

Hosting and Harvesting: Creating the Change we wish to see in the World
2010 CCEAM & ACEL International Conference
29 September - 1 October 2010
Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre
Darling Harbour, Sydney
Australia

The challenge of reaping a harvest from school-based learning initiatives: Sources of learning through the perspectives of school leaders, teachers and students

Howard Youngs
Senior Lecturer
Department of Education
Faculty of Social and Health Sciences
Unitec Institute of Technology
Auckland, New Zealand
hyoungs@unitec.ac.nz

Abstract

Implementing and sustaining school-wide learning initiatives through a wider distribution of leadership is espoused as a means of generating a higher quality 'harvest' of student learning outcomes. Two in-depth 20-month case studies situated in urban New Zealand secondary schools revealed that the 'harvest' of improved student learning was more challenging than first envisaged. Perspectives of the school leadership teams, the teachers and 500 students revealed multiple sources of influence in relation to student learning with some possibly related to the two respective initiatives that each school had introduced. Tensions between the change that the schools wanted to see and what they actually experienced arose due to day-to-day demands, other initiatives and a limit to resources. Consequently planting for a 'harvest' of improved student learning is a long one, packaged approaches and expected quick results are not realistic, nor should they be encouraged for the leadership for learning.

Introduction

The challenge of improving outcomes for students is at the forefront of school leadership literature and policy and though I totally support this focus I entered into a research study of distributed forms of leadership related to curriculum implementation and initiatives to improve student achievement with some concerns. On the one hand it could appear that given the right conditions (soil), ingredients (seed and fertiliser), resources (tools to tend and look after the ground), leadership (the farmers with their hired hands) that improvements should occur with student achievement (the harvest). However, reducing the learning process in schools to what appears to 'work' may not be all that helpful (Simkins, 2005). My concerns are related to the often prescribed process of managing change and associating leadership with student outcomes.

Change particularly that related to national and federal state learning initiatives place emphasis on shared vision, the role of the principal championing the cause along with senior and middle leaders who filter the implementation of the initiative through to teachers. Where micropolitics arise, they are seen as a barrier to change that leaders must overcome rather than a legitimate part of the change process (Flessa, 2009). If only it was that straightforward. The tendency to also focus on student outcomes through analysing student achievement data usually at the expense of gaining perspectives on learning from students directly has also I believe tended to simplify the complexity of what occurs day-to-day in schools. It was with these self-imposed challenges that I set out to explore distributed forms of leadership in schools.

The findings reported and discussed in this paper are a subset of a wider research study that has focused on the understanding and subsequent re-theorising of distributed forms of leadership practice in schools. Three research aims provided the framework for the overall study:

- to critically analyse why particular distributed conceptualisations of leadership have emerged over the last decade and how distributed forms of leadership under the nomenclature of “distributed leadership” is conceptualised in the literature;
- to interpret from multiple perspectives, understandings of situations where distributed forms of leadership are espoused and/or practiced in two New Zealand secondary schools; and,
- to re-theorise distributed forms of leadership, particularly in relation to school day-to-day practice and micropolitics.

The research study included two parallel case studies situated in two medium to large urban New Zealand secondary schools carried out over a 20 month period during 2008 and 2009. The studies were contextualised through two contexts in each school where the first was self-selected by each school prior to data being collected:

- activity related to a new school initiated endeavour to improve student learning; and,
- activity related to a new externally mandated endeavour, the implementation of the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) by the start of 2010.

The purpose of this paper is to focus on some of the case study findings related to the second research aim and I draw on some of the data related to the perspectives of school leadership teams, teachers and senior secondary school students particularly in relation to each school initiated endeavour. Other publications related to the first research question are available and

provide a more in-depth account of distributed leadership theory and research (Youngs, 2007, 2009).

A distributed and multi-level perspective

During the last decade there has been a shift in nomenclature with schools from management to leadership (Strain, 2009), a shift that has also placed more of an emphasis on associating leadership with student outcomes. Parallel to this shift has been an intensification of leadership work with little or no increase to the resource base so that the environment in schools has become one where leadership work has had to have been distributed (Youngs, 2009). This official distribution of new and extra leadership work has contributed to the interest around distributed leadership and the effective management of change that hopefully would lead to school improvement and improved student outcomes. The study and commentary of this activity is often equated to what are labelled normative studies of distributed leadership.

An alternative to the normative approach is where a distributed perspective of leadership across a school is theorised and practice is described. The two researchers who independently raised the profile of distributed leadership a decade ago, Peter Gronn (2000, 2002) and James Spillane (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004) have never seen their theorising as a justification for distributing more leadership work across a school. Rather, they both argue that the alternative leader-centric perspective does not encapsulate all of the leadership activity that can occur in day-to-day practice. If a distributed perspective is not taken then we can be at risk of excluding leadership practice that sits beyond formal roles and distribution of work labelled as leadership.

Distributed leadership, despite its popularity, is not without its critics. The published commentaries and research on it have been critiqued as apolitical (Maxcy & Nguyen, 2006), silent on power (Hatcher, 2005), lacking a micropolitical perspective (Flessa, 2009) and mostly silent on critiquing the policy environment that mediates what occurs in schools (Youngs, 2009). Gronn (2009) now argues that perhaps the emphasis on the distributed aspect has been at the expense of also recognising the leader-centric perspective, rather, he now argues that a more hybrid perspective is required.

In the school leadership field there has generally not been enough attention given to socio-cultural and micropolitical processes as there has been a tendency to overlook problems and issues that concern practitioners, more empirical work is needed, particularly of day-to-day practice (Harris, 2006; Heck & Hallinger, 2005; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003). If a greater understanding of distributed forms of school leadership practice is to eventuate then the study of

practice needs to also be carried out *in situ*, teachers' lives can be ones of negotiation, conflict and compromise (Gunter, 2001).

