supported by those they collaborated with. Through sharing their perceptions, they have provided practitioners with a clear view of what constitutes a meaningful leadership learning experience.

## **LEARNING EXPERIENTIALLY**

All the participants in this research indicated a preference for learning leadership experientially, a notion that has been endorsed by much youth leadership development literature in the past (Fertman & van Linden, 1999; MacNeil & McLean, 2006; Whitehead, 2009). The delicate balance

of providing activities that actively engage youth at their experience level without overwhelming them with too much responsibility (and hence setting them up to fail) is a crucial consideration for practitioners, as I discovered within my own programme design in the course of this research. As Kress indicates, not getting that balance right, as happened with the group challenges in the WE Lead programme, can unfortunately “highlight weaknesses rather than build strengths” (Kress, 2006, p. 52), and undermine potential gains in knowledge.

The experiential nature of leadership learning was highly valued by the youth involved in this research. One aspect that can assist with experiential knowledge gains, even when mistakes are made or outcomes are not as intended, is the inclusion of reflection processes as a valued part of the learning experience. Despite varying engagement with structured reflection tasks in the WE Lead programme, comments from some participants in this research resonated with Brungardt’s (1997) position that “leadership development is advanced when leaders take time to think deeply about their successful and unsuccessful actions” (p. 86). Comments such as Carebear’s, that “I’ve learnt that the best way to improve is to compare yourself to your old self. That way you can see how much progress you are making,” serve to illustrate participants’ understanding of the value of being able to learn from their experiences through engaging in reflective processes. The perceptions shared by these youth indicate that practitioners need to ensure that opportunities provided for learning leadership are experiential in nature, and to maximise learning, it is critical to include opportunities for reflection within the learning process.

## CREATING CONTEXTS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR AGENCY

The majority of participants in this research identified a desire to 'have a positive impact' of some kind, indicating an expectation that their youth leadership involvements included a sense of purpose and created a sense of agency in terms of outcomes. This finding outlines the importance for practitioners of providing opportunities within contexts that meet such expectations. It also serves to support MacLean's (2006) position that context is all-important and emphasises that "when youth are engaged in authentic opportunities for leadership (where they not only develop their leadership abilities but also exercise leadership authority), their leadership has real impact, either on their organisation or a specific project" (p. 35). Hence, the provision of authentic contexts also creates more possibility for meaningful outcomes and can thereby increase a sense of purpose and agency for youth.

Provision of an authentic context is not enough though; the nature of opportunities offered within those contexts is also important. The previous chapter indicated that participants particularly valued acknowledgement of themselves as community assets with legitimate skills and contributions to make. The majority of participants sought opportunities that allowed them to 'make a difference', supporting MacNeil and McLean's (2006) aforementioned definition of authentic opportunities as having "true impact and consequences" (p. 33). This finding creates a challenge to practitioners to provide learning opportunities that are much more than mock scenarios and training exercises designed to prepare young people for being "leaders of tomorrow" (Kress, 2006, p. 54). It also demands that practitioners dispense with any outmoded, adult-centric perceptions that might limit the power of youth and exclude them from having meaningful influence in the present.

Those involved in the design and provision of socially just leadership learning opportunities have a responsibility to acknowledge the agency of youth through facilitating meaningful experiences that recognise and allow them to demonstrate their power to affect change in their own right (Whitehead, 2009). In turn, through providing inclusive contexts where a variety of experiences are created, the principle of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning where knowledge is seen as an active process that is used to develop capacity through “learning by doing” (MacNeil and MacLean, 2006, p. 99) can be enacted for range of youth.