The amalgamation of these concerns has informed this research study so that a micropolitical perspective could be obtained through the development of a multi-level study of school leadership practice over a 20-month period. If studies associated with distributed leadership are to capture some of the day-to-day practices of school leadership then analysis is required from multiple participants and groups so espoused, observed, and perceived accounts can be assimilated. Therefore, my study included the school senior leadership team, within and between group analysis of curriculum and student support leaders, other staff and the students, though it is not possible to cover all of the related findings here in one paper.

The study

Embedded multiple case studies as defined by Yin (2009) were used to construct the research design. The secondary schools were the two cases and the following were utilised as the embedded units of analysis:

- espoused understandings of distributed forms of leadership;
- observed patterns of leadership practice and meeting participation practice;
- perceptions of sources of influence related to decision making and aspects of student learning; and,
- perceptions of staff relations, leadership practice and participation related to each school initiated endeavour and national curriculum implementation.

Non-participant overt observation, interviews, focus groups and questionnaires were employed to gather data related to the embedded units of analysis. The findings reported and discussed in this paper are drawn from the questionnaire data and supported in places with data generated through the other data collecting tools. Pseudonyms are used throughout for the schools and all the staff. In places details of the schools and individuals have been deliberately generalised to further protect anonymity.

The two schools

Esteran College and Penthom High School are situated in the wider Auckland region of New Zealand. Both are co-educational State funded secondary schools covering up to year thirteen, where year thirteen often is the last year students attend prior to starting post-school undergraduate qualifications. Both schools were similar in relation to: the socio-economic

characteristics of their local communities; the ethnicity of students; their organisational structure in terms of roles and meetings; the continuity of senior leadership staff from 2006 to 2009; their low profile in national media; the redesign and development of each school site during the period of research through Ministry of Education funded building programmes; offering the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) as the only recognised qualification option for students; the channelling of their efforts to raise student achievement above national mean scores for schools that exist in similar socio-economic settings; and, the acknowledgement from the national quality assurance Education Review Office that both schools were putting in place strategies that were conducive to raising student achievement. In their quest to raise student achievement both schools viewed leadership across all levels as a possible means to help raise student achievement.

Throughout most of 2008 and 2009 I was able to situate myself in each school, collecting data through non-participant observation of meetings, interviews, focus groups and questionnaires (see Table 1).

Table 1: Data collecting details

	Esteran	Penthom	Overall	Analysis
Observation	7 general observations 10 focused observations 22.5 hours in total	8 general observations 12 focused observations 19.5 hours in total	15 general 22 focused 42 hours	qualitative and quantitative
Interviews	3 focus groups 2 interviews	2 focus groups 7 interviews	5 focus grps 9 interviews	qualitative
Questionnaires	Staff (electronic) Students (written)	Staff (electronic) Students (written)	4 in total	quantitative with some qualitative

NVivo 8 was used to establish connections between the codes and the data for qualitative analysis and PASW 18 (formerly SPSS) was used to analyse questionnaire data quantitatively.

A key to maintaining access to each school for nearly two years was allowing each to choose its own school-initiated endeavour as a context for the research before any data was collected. This enabled a reciprocal relationship to be built where I was able to report back to each school at the end of my field-based time some of the initial findings in such a way so that it could inform their decision-making for 2010. I was intentionally open about this degree of cooperation being linked to access which can be treated as one process with fieldwork when appropriate (Wanat, 2008).

Both schools were departmentally structured around learning areas, with a head of department managing a team of teachers in most areas. Across each student year level existed one or two deans who along with the year level form teachers were responsible for the pastoral care, attendance and some of the behavioural management processes. The delegated areas of management to other staff in the school were mostly structured across these two areas, student services (pastoral care) and curriculum (departmental learning areas).

So those two groups [curriculum and student services] are, mmm, they're great big, no not monsters, you know, but they are great big lumps in the school's professional leadership area. (Rachel, Principal, Esteran College)

Both schools aimed to implement school-based initiatives that sat across these two “great big lumps” and so went beyond the more traditional trickle down effect of school change through department learning areas where heads of departments and their teams have been seen as crucial to implementing change across a school due to their shared “subject loyalty and expertise as well as micropolitical interests” (Brown, Rutherford, & Boyle, 2000, p.242). Moreover, subject departments can be situated as separate entities within secondary schools and this structure can lead to issues of territorialism (Bennett, Woods, Wise, & Newton, 2007). The possible widening of initiative leadership beyond heads of departments and any territorialism suggests that the implementation of school-wide initiatives have some layers of complexity that perhaps are unique to secondary schools with their learning area/subject based structure. One school attempted to implement their initiative mainly through their pastoral structure, whereas the other school attempted to implement their initiative by creating a new structure; in both cases the departmental subject structure was not the primary conduit for managing change.

Two initiatives

Throughout 2008 and 2009 Esteran College prioritised the implementation of the revised *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) as a key strategic initiative. The profile afforded to this initiative meant that the school initiated endeavour, implementing Academic Counselling through the Year level Deans and Form Teachers, tended to be less visible in 2008, though was not as subsumed by the externally mandated Ministry of Education endeavour of curriculum review and implementation during 2009. The aim of the initiative was to help students set targets particularly in relation to NCEA and to monitor their progress across all learning areas rather than just one departmentally based learning area.

Penthom High School on the other hand prioritised its own initiated student mentoring endeavour above that of the revised *New Zealand Curriculum* throughout the second half of

2008 when it was introduced prior to the review of its school-based curriculum which had more a focus in 2009. In July 2008 approximately a dozen staff were ‘shoulder-tapped’ and volunteered to act as mentors along with the senior leadership team, including the principal, for students across Year 11 as a means of helping student motivation, organisation and goal setting. During 2009 the initiative was expanded to also include Year 12 and 13 students, with the total number of mentors rising to just over 40. For the staff mentors, this became an additional role they played in the school, whereas at Esteran College the form teachers took on an additional task within an existing role they already had.

The findings

Both initiatives took place in two unique settings. Each school had its own culture and sub-cultures and these are briefly described before the findings from students and staff in relation to the two initiatives are presented and discussed. According to the senior leadership team at Esteran College staff relations appeared to have transitioned as the SMT collectively and intentionally sought to bring a greater degree of coherence in relation to planning and direction, individual management roles and organisational structure. There was an acknowledgment that the social dimension of staff relations had always been a strength of the school, though there were some differences with more recent views:

I always thought our staff were a much more homogenous, very sociable group of people. And they still are ‘cause a lot of schools are very factionalised, I think. Often departmental, you know. And we’re not that here. (Craig, Head of Department, Esteran College)

Ever since I’ve been in this school it’s been a really close, supportive staff.... So, all the time it’s been supportive. I’m not overly sure it’s as supportive as it used to be. (Raewyn, Head of Department, Esteran College)

At the end of the study in 2009, 43 out of 67 (64%) staff at Esteran College and 39 out of 85 (46%) staff at Penthom High School completed all or part of a staff questionnaire using SurveyMonkey. A six point scale was used for each statement with 0 being equated to “disagree” at one end of the scale and 5 being equated with “agree” at the other end of the scale. As part of the questionnaire staff were asked to provide a perception of how much they influenced groups within the staff and to what degree they were influenced by these groups in relation to decision-making.

The Esteran College senior leadership team consisting of the principal and the three deputy principals was perceived as being the most influential group in the school along with the heads of department (HODs), though the year level Deans and the senior leadership team were the

groups likely to be influenced less by staff when compared to other groups in the school. Figure 1 maps how the staff viewed other groups in the school.

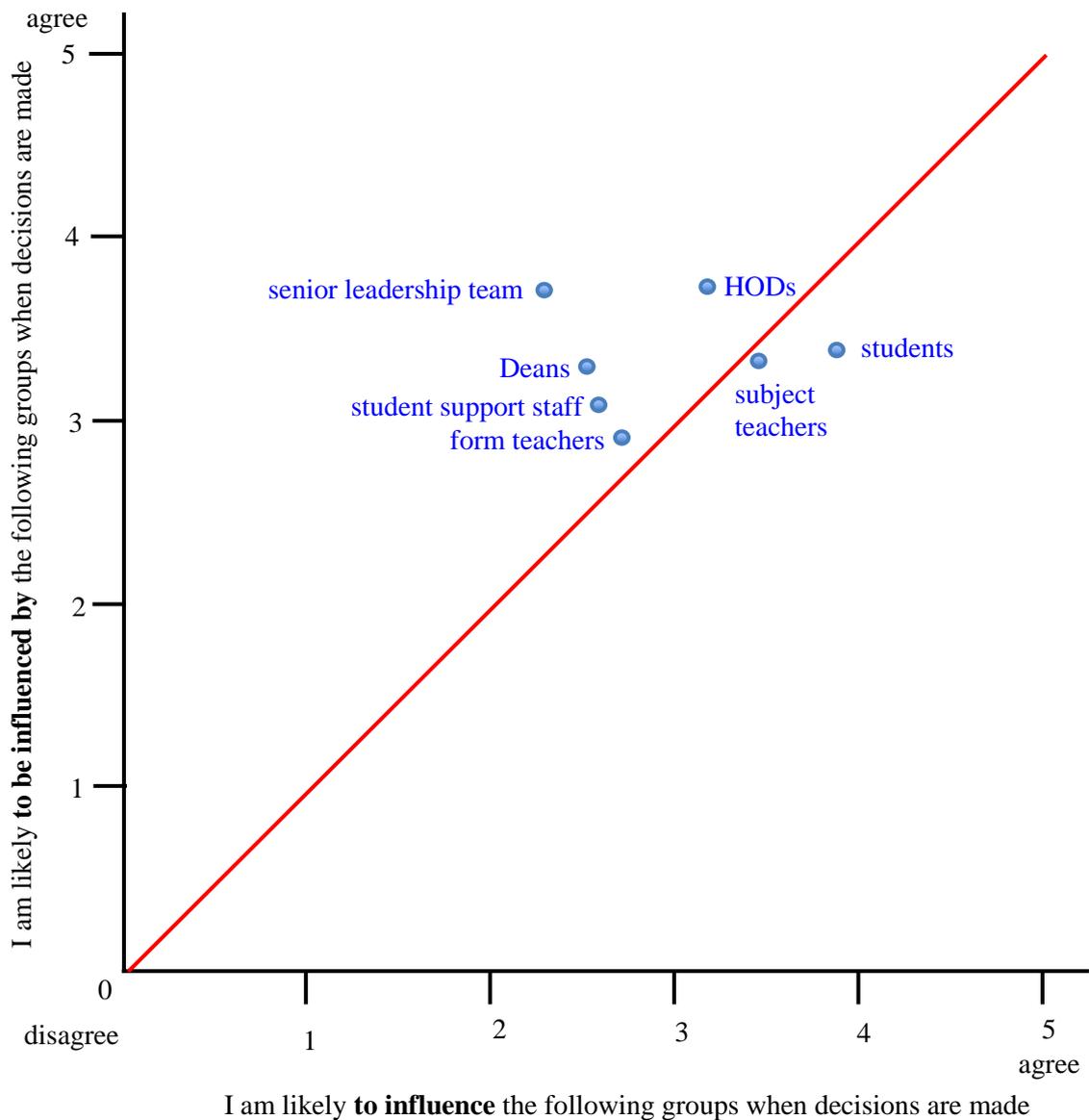


Figure 1: Esteran College staff perceptions of influence related to decision-making

The perceptions of the staff at Penthom High School revealed some similar patterns with the senior leadership team and HODs both being influential (see figure 2) though staff were likely to be influenced slightly more by other subject teachers and students at Esteran College when compared to Penthom High School.