This research has shown that it is not enough to provide tokenistic, pretend or insignificant opportunities where young people gain the illusion that they are being effective. If practitioners are to act on the desires of the youth presented in these findings, they must ensure that leadership learning opportunities are well-supported, including real situations where impact can be measured, responsibility given and accountability expected, and where ‘learning through doing’ is prioritised (Bragg, 2013; MacNeil and MacLean, 2006). In order to achieve this, as will be discussed shortly, practitioners need to actively seek the voices of youth to assist in the identification of contexts they consider relevant, feel connected to, and can identify opportunities for meaningful leadership contribution. In addition, the development of constructive power-sharing partnerships between both young people and adults, and between schools and community organisations needs to be prioritised.

## **ACKNOWLEDGING AGENCY AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

As previously discussed, participants’ engagement with the range of activities offered in the WE Lead programme varied according to their perceived relevance, their level of interest and what extrinsic benefits they contained for participants. The variety of responses outlined in the

previous chapter indicates that these young people choose where, when and how to engage in leadership opportunities based on how relevant and worthwhile they perceive their involvement to be. It also points to an awareness of their contributions as having legitimacy and value, and the expectation that they are acknowledged as such.

The perceptions these young people have shared contain a challenge for all practitioners to ensure that a range of opportunities is offered for young people to engage with and choose between. It also cannot be assumed that young people see their involvements as purely educational and of value just by virtue of their willingness to participate. It is up to practitioners to offer young people a breadth of authentic leadership development opportunities and the contributions made within those contexts could to be acknowledged and rewarded in ways that have meaning and validation for them (Kress, 2006; Whitehead, 2009). If they are to ensure that leadership opportunities offered are considered relevant by youth, a shift in practice on behalf of some practitioners to include structured mechanisms within programme design that acknowledge the contributions of young people may be required (eg: extrinsic rewards like qualifications, financial compensation or written references).

Identifying key components required for meaningful leadership learning is a responsibility that practitioners need to actively engage with, and enact with leadership programme design. In order to grow leadership knowledge, youth need continued support in the form of consistent, structured activities, and opportunity for action in real-life contexts. Two further considerations for future-focussed youth leadership practitioners working in 21<sup>st</sup> century educational contexts include the building of constructive partnerships that assist with providing authentic and inclusive

leadership learning opportunities that personalise learning, and acknowledgement of the voice of youth in that design.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS IN THE PROVISION OF MEANINGFUL YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES.**

A key component in meeting the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners is the development of partnerships and collaborations where individuals and groups work together to ensure that every learner is developed to their full potential. For constructive learning partnerships to be built in ways that benefit all in our wider communities, individuals, schools, and local authorities need to have shared vision in terms of what they would like to achieve and how they can be inclusive in working together for the common good.

The situation in Christchurch after its devastating earthquake and the resulting disruption, dislocation and reconstruction, while creating huge challenges for communities, has also provided many on-going opportunities for leadership at a number of levels. In particular, the chance for youth to engage meaningfully in service opportunities during the recovery (eg: the Student Volunteer Army), and consultation processes during the rebuild (eg: Christchurch Earthquake Recovery Authority Youth Jams) has helped to reshape the way youth participate, how they are viewed by the wider community, and also how they view their own contributions in aiding community reconnection. Hayward (2013) acknowledges the situation in Christchurch as providing a powerful opportunity for collective action and social justice. However, she advocates that more social equity at a government and local policy level is required in order to “free young people to act collectively to effect change and discover the process of forging new community visions” (p. 38).

Central to that notion, is the sharing of power and the building strong collaborative partnerships at many levels, including contexts where youth leadership learning takes place.

This research has found that many youth perceived leadership as a positive relationship of transformational influence – it is a process that occurs between and with people they have an on-going connection with. They also perceived leadership as contextual – occurring in particular environments and situations they have on-going connections with. In conjunction with the previously discussed notion of providing authentic leadership learning for youth, these perceptions have implications for the future provision and design of leadership development opportunities that are meaningful. They call for a shift in much current practice to provide opportunities and programmes that are more inclusive, broader in context, increasingly sustainable and socially just.