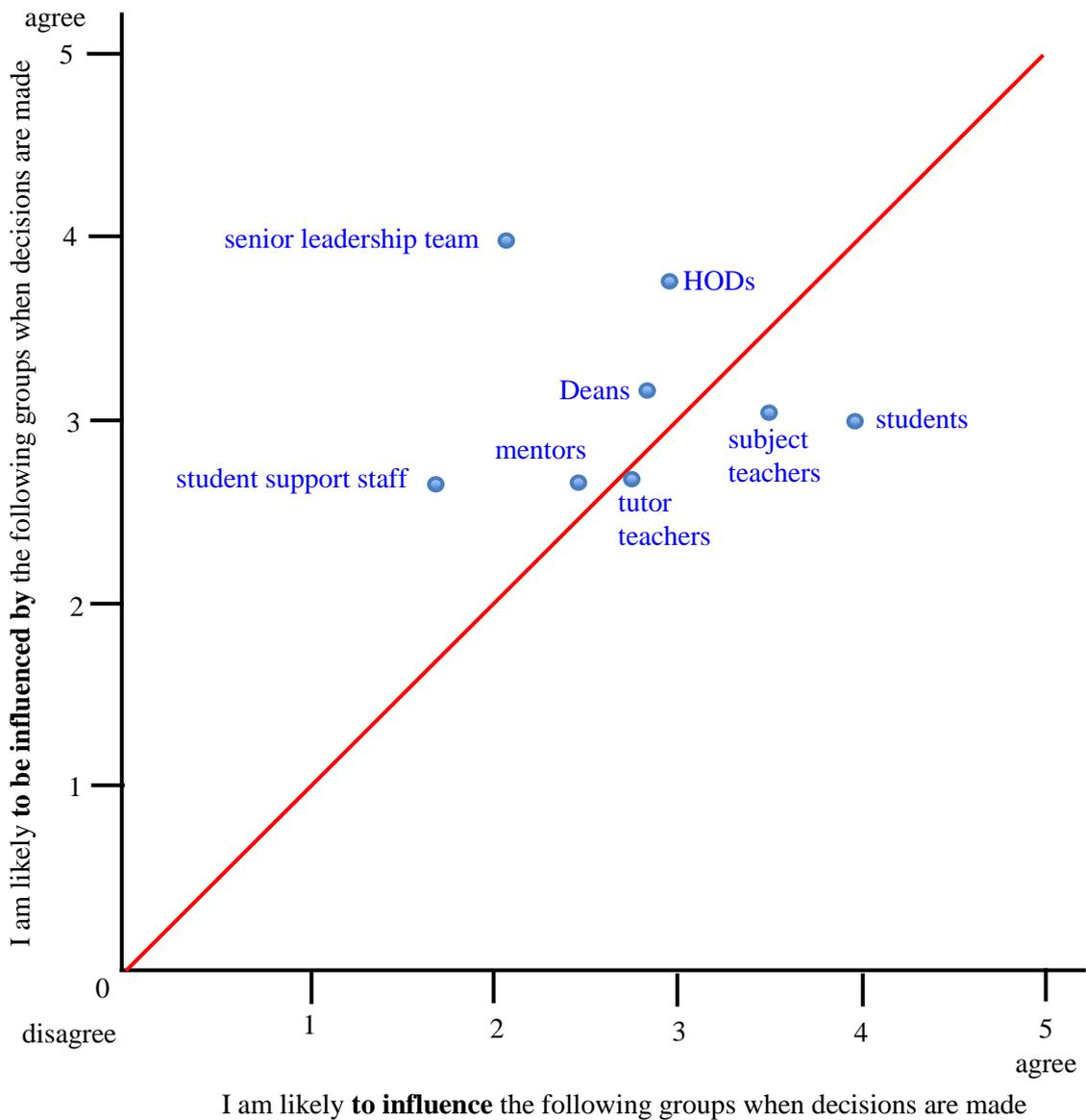


Figure 2: Penthom High School staff perceptions of influence related to decision-making

The senior leadership team at Penthom High School viewed the overall staff relations as friendly and open with less tension evident than in the past, though others commented on the issue of not having a central staff room large enough to accommodate all staff:

I think the key word that changed over time is tension. (Iain, Principal, Penthom High School)

[Staff relations have] definitely changed, things are a lot more settled....But I do think this one common staff room thing that we don't have, where everyone goes, does tend to put people into their groups. And yeah, it's very, it can be very clicky at times as well

cause some people are not really very good at getting out and wandering around. (Roslyn, Head of Department, Penthom High School)

The respective groups who were at the forefront of implementing each of the two school-based initiatives were both situated on the left side of each diagram. The Deans group at Esteran College were positioned more towards being an influence to other staff compared to the mentors group at Penthom High School who were more closely situated to the red line that equated to perceived influence being equal between “influence to” and “influence by”.

Staff perspectives

At the end of 2009 the two respective school-based initiatives were seen as factors contributing to staff perceptions of what influenced the conditions of student learning in their schools, both were rated ahead of a focus on the curriculum and a wider distribution of leadership, but lower than student attendance. A six-point scale was used for each statement with 0 being equated to “disagree” at one end and 5 being equated with “agree” at the other end.

Table 2: Staff assumptions of factors contributing to student achievement

Esteran College (n=43, response rate 64%)		Penthom High School (n=39, 46%)	
Statement	Mean	Statement	Mean
Student attendance	3.86	Student attendance	3.97
A strong focus on the school-based initiative, Academic Counselling	3.09	A strong focus on pedagogy	3.53
A strong focus on pedagogy	2.71	A strong focus on the school-based initiative, Mentoring	3.35
A strong focus on the learning areas of the revised New Zealand Curriculum	2.58	A strong focus on the learning areas of the revised New Zealand Curriculum	3.06
A strong focus on the key competencies of the revised New Zealand Curriculum	2.48	A strong focus on the key competencies of the revised New Zealand Curriculum	2.90
A wider distribution of leadership	2.26	A wider distribution of leadership	2.79

Overall Penthom High School staff provided higher ratings than Esteran College staff. One possible contextual factor that may have contributed to this was the intentional focus at Penthom High School to use terms that included “learning” or “learner” rather than the more common usage of students, departments, senior leadership or management, homework. The equivalent terms used at Penthom High School brought the focus back to learning. Another possible contextual factor at Penthom High School was the rotation of Art Costa’s 16 Habits of Mind (Costa & Kallick, 2007) throughout different terms of the school year as these can be linked to the New Zealand Curriculum key competency of “thinking” (Ministry of Education, 2007,

p.12). Students, however, from both schools still perceived that their subject teachers had a similar influence on different aspects of their school experience (see Tables 6 and 7).

Staff and students were asked scale question statements associated with sources of influence related to three aspects of student learning and decision-making; the students’:

- motivation to learn at school;
- preparation for NCEA assessments throughout the year; and
- decision-making about their subject choices for the following year or what they should do if they were planning to leave school.

Each of these three areas was a central focus, along with attendance and goal setting for each of the two school-based initiatives. Staff were asked to respond to the statement “I have a major direct influence on...” for each of the three aspects listed above. Across all three aspects Esteran College and Penthom High School staff associated their greatest degree of influence with students through their role as a subject teacher above that of any other role they had in the school such as form teacher, dean, student support services or as a mentor with the new initiative at Penthom High School.

Table 3: Esteran College staff perceptions of their influence on students (n=43, 64%)

Students’ motivation to learn		Students’ preparation for NCEA		Students’ decision-making	
Statement	Mean	Statement	Mean	Statement	Mean
I have a major direct influence on my subject class students’ motivation to learn at school	4.27	I have a major direct influence in preparing my subject class students for NCEA assessments	4.61	I have a major direct influence in helping students in my subject classes choose their next year’s subjects	3.37
				I have a major direct influence in helping students in my subject classes decide what to do next year if they are likely to leave school	2.37
I have a major direct influence on students’ motivation to learn at school who are not in my subject classes (e.g. form class, work as a Dean, student support etc...)	2.68	I have a major direct influence in preparing students for NCEA assessments who are not in my subject classes (e.g. form class, work as a Dean, student support etc...)	2.39	I have a major direct influence in helping students who are not in my subject classes choose their next year’s subjects (e.g. form class, work as a Dean, student support etc...)	2.93
				I have a major direct influence on students’ who are not in my subject classes decide what to do next year if they are likely to leave school (e.g. form class, work as a Dean, student support etc...)	2.33

Subject teachers at Esteran College particularly perceived that they had more influence upon students’ motivation to learn and students’ preparation for NCEA assessments when compared

to students' subject choice and career choice decision-making. The Deans at Esteran College did perceive that changes had occurred with student awareness of the school-based initiative during 2009. The following is an excerpt from a focus group conversation with them:

I remember when we did the Academic Counselling last year there were kids, “credits, what? Who cares?” (Chloe, Year Level Dean, Esteran College)

Absolutely (Olivia, Year Level Dean, Esteran College)

Whereas I'm not seeing that this year. (Chloe, Year Level Dean, Esteran College)

No. (Ryan, Year Level Dean, Esteran College)

They're more aware. (Tracey, Student Support, Esteran College)

The overall pattern associated with subject teachers was also evident with Penthom High School staff:

Table 4: Penthom High School staff perceptions of their influence on students (n=39, 46%)

Students' motivation to learn		Students' preparation for NCEA		Students' decision-making	
Statement	Mean	Statement	Mean	Statement	Mean
I have a major direct influence on my subject class students' motivation to learn at school	4.07	I have a major direct influence in preparing my subject class students for NCEA assessments	4.41	I have a major direct influence in helping students in my subject classes choose their next year's subjects	2.82
				I have a major direct influence in helping students in my subject classes decide what to do next year if they are likely to leave school	2.68
I have a major direct influence on students' motivation to learn at school who are not in my subject classes or mentoring group (e.g. form class, work as a Dean, student support etc...)	2.20	I have a major direct influence in preparing students for NCEA assessments who are not in my subject classes or mentoring group (e.g. form class, work as a Dean, student support etc...)	1.81	I have a major direct influence in helping students who are not in my subject classes or mentoring group choose their next year's subjects (e.g. form class, work as a Dean, student support etc...)	1.95
				I have a major direct influence on students' motivation to learn at school who are not in my subject classes (e.g. form class, work as a Dean, student support etc...)	2.20
I have a major direct influence on students' motivation to learn at school whom I mentor	3.05	I have a major direct influence on students' motivation to learn at school whom I mentor	2.67	I have a major direct influence in helping students whom I mentor choose their next year's subjects	2.16
				I have a major direct influence in helping students whom I mentor decide what to do next year if they are likely to leave school	2.26

Staff at Penthom High School were also asked to respond in their role as a mentor in the school-based initiative. Across nearly all areas they rated their influence through this role above their

other roles such as form teacher though the sustainability of this influence is an issue that I will discuss at the end of this paper.