There are several points to consider with regards to the development of learning collaborations, in particular: youth-adult learning partnerships including the notions of shared power, and reciprocal learning; and school-community learning partnerships including the notions of personalising learning and community connectedness.

## **YOUTH AND ADULTS SHARING LEARNING**

Sharing power in leadership learning opportunities demands recognition on behalf of adults that students have something to bring to the learning relationship. Future-focussed, culturally responsive teacher-student relationships need to become relationships that are collaborations to develop new knowledge together rather than an expert-novice dynamic where one party delivers and the other receives knowledge, otherwise known in Maori as the concept of ako, or reciprocal learning (Bishop, 2011; Bolstad & Gilbert, 2008).

Critical 21<sup>st</sup> century educational principles are met by the development of such collaborative youth-adult partnerships to create knowledge, as they assist to personalise learning experiences, and practise inclusivity. As the traditionally defined roles of teacher become less mutually exclusive, and more open to reciprocal learning, a “radical collegiality” is created (Fielding, 2001, p. 108). Hence, enabling students to lead the process of co-construction as occurred in the WE Lead programme, helps to shift power and cultural dominance by practitioners and as such, constructivist practices in the design of leadership learning programme can be seen as necessary acts of social justice.

As has been established, in order to provide meaningful opportunities for leadership, learning practitioners not only need to build collaborative partnerships with youth, they need to take place in a range of new, more authentic contexts than most youth currently have access to.

## **YOUTH AND ADULTS SHARING POWER**

The young people in this research experienced leadership in relational terms, describing it as a process where someone guides, helps, supports and mentors others to achieve goals and build ability. In order to have that, strong, mutually respectful relationships between adults and young people need to be developed that, as Libby et al (2006) suggest “young people and adults come together to plan, problem solve, learn and strengthen their relationships with each other and the community” (p. 22). Therefore, a key aspect embedded within the establishment of those relationships, is the willingness of practitioners to share power with young people.

With regards to authenticity of opportunities, Libby et al (2006) contend, “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). However, it is important to be mindful of how much power sharing is realistic to expect. Youth are sometimes unprepared for the reality of having complete responsibility and power. Kress (2006) warns that practitioners need to watch that what they perceive as allowing autonomy is not in fact “abandonment by adults who are unsure how to partner effectively with young leaders” (p. 52). As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, such total relinquishment of power and structured support can inadvertently set youth up to fail and undermine any gains in leadership confidence and knowledge, therefore power-sharing with youth needs to be managed mindfully by adults involved.

The youth involved in this research expressed appreciation for increased leadership responsibility and delegation on behalf of adults to assist them to grow, but they also showed an awareness of learning “step by step” with adults working alongside them as guides, and identified this as a method of providing structured support. Bolstad and Gilbert (2012) contend that the challenge in terms of “changing the script” (p. 4) and re-thinking students’ and teachers’ roles within 21<sup>st</sup> century educational relationships, is actually not about teachers ceding all the power and responsibility to learners, rather, “it is about structuring roles and relationships in ways that draw on the strengths and knowledge of each in order to best support learning” (p. 5).

The WE Lead programme offers an example of shared power through the co-construction of content and delivery. Rather than an adult deciding what was relevant content and presenting as an expert, participants identified topics they were interested in learning more about, and shared the responsibility for presenting new learning to the rest of the group. This opportunity provided a relevant and authentic learning challenge that was

based around their learning needs while acknowledging and growing their competencies, and provides a model for power sharing between youth and practitioners in leadership learning programmes.

## **SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES SHARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

With the demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century society and learners' needs it is unrealistic to expect that authentic contexts for learning can be provided purely within existing educational structures, and changes in practice will need to occur. Bolstad (2012) contends that schools as they are currently set up, will not have the resources to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners and they need to reach out into communities to gather a broader range of expertise and skills. The development of sustainable school-community partnerships will be a necessity if practitioners are to be responsive to both changing educational demands, and youth perceptions of where and how meaningful leadership learning takes place.