Student perspectives

Similar to the staff questionnaires, the student questionnaires used the same six point scale for each statement with 0 being equated to “disagree” at one end and 5 being equated with “agree” at the other end. Pearson correlation co-efficients were calculated at the 0.01 level of significance to see if there were any associations between scale responses. Independent sample t-tests at the 0.05 level of significance were used to test for differences between two variables within school groups. One-way ANOVA tests were carried out at the 0.05 level of significance to see if there were any statistical differences between year levels 11, 12 and 13 at each school and the statistically significant differences arising from the ANOVA tests are in italics under each source of influence in the tables that follow:

Table 5: Esteran College Year 11-13 student perceptions of who influences them (n=304, 60%) [Y11, n=130, 60%; Y12, n=89, 52%; Y13, n=85, 77%]

Students' motivation to learn		Students' preparation for NCEA		Students' decision-making	
Source of influence	Mean	Source of influence	Mean	Source of influence	Mean
Students who are friends	3.65	Students' subject teachers <i>Y11 (3.49) v Y13 (4.27)</i> <i>Y12 (3.70) v Y13 (4.27)</i>	3.78	Parents and/or caregivers at home <i>Y12 (3.30) v Y13 (4.00)</i>	3.59
Parents and/or caregivers at home	3.56	Parents and/or caregivers at home	3.29	Students who are friends	3.17
Students' subject teachers <i>Y11 (3.10) v Y13 (3.95)</i> <i>Y12 (3.37) v Y13 (3.95)</i>	3.42	Students who are friends	3.26	Students' subject teachers	2.76
Students' Form Teacher	2.63	Students' Form Teacher <i>Y11 (2.63) v Y12 (1.92)</i>	2.36	Students' Form Teacher	2.38
Students' Year level Dean <i>Y11 (2.58) v Y13 (1.83)</i> <i>Y12 (2.70) v Y13 (1.83)</i>	2.40	Students' Year level Dean <i>Y11 (2.52) v Y13 (1.73)</i>	2.20	Careers Advisor and/or Counsellor <i>Y11 (1.67) v Y13 (2.81)</i> <i>Y12 (2.04) v Y13 (2.81)</i>	2.11
Heads of Department <i>Y11 (1.63) v Y13 (2.90)</i> <i>Y12 (2.16) v Y13 (2.90)</i>	2.15	Heads of Department <i>Y11 (1.57) v Y13 (2.95)</i> <i>Y12 (1.99) v Y13 (2.95)</i>	2.10	Students' Year level Dean	1.89
Careers Advisor and/or Counsellor <i>Y11 (1.47) v Y13 (2.59)</i> <i>Y12 (1.85) v Y13 (2.59)</i>	1.90	Careers Advisor and/or Counsellor <i>Y11 (1.27) v Y13 (2.02)</i>	1.57	Heads of Department <i>Y11 (1.47) v Y13 (2.18)</i>	1.77
Principal or Deputy Principal	1.10	Principal or Deputy Principal	1.11	Principal or Deputy Principal	0.92

Table 6: Penthom High School Year 11-13 student perceptions of who influences them (n=216, 40%) [Y11, n=43, 20%; Y12, n=116, 62%; Y13, n=57, 43%]

Students' motivation to learn		Students' preparation for NCEA		Students' decision-making	
Source of influence	Mean	Source of influence	Mean	Source of influence	Mean
Students' subject teachers	3.55	Students' subject teachers	4.03	Parents and/or caregivers at home	3.76
Parents and/or caregivers at home	3.55	Parents and/or caregivers at home	3.32	Students who are friends	3.28
Students who are friends	3.44	Students who are friends	3.14	Students' subject teachers	2.76
Students' Form Teacher <i>Y11 (3.23) v Y12 (2.18)</i> <i>Y11 (3.23) v Y13 (2.40)</i>	2.45	Students' Form Teacher <i>Y11 (3.10) v Y12 (1.93)</i>	2.27	Students' Form Teacher	1.69
Students' Year level Dean	1.98	Students' Year level Dean	2.02	Careers Advisor and/or Counsellor <i>Y11 (1.10) v Y13 (2.11)</i> <i>Y12 (1.34) v Y13 (2.11)</i>	1.50
Student mentor	1.91	Student mentor	1.92	Students' Year level Dean	1.50
Heads of Department <i>Y12 (1.53) v Y13 (2.40)</i>	1.87	Heads of Department <i>Y12 (1.56) v Y13 (2.25)</i>	1.81	Student mentor	1.44
Principal or Deputy Principal	1.55	Principal or Deputy Principal	1.52	Heads of Department	1.31
Careers Advisor and/or Counsellor	1.40	Careers Advisor and/or Counsellor <i>Y12 (1.15) v Y13 (1.80)</i>	1.31	Principal or Deputy Principal	1.12

Parents and/or caregivers at home, students who were friends and students' subject teachers (except for the third bullet point listed on page 11) were the major sources of influence perceived by students at each school. Despite the intention of each school to influence students through Form Teacher and Mentor interaction, students still regarded their home environment and their school friends as sources of major influence, for good or for bad. Students positioned their subject teachers as major sources of influence especially in relation to their motivation to learn and their preparation for NCEA assessments. Principals and deputy principals were viewed to have less direct influence on aspects of student achievement from the students' perspective, though the ratings at Penthom High School were slightly higher possibly due to the senior leadership team also taking on the role of mentors with the school-wide initiative.