Currently, most innovations in the area of school-community partnerships exist on the fringes of mainstream and curricular education as extra-curricular pursuits (Fertman & van Linden, 1999; Bolstad, 2012). However, the school of the future is seen by many to be more of a hub that reaches into communities, businesses and homes to create meaningful learning opportunities, and acts as a facilitator or "an educational broker in arranging, facilitating, guiding and monitoring learning activities beyond its walls" (Jennings, 2005, p.11).

Practitioners require strong pedagogical knowledge related to leadership, and the skills to collaborate with others with specific kinds of expertise, knowledge or access to learning opportunities in community contexts. The WE Lead Programme demonstrates allegiance with Fertman and van Linden's (1998) belief that nurturing and supporting youth leadership

development is a community-wide responsibility that extends beyond school contexts and serves to endorse Bolstad and Gilbert's (2012) suggestion that "public education is a collective good in which everyone has a stake" (p. 5.)

The demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners, and the complexity of issues now facing society mean that it is not only school leaders and teachers that need to view education differently. Future-focussed communities also need to understand and be engaged in the education of youth. A key way they can do this is by positively collaborating with schools to provide authentic educational activities that support every learner to develop to their full potential through building a variety of cultural, business, and organisational partnerships for learning.

In order for this to happen systems and structures need to be re-developed in ways that enable community connections. They also require resourcing in terms of time and space, to create collaborative conversations and build sustainable partnerships between adults and youth, and between schools and communities. Such connectedness practices inclusivity, providing opportunities to build links across a range of professional and cultural boundaries. The WE Lead Programme offers an example of a possible approach in the transcendence of previously entrenched barriers between schools and communities, and adults and youth, through its collaboration towards sharing the educational purpose of providing a socially just youth leadership development programme.

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF YOUTH VOICE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEANINGFUL YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

There is growing encouragement for the use of student perspectives about their current learning experiences into the re-shaping of future

opportunities (Bolstad, 2012; Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2001; Groundwater-Smith, 2011; Hargreaves, 2009; Mitra, 2005; Zhao, 2011). As such, as the final point for discussion in this chapter, it is pertinent to consider both the practical educational benefits, and the implications of prioritising youth voice within 21<sup>st</sup> century educational experience and design.

Insights from students can help to enhance the structure and delivery of educational experiences. Further, there is the potential for teachers to learn from the voices of students (Cook-Sather, 2002). When students are included in discussions about their learning with teachers, as this research demonstrates, teachers are challenged to evaluate their efforts from students' viewpoints (Fielding, 2001). However, this requires practitioners being open to hearing the perspectives of the young people they work with.

It is unfortunate that, as Flutter and Rudduck (2004) have identified, “the structures of secondary schooling offer, on the whole, less responsibility and autonomy than many young people are accustomed to taking out of school” (p. 1). As this research has illustrated, many young people are able to articulate what their needs are and what works (or not) for them in terms of learning opportunities, however, student perspectives have traditionally been excluded from educational discussions (Fielding, 2001; Zhao, 2011). The findings generated by this research offer an opportunity for socially just educational reform to take place, and are significant in that they acknowledge the power of youth voices to become “radical agents of change” through the potential to influence their own learning experiences (Fielding, 2004, p. 123).

However, as Fielding (2001) notes, to talk about “student voice” in general terms is misleading as some voices are more willing to speak than others

and are more likely to be represented in educational discussions. He contends that awareness of diversity and inclusivity are critical considerations and that “new approaches to student voice are needed to widen the scope of who is allowed to speak, what they are allowed to speak about, and how they are allowed to speak about it” (p. 102). Inclusive practices acknowledge diversity by encompassing the variations and differences of all stakeholders, including a range of cultures and backgrounds. This calls for greater engagement of not only learners, but also their family/whānau and communities in co-shaping education to address their needs, strengths, interests and aspirations (Bolstad and Gilbert, 2012). Through creating broad access to the WE Lead Programme, being culturally reflexive, and offering a range of youth-centric mechanisms for participants to communicate their experiences, this research has engaged a diversity of youth voices. As such, the resulting findings can be seen as inclusive of a range of needs and perspectives and have value in creating effective educational change for the provision of meaningful leadership learning opportunities.