The ANOVA tests revealed that Careers Advisors and Counsellors played a direct role in influencing Year 13 students more than Year 11 or 12 students and that in year 13 Heads of Department were perceived as having a more direct influence on students' motivation to learn at school, their preparation for NCEA assessments and the decisions students needed to make for the following year of school.

At Esteran College if a student understood the purposes of the school-based initiative, academic counselling, some could be more likely to know their targets for the year ($r=0.435$, $\alpha=0.01$) and if they were more likely to know their targets some could be more likely to have improved regular attendance ($r=0.467$, $\alpha=0.01$). If a student did meet regularly with their form teacher about goals and targets then students tended to position the form teacher as having a positive influence on their motivation to learn at school ($r=.403$, $\alpha=0.01$). This last finding was also replicated through independent sample t-tests at the 0.05 level of significance; if students knew how many credits they had earned during the year to date they were more likely to have had regular meetings with their form teacher about their targets as part of the school-based initiative (mean rating score increased from 2.40 to 2.96, $t=2.311$, $p=0.022$). Knowing how many credits they had earned during the year also appeared to have some impact on attendance (mean rating score increased from 3.86 to 4.25, $t=2.161$, $p=0.033$) and the expectations students placed on themselves to learn (mean rating score increased from 3.33 to 3.75, $t=2.538$, $p=0.012$). Though these results need to be replicated over time it did appear that the school-based initiative, academic counselling with its emphasis on targets and raising student awareness of their credit progress may be weakly associated with having a positive impact on aspects of student achievement at Esteran College at this early stage.

At Penthom High School, even though the mentors had low ratings overall, students perceived that if their mentor had made regular contact with them during the year they were more likely to rate the mentor higher as a source of influence with their motivation to learn ($r=0.701$, $\alpha=0.01$), their preparation for NCEA assessments ($r=0.656$, $\alpha=0.01$) and their decision-making for the following year ($r=0.542$, $\alpha=0.01$). 55 out of the 83 students, who responded when asked for any comments about the mentoring initiative, stated that they wanted to see their mentor more; some had not seen their mentor at all during the second year of the school-based initiative. T-tests at the 0.05 level of significance comparing the 55 with the other 28 who supplied comments showed that these students were possibly receiving support mainly from the year level deans instead. The ratings for the level of influence from deans increased across all three components associated with some aspect of student achievement (see the bullet points on page 11). Also of interest was the Year 12 group that rated the influence of the mentors lower compared to the Year 11 and 13 groups. These Year 12 students may have had higher expectations of the school-based mentoring initiative given that they had experienced it the year before for two terms as Year 11 students. Feedback from a sample of these then Year 11 students at the end of 2008 through a focus group facilitated by a teacher was overwhelmingly positive. Students at that time with much agreement from the rest of the group, made comments like:

- Good to have someone helping you;
- They really want you to pass;
- The mentor was on our side;
- They ask rather than tell;
- I wanted to prove to my mentor that I could do better than the target; and,
- They provided more pressure, but it was good pressure.

Examples were also provided by these students where their credits had increased and in some cases merits had occurred. As with Esteran College it appeared that the school-based mentoring initiative may have had a small impact with a group of students, particularly those who met regularly with their mentor during the year.

The implementation processes

The findings reported in the previous section reveal that from both staff and student perspectives there are possible multiple sources of influence on aspects of student learning and that the distribution of this influence can differ according to year level and degree of connection a staff member and a student have with a school-based initiative aimed at enhancing student achievement. As discussed earlier the school-based initiatives were different in that the one at Esteran College sought to utilise existing school structures through the Deans network with form teachers, whereas the other one at Penthom High School, sought to create a new role for some of the staff in parallel to existing networks.

The process for leading and participating in the decision-making related to each of the two the initiatives developed in differing ways. At Esteran College the mandate to work closely with the form teachers was situated with the year level Deans, who were perceived by some as a sub-group with a high degree of influence:

I think the Deans have a lot of power in the school and they form a distinct cultural subgroup, I think, that are perceived by a lot of teachers to have the power. (Craig, Head of Department, Esteran College)

With regards to our position in the school I'd say that since I've been here, that it's "the Dean's will do it". If something needs to be done the Deans will do it and the buck stops with the Deans, and the responsibility is with the Deans. That was before I was a Dean and now that I am one. That's my perception. (Roger, Year level Dean, Esteran College)

The Deans have a really high profile in this school. (Julie, Year level Dean, Esteran College)

The focus of this paper does not afford me the opportunity to focus more on the micropolitics possibly evident between the Heads of Department and the Deans group here, though a

comparison of the spread of participation within each of these groups over several of their meetings revealed that engagement through talk was more widely distributed within the Deans meetings when compared to the Head of Department meetings. A similar pattern also emerged at Penthom High School. The initial group of 2008 mentors lead by the Principal, also acted as the steering group for the initiative during its trial period with the Year 11 students. A comparison of this group's participation in their meetings when compared to the Head of Department meetings also revealed that engagement through talk was more widely distributed within the group that was leading and implementing the school-based initiative. These findings, though in their early form at this stage, suggest that groups with wider distributed internal engagement through talk may be looked upon by other groups as those where power is situated beyond the more traditional groups such as Heads of Departments, where issues of territorialism can exist (Bennett et al., 2007). However this point needs to be moderated against the sources of influence evident across the staff in each school where Heads of Department were perceived as being slightly more influential on staff when compared to Deans and Mentors respectively (see figures 1 and 2).