Despite the fact that in much of the literature focussed on leadership, youth are “noticeably absent” (MacNeil, 2006, p. 29), this research has shown that youth have much that is pertinent to say about their experience of learning leadership. This research challenges historical stigmas based on adult perceptions that what youth have to say as being naïve, untrustworthy or invalid because they are somehow flawed, inexperienced or incomplete beings (Cook-Sather, 2002). The perspectives of youth need to be seen by practitioners as a valuable resource. It is now up to responsive and forward-thinking practitioners in an increasingly complex and dynamic 21<sup>st</sup> century educational environment full of challenges and opportunities, to listen, reflect, and consider the implications for our own practice in the provision of meaningful leadership learning opportunities.

## SUMMARY

This chapter discussed four key themes identified from the findings that resulted from the analysis of youth perceptions shared in this research. The issue of access to and the nature of meaningful youth leadership development opportunities, and the importance of collaborative partnerships and the significance of youth voice in the development of meaningful youth leadership development opportunities were all discussed. Each theme was addressed in relation to the context of socially just, future-focussed, 21<sup>st</sup> century educational provision, and in particular association to Bolstad and Gilbert's (2012) six emerging principles associated with "re-bundling" schools for effective 21<sup>st</sup> century education delivery (p. 9).

# CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

## OVERVIEW

This concluding chapter will briefly address the contribution this research makes to current knowledge, discuss implications of these findings for future practice, acknowledge their limitations, and identify possible areas for further investigation, before sharing some concluding comments.

## KEY FINDINGS

Key findings presented in this thesis indicated that the youth who participated in this study perceived leadership as relational and transformational actions experienced on a personal level by someone they have an on-going relationship with; they felt there is inadequate acknowledgement of extra-curricular youth leadership experience and perceived inequity in access to leadership development opportunities for youth within school contexts; they desired experiential leadership development opportunities that were authentic, challenging and inclusive; and that participating in an experiential youth leadership development programme in a community context provided positive benefits for all participants.

## CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This research adds to the emerging body of literature examining youth perspectives on leadership. The results help to inform practitioners regarding effective practice when working with youth in a 21<sup>st</sup> century educational context, and crucially, gives youth a voice as to the influence contextual experience has on their developing understandings and leadership learning expectations. In particular, by hearing from youth about their understandings and experiences, it provides schools and

community groups feedback and suggestions as to how they can best provide authentic youth leadership development opportunities.

## **IMPLICATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS**

Findings from this research exposed a number of perceptions shared by the youth participants that are relevant to the effective design and delivery of authentic leadership learning opportunities. My recommendations for the provision of socially just, meaningful 21<sup>st</sup> century leadership development opportunities are as follows:

- Schools and practitioners should be encouraged to scrutinise their own values and beliefs about what they see as meaningful youth leadership development opportunities. Asking questions about who has access to those opportunities, and how those opportunities are designed and delivered, is also important.
- Schools and practitioners should be encouraged to actively seek the voices of youth and include them in the design and delivery of relevant and meaningful experiential leadership learning opportunities.
- Schools and practitioners should endeavour to ensure broader access for a range of youth and prioritise inclusivity by:
  - Catering for a variety of prior learning and learning preferences through differentiated approaches
  - Offering a range of authentic, relevant and experiential learning opportunities
  - Including youth voice in the co-construction of those opportunities
  - Building strong youth-adult relationships

- Looking beyond the school context and developing a range of school-community collaborative partnerships to provide structured, challenging and well-supported authentic leadership learning opportunities
- Acknowledging contributions and validating involvement for a range of youth through providing a range of ways to extrinsically recognise the agency of youth leaders

## LIMITATIONS

The short-term nature of this research and the small sample investigated mean that this research's findings should be considered by practitioners as indicative of the perceptions of this particular group of participants rather than representative of youth in general. Had the research taken place over a longer period, and with a larger sample, it is possible that findings could have been markedly different.

Despite efforts to capture a wide range of participants, young people who were previously engaged and interested in community leadership opportunities already were more likely to notice and respond to the White Elephant social media advertisements for the programme, hence influencing the amount of prior leadership learning, and experience of the sample represented.

The age group and context was limited – all research participants were between 16-18 with all but one, still at high school. The programme took place in a local school, which may have led youth to assume that the usual peer group and power imbalances associated with traditional school settings would inevitably recur. Efforts were made to mitigate against this through practising culturally responsive pedagogies such as basing

sessions in the school whanau (communal area) to assist with relationship building between the researcher and participants.

The research also depended on participants having individual personal commitment to attending for the duration of the 12 week programme over winter. It relied upon participants engaging in all aspects of data collection and the reflection tasks, which required participants to be motivated and organised enough to actively undertake these in their own time, drew a mixed response that created limitations on depth and diversity in the data included in findings. This issue highlights the nature of working with youth, and how they perceive their commitments/responsibilities, which is an interesting consideration in itself, but was unfortunately beyond the scope of discussion possible in this thesis.

The fact that I was both the researcher and the programme facilitator meant that my attention was usually on guiding the group through activities rather than purely observing how they participated. Clearly, had my role been just observational, more field-notes could have been collected to inform findings. There is also the possibility that despite my best efforts to be reflexive and to generate authentic youth perspectives, my inherent beliefs and positioning as a middle class, pakeha woman influenced my interpretation and analysis of data, and subsequently shaped the nature of the findings reported.

## **POSSIBLE AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

There remains much to explore and learn about youth perceptions of leadership and leadership learning, effective leadership development opportunities, and leadership learning within a 21<sup>st</sup> century educational context. Some suggestions for future study include:

- A longitudinal study, which would give opportunities for youth to experience a wider variety of authentic leadership development opportunities, share their perceptions over time and deeply reflect on and develop their understandings of leadership. It could also investigate how this learning was applied in future leadership scenarios.
- Attention could be paid to the provision of more inclusive leadership learning opportunities (increasing accessibility for youth traditionally marginalised by way of socio economic status, lack of academic or sporting achievement, geographic location, disability, ethnicity, gender or cultural background), and subsequent investigation of the impact of increasing accessibility and engaging a diversity of youth in leadership development.
- Studies examining the aspects that assist with the establishment and sustainability of youth-adult partnerships and/or school-community partnerships in the provision of authentic youth leadership development opportunities.
- Perspectives of youth and/or other stakeholders involved in leadership development opportunities within modern learning environments built on strong youth-adult partnerships and/or school-community partnerships.
- A case study following the experiential learning and development of youth engaged in leadership development opportunities as adolescents and their experiences and developing perceptions as they move into adulthood.

## **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

The findings from this research offer organisations and practitioners who are involved in the design and delivery of youth leadership development opportunities with social justice at the heart of their practice, suggestions

of how they can enhance their practices to better meet the needs and expectations of a diversity of 21<sup>st</sup> century youth leadership learners. Through eliciting youth perspectives on leadership and leadership learning, it is hoped their voices will serve as “radical agents of change” (Fielding, 2004, p. 1) assisting youth leadership educators to move past best practice, and consider “next practice” (Bolstad & Gilbert, 2012, p. 2) that embodies 21<sup>st</sup> century educational principles.

It is time for teachers, students and their communities to enact the principles of social justice by actively removing barriers that can exclude access to leadership learning opportunities for some students. Schools, communities, practitioners and young people can all work together to collaborate in the construction of new approaches and promoting youth leadership development opportunities that are inclusive, experiential, and authentic.