Despite the potential for difference between and within staff groups, the staff I interviewed were generally supportive of their school-based initiative but also acknowledged that they were stretched to near-full or full capacity already given the everyday demands that arise in school life. This was particularly apparent with the mentors at Penthom High School who in the second year of the initiative struggled to see their group of students as often as they had hoped. Even though regular meetings with individual students was a central facet of meeting the purposes of the mentoring initiative there was a gap between the mentors espoused understanding and their practice.

Table 7: Penthom High School staff responses related to the school-based initiative

Statement	Mean
I fully understand the purpose the mentoring initiative	4.13
As a mentor I have been able to have a sufficient number of meetings with my group of students throughout the year	1.90
I am very likely to be a mentor next year	2.56

The day-to-day demands and a multitude of other school leadership functions can create challenges for new initiatives despite all the best intentions. As an example, at Esteran College, the Deans had met with the senior leadership team about the school-based initiative with the intention that it would be regularly revisited as a focus of meetings between the two. At the first follow up meeting, the school-based initiative had to be put totally to one side so that urgent issues related to school reports could be resolved and at the second follow-up meeting the

initiative ended up being the last agenda item behind other more urgent issues. Over the 20 months in each school I was able to track agenda items across meetings related to the initiatives and at both schools intentions were on the whole followed through, though the follow through generally tended to take longer than what was originally intended. At Penthom High School, the mentoring initiative was reported to the Heads of Department twice over two months in late 2008, whereas it was reported once in the six meetings I attended in the first half of 2009. It seemed that it was also a challenge to keep the profile up of each initiative in a congested space where school leaders and their staff had to deal with multiple demands related to the operation of schools.

Conclusion

The challenges and complexities that existed in each school reveal that implementing a school-based initiative aimed at enhancing student achievement is not a straightforward process. In a way there were no one set of ideal conditions (soil) to implement the initiative (seeds). Resources, both human and time existed within a congested space of continuous school activity and could not all be focused on each initiative, despite the promise of a harvest related to improved student achievement. Since withdrawing from each school I am aware that Esteran College is now taking a long term view with their academic counselling initiative, they don't expect it to be part of their school culture for at least five years. At Penthom High School a greater priority is now being placed on the students who are at risk of not attaining the national qualification NCEA level 1, rather than all students across Years 11, 12 and 13.

A wider distribution of leadership with each initiative is not the answer as there is a finite capacity to what schools and staff can focus on. Utilising a wider perspective of leadership and influence has however helped uncover patterns of practice in both schools that perhaps could have been overlooked, particularly in relation to student perspectives and the micropolitics of schools that I have touched on in this paper. Planting for a 'harvest' of improved student learning is a long one and expected quick results are not realistic, nor should they be encouraged for the leadership for learning given the complexity of school activity and the demands that school staff and leaders face on a day-to-day basis.

References

- Bennett, N., Woods, P. A., Wise, C., & Newton, W. (2007). Understandings of middle leadership in secondary schools: A review of empirical research. *School Leadership and Management*, 27(5), 453-470.
- Brown, M., Rutherford, D., & Boyle, B. (2000). Leadership for school improvement: The role of the head of department in UK Secondary Schools. *School Effectiveness & School Improvement*, 11(2), 237 - 258.
- Costa, A. L., & Kallick, B. (2007). Describing 16 Habits of Mind [Electronic version].
- Flessa, J. (2009). Educational micropolitics and distributed leadership. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 84(3), 331-349.
- Gronn, P. (2000). Distributed properties: A new architecture for leadership. *Educational Management & Administration*, 28(3), 317 - 338.
- Gronn, P. (2002). Distributed leadership as a unit of analysis. *Leadership Quarterly*, 13(4), 423 - 451.
- Gronn, P. (2009). Hybrid leadership. In K. Leithwood, B. Mascall & T. Strauss (Eds.), *Distributed leadership according to the evidence* (pp. 17-40). New York: Routledge.
- Gunter, H. (2001). *Leaders and leadership in education*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Harris, A. (2006). Opening up the 'Black Box' of leadership practice: Taking a distributed leadership perspective. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 34(2), 37 - 45.
- Hatcher, R. (2005). The distribution of leadership and power in schools. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 26(2), 253 - 267.
- Heck, R. H., & Hallinger, P. (2005). The study of educational leadership and management: Where does the field stand today? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 33(2), 229 - 244.
- Maxcy, B. D., & Nguyen, T. S. T. (2006). The politics of distributing leadership. *Educational Policy*, 20(1), 163 - 196.
- Ministry of Education. (2007). *The New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media Ltd.
- Simkins, T. (2005). Leadership in education: 'What works' or 'what makes sense'? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 33(1), 9 - 26.
- Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. B. (2004). Towards a theory of leadership practice: A distributed perspective. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 36(1), 3 - 34.
- Strain, M. (2009). Some ethical and cultural implications of the leadership 'turn' in education: On the distinction between performance and performativity. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 37(1), 67-84.
- Thrupp, M., & Willmott, R. (2003). *Education management in managerialist times: Beyond the textual apologists*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Wanat, C. L. (2008). Getting past the gatekeepers: Differences between access and cooperation in public school research. *Field Methods*, 20(2), 191-208.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Youngs, H. (2007). *Having the 'presence' and courage to see beyond the familiar: Challenging our habitual assumptions of school leadership*. Proceedings of the ACEL & ASCD International Conference 10 – 12 October , Sydney, Australia [Available: <http://www.ancelconference2007.com/papers.php1>].
- Youngs, H. (2009). (Un)Critical times? Situating distributed leadership in the field. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 41(4), 377-389.