This research took place in a unique circumstance as Christchurch continues to recover from its devastating earthquakes. Communities will always face challenges, and along with those, opportunities for meaningful contributions and learning at both individual and collective levels emerge. In a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment full of challenges and possibilities, a shared commitment by all community stakeholders to the development of positive and constructive partnerships that co-create authentic and engaging learning opportunities for a diversity of young people will be key to building capacity for sustained influence and effectiveness for all within school and community contexts.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

### *Participant Information Sheet*



#### **Project Title:**

**Emerging youth leaders' conceptions/understandings of leadership and their individual identity as leaders: The influence of structured leadership development programmes in a community organisation**

#### **Purpose**

This research is conducted as partial requirement for a Masters in Educational Leadership. This project requires the researcher to choose a topic and conduct research on the topic through using surveys and/or interviews, or a combination of other research techniques.

#### **What is this research project about?**

This research intends to discover more about youth perceptions of leadership and the influence that being involved in an experiential community leadership development programme has on their perceptions of leadership generally, and their individual emerging leadership identities and leadership practices.

#### **What will you have to do and how long will it take?**

In most cases, the researcher will want to interview you briefly either on your own or in a small group after you complete a survey questionnaire. This should take no longer than 30 minutes at the start and then again at the end of the programme. The researcher may ask for relevant documents or sources accessible for this research, for example, participant reflection material. The interview may be recorded. You will be asked to give consent prior to the interview and have the opportunity to review and approve interview transcripts.

#### **What will happen to the information collected?**

The information collected will be used by the researcher to write a masters thesis. Only the researcher, Rachel Hawthorne, and Dr Rachel McNae (academic supervisor), will be privy to the notes, documents, and recordings. An electronic copy of the thesis will be lodged in the University of Waikato Research Commons Database and thus widely available, and I hope to present a summary of the thesis to the White Elephant Trust in order to share key findings with the aim to enhance youth leadership development provision in the community. It is possible that articles and presentations may be the outcome of the research.

Afterwards, notes, documents and other sources will be destroyed and recordings erased. The researcher will keep transcriptions of the recordings and a copy of the paper but will treat them with the strictest confidentiality. No participants will be named in the publications and every effort will be made to disguise their identity.

**Declaration to participants**

If you take part in the study, you have the right to:

- Refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw from the study after your interview transcript has been approved, and before analysis has commenced on the data.
- Ask any further questions about the study that occurs to you during your participation.
- Be given access to a summary of findings from the study when it is concluded.

**Who's responsible?**

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

Researcher:

Rachel Hawthorne  
[rachel.hawthorne@staff.hagley.school.nz](mailto:rachel.hawthorne@staff.hagley.school.nz)  
0212160933

Supervisor:

Dr Rachel McNae  
Department of Professional Studies in Education, Faculty of Education,  
University of Waikato  
[r.mcnae@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:r.mcnae@waikato.ac.nz)  
ph: 64 7 8384500 ext 7731

## APPENDIX B CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

### *Consent Form for Participants*



#### **Emerging youth leaders' conceptions/understandings of leadership and their individual identity as leaders: The influence of structured leadership development programmes in a community organisation**

#### **Consent Form for Participants**

I have read the **Participant Information Sheet** for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I understand that my participation will be generated by random selection and that if I am not randomly selected to be a research participant, this does not preclude me from participating in the leadership development programme.

I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study before September 2013 or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study or have my personal contributions/reflections make up part of the study. I understand that I will be given the opportunity to review and approve interview transcripts, and I can withdraw any information I have provided up until the researcher has commenced analysis on my data. I agree to provide information to the researcher under the conditions of confidentiality set out on the **Participant Information Sheet**. I understand that I will be involved in generating data about my perceptions of leadership via:

- Filling in an online survey at the start, and at the end of the leadership development programme
- Being interviewed either on my own or in a small group after completing both online surveys
- Being observed during leadership development programme activities
- Providing written or video blog reflections at several points during the programme

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the **Participant Information Sheet**.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Additional Consent as Required**

I agree / do not agree to my responses to be tape recorded.

I agree / do not agree to my images/personal recordings being used.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name and contact information:

Rachel Hawthorne  
[rachel.hawthorne@staff.hagley.school.nz](mailto:rachel.hawthorne@staff.hagley.school.nz)  
0212160933

Supervisor's Name and contact information:

Dr Rachel McNae  
Department of Professional Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, University of  
Waikato  
r.mcnae@waikato.ac.nz

## APPENDIX C

### FIRST QUESTIONNAIRE AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### GENERAL

What is your definition of leadership?

Who do you see as leaders?

Where do we find leaders?

Why do we need leaders?

What personal qualities/characteristics do you think it takes to be a leader?

Do you think leaders are born or bred? Explain your answer.

What do you think being a follower means?

#### PERSONAL

Do you consider yourself a leader? Why/why not?

What leadership qualities/ characteristics do you think you currently possess?

What leadership qualities/characteristics would you like to develop?

What kind of leader would you want to be?

Who are leaders around you? How did they get to be seen this way?

What leadership experiences have you had?

#### INTERVIEW PROBES

How do you think your ideas about leadership have been formed – where/who/what has influenced them?

Who/what has influenced your ideas about the characteristics of leaders and in what ways?

Do you think that youth see leadership differently to adults? How?

What are some common misconceptions about leadership?

What opportunities are there for youth to develop leadership?

What kinds of youth take on these leadership roles?

What do you think a course like this can offer you?

What kind of role do adults have in helping youth to develop leadership?

Tell me more about....

Give some examples of ....

What questions do you have about leadership and/or being a leader?

What is good/bad leadership – how is it characterised?

## SECOND QUESTIONNAIRE AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What new learning or thinking have you come away from the course with and how do you think you will use it?

### GENERAL

How has your definition of leadership changed since the beginning of the course?

How has your definition of who you see as leaders changed since the beginning of the course?

How has your perception of where we find leaders changed since the beginning of the course?

How has your perception of why we need leaders changed since the beginning of the course?

How has your perception of personal qualities/characteristics it takes to be a leader changed since the beginning of the course?

How has your perception of what being a follower means changed since the beginning of the course? Please explain further...

Do you still have any unanswered questions about leadership/leaders?

Do you have any other reflections/thoughts comments about how you see leaders/leadership since completing the WE LEAD Programme?

### PERSONAL

How has your perception of yourself as a leader changed since the beginning of the course? Please explain further...

How has your perception of the leadership qualities/characteristics you possess changed since the beginning of the course? Please explain further...

How has your perception of the leadership qualities/characteristics you would like to develop changed since the beginning of the course? Please explain further...

How has your perception of the kind of leader you want to be and in what situations changed since the beginning of the course? Please explain further...

Do you have any other reflections/thoughts comments about how you see yourself as a leader since completing the WE LEAD Programme?

## 2<sup>ND</sup> INTERVIEW PROBES

Do you think youth see leadership differently to adults? How?

How do you think being in leadership programme has impacted on your perceptions of leadership in general?

How do you think being in leadership programme has impacted on your perceptions of yourself as a leader?

What did the programme offer you in terms of knowledge/skills/experiences that impact on your personal growth as a leader? Can you think of some examples...?

What other experiences do you think would be beneficial for you in terms of developing your leadership at this point?

What role would you like adults to have in helping youth to develop leadership for the future? Personally or generally?

What questions do you still have about leadership and/or being a leader?

Is there anything that being on the programme has stimulated you to find out more about?

Is there anything that being on the programme has stimulated you to do differently/more/less of?

We were going to get into some goal-setting etc but ran out of time - where and how do you feel you would like to use your energy and skills as a youth leader